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Keep them moving: Campers give varied sports the college try

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BRICK — Hawks, Hoyas and Huskies.

Those are just some of the college athletic department team names being used in Dare To Be Fit Camp at Veterans Memorial Elementary School.

Over 120 town residents, ages 6 to 12, are grouped into teams bearing the name of different institutes such as Monmouth University, Georgetown University, University of Washington, Boston College and University of Cincinnati.

Camp director Suzanne Kurasz said she writes letters to different colleges asking permission to use their team names.

"The universities respond positively," she said. "They send pennants and fliers . . . Villanova even gave us tickets to a game which we will give away at the end of camp."

Kurasz said the main goal of the camp, which offers two two-week sessions, is simple. "Keep them moving."

There are other benefits to the camp beside physical activity, she said. For instance, Kurasz said she uses the colleges as a way to make students aware of their futures.

"I really think as early as possible kids should be thinking about universities and sports at universities," she said. "For a lot of these kids, sports will be giving them a focus at college."

Kurasz, who teaches fifth grade at Veterans Elementary, has been running the camp since it started three years ago to fill the need for a non-competitive summer camp and encourage healthy lifestyles. She said at least one-third of campers attend all four weeks.

Each team has an adult and high school-student leader to ensure safety during activities. The day is sectioned into 20-minute activity intervals. Campers are given instruction and practice in games, sports and activities of their choice. There are 14 different activities to choose from each day.

"There's very little down time," Kurasz said.

Jodi Hansen can attest to that. Hansen's two children, Jordan, 7, and Josh, 12, attend the camp.

"They're really excited about camp," she said. "It beats staying home watching TV and playing video games."

Which is the intention of the camp — get children off the couch and onto the playground.

"It's a full day of activity. They don't stop other than for snack, lunch and bathroom," Hansen said. "Everyone's so happy here, and everything is so much fun.

"My son has gone to other camps and dreaded going, but here he always wants to come," she said.

Eleven-year-old Cole Kachelhoffer also enjoys camp.

"It's fun because you get to play different sports and try new sports," the Monmouth Hawks team member said.

Kachelhoffer has been with this camp for three years and said he gets excited for summer to roll around so he can come back.

"Most of my friends are from here," he said.

Tabitha Franceschini, 9, and Chelsea Ferster, 10, were friends before coming to camp and landed on the same team.

"We live across the street from each other," Ferster said.

She said her favorite game at camp is scooterball, which is a variation of soccer, because she has played soccer for almost five years on a recreational team.

"I like camp because it's really fun, and I get really healthy," Franceschini said.

The Marshall Thundering Herd team members agreed that camp can get tiring sometimes.

"Only when we ran six laps I was kinda tired," Franceschini said.

The girls were referring to the President's Fitness Challenge, which is a set of fitness standards set by the president for children to meet. Each age group has different requirements. Sit-ups, push-ups, vertical sit and reach, stretching, one-mile run and shuttle run are all implemented during the challenge.

"There's so many benefits that come from keeping them moving," Kurasz said. "It helps them find their niche as they experience as many activities as they can."
