

The Scarsdale Inquirer

Founded in 1901

VOLUME 91, NUMBER 1

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2013

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

Backyard basketball bonanza

BYS Cares to host fundraiser at MSG facility

By TODD SLISS

Going from running a family-owned company to being a self-starting small business owner was no small undertaking for Scarsdale's Danny Bernstein, especially switching from clothing to youth sports. But Bernstein came up with a plan, stuck with it and Backyard Sports has blossomed since its inception in 2006. While Bernstein continues to focus on his brand, something else developed in 2010 — Backyard Sports Cares.

The not-for-profit aspect of the Backyard Sports family is everything that the main product is, but instead of catering to people who can afford extra athletic programs, it brings programming into communities in need and uses scholarships for both the main program and BYS Cares. It has grown so big that Bernstein finally needed to find a signature event to raise money to cover the costs of bringing sports programs to kids in underserved communities, of which there are many in Westchester County.

"What we're doing with the not-for-profit mirrors the image of what we're doing with our for-profit programs — using sports as a vehicle to improve lives in the community beyond the playing field," Bernstein said. "The not-for-profit started really as a way of getting kids from different communities to play with the kids from privilege." He realized that to reach these kids he had to go into their schools and neighborhoods. "We brought the coaches and the high school kids with us to lead those programs. It was the reverse commute."

On Sunday, March 17, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Bernstein will live out a fantasy, as will others who participate in his first major fundraising event for BYS Cares at the Madison Square Garden Training Facility in Tarrytown, where the Knicks, Liberty and Rangers practice. In the inau-



BEVERLY PICKER PHOTO

Scarsdale's Danny Bernstein is eagerly awaiting the inaugural Adult 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament at the MSG Training Center in Greenburgh.

gural Adult 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament, teams of three to five players can sign up in one of three competition categories — open (any age, most competitive), 35-and-over competitive, and recreation (any age) — to play in round robin games at MSG North. Registration costs \$1,500 per team. Team jerseys, food, drinks and use of the Knicks facility are included. There will also be extra perks kicked in by the Knicks. (Visit www.byardsportscares.org to register.)

Bernstein was able to secure rare time in the Knicks' facility through Jonathan Supranowitz, the vice president of public relations for the Knicks. Supranowitz's 13-year-old son enjoys the Backyard Sports programs.

The event, which participants' family members are encouraged to attend, coincides with the kickoff of March Madness.

"The idea is to make it an engaging event

so people don't just show up and attend," Bernstein said. "The idea is to build an iconic event that can be repeated year after year after year. This is our one event to bring money into the program."

Bernstein's goal is to raise \$150,000 through the tournament to cover expenses involved with running programs both in and out of area schools, such as coaches, coach training, supervisors, facilities, equipment and uniforms for participants.

"They have this place in Greenburgh which is like Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory," Bernstein said. "Everyone knows it's there, but no one gets inside. My guess is they have 10-15 days per year to open it up and they thought our organization, our project and our needs were worthy enough to form a partnership."

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The Knicks have their own Garden of Dreams Foundation to focus their energies, but also see the importance of other causes.

“By partnering with Backyard Sports Cares and opening up their training facility to host the event, the New York Knicks are demonstrating that they believe in the values and the goals of Backyard Sports Cares and the positive impact that it is having in our communities,” BYC Cares president Michael Moser of Scarsdale said. “Having the chance to play a tournament and spend the day in the Knicks training facility is a pretty incredible experience for anyone who likes to play basketball and is a Knicks fan. You don’t get many opportunities like this.”

Getting behind Bernstein’s efforts was a no-brainer for Moser.

“Backyard Sports Cares plays a meaningful role in the lives of disadvantaged children and children with special needs in Westchester,” Moser said. “Living in Scarsdale, it is easy to take for granted all of the wonderful athletic programs and activities that this town offers our children. But there are communities within Westchester that do not have the resources or budgets to make athletic programming available to all of their children.”

Westchester County cities like Port Chester, New Rochelle, White Plains, Yonkers and Mount Vernon get the same opportunities brought to them. Helping kids get instruction, competition and fun through the mentorship by coaches and volunteers is a winning formula.

While the BYC flagship programs are still basketball and soccer, through the after-school programs and Home Field Advantage, where BYC literally goes into people’s backyards to conduct programs, virtually any sport is available. There is also a program for kids with special needs. Bernstein has over 100 coaches and volunteers involved in the BYC programs.

“The idea is to bring athletic programming for what I call kids without traditional access to these sports, which is kids in underserved areas and kids with cognitive



BEVERLY PICKER PHOTO

Danny Bernstein poses with some of the Knicks greats at the MSG Training Center.

challenges,” Bernstein said. “We provide the services and use the community to supply the coaching, the mentoring, the assistance. We use sports to connect kids.”

Many times a volunteer’s interests can spark a new program.

“We find the passion of our volunteers and we use that as a resource to run programs,” Bernstein said. “Then it doesn’t become community service because you’re doing something you enjoy anyway to make that connection.”

The growth of 2012 is a far cry from Backyard Sports’ humble beginnings of 2006 when there were “token flagship programs” on Sundays with 30-40 participants. The basketball league now has 150 players from over 20 communities. What sets BYC apart is the lack of parent involvement in gameplay. The notion of “pick-up play” is stressed as much as it can be in an organized program.

“I think this is the first year we’re start-

ing to see the fruits of what we’ve been trying to accomplish for the past five or six years,” Bernstein said. “It’s been a great trip and a great community to do it in.”

“Refs like our games because they’re not being shot down by the parents at the end. It’s competitive and it’s achieved the vision of what we always wanted to do — play competitively without any of the distractions which sometimes take away from youth sports.”

Between the BYC Cares board of directors, the 3-on-3 player recruiting committee and the hostess committee for the event, Bernstein has a long list of mostly Scarsdale residents supporting the cause.

“Sports for a child is not about making an A team,” Scarsdale’s Scott Edlitz, a player committee member, said. “They are about building friendships while enhancing confidence, spirit and character. That is what I believe, that is what BYC Cares promotes and that is why I am proud to support them.”