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TOS Vincent Wilkes coaches disadvantaged kids in year-round basketball program. | Photo by Carlos Baez

Metro's Vincent Wilkes Rekindles Dreams by Coaching Kids

- Year-round basketball program helps disadvantaged children

By JORI STERN

(Jan. 19, 2007) Instead of forsaking his dreams of a coaching career, Vincent Wilkes, a transportation operations supervisor at Operations Central Instruction, chose to recapture those dreams through his volunteer efforts helping children.

"I love kids," he says. "To see them blossom and develop, and to be able to teach them and see them respond, that's where the pure joy of teaching comes in."

That's also where Hoopmasters, a year-round basketball program which works with disadvantaged children, comes in.

His philosophy is be your best at whatever you do and Wilkes makes sure the kids follow his lead. The Hoopmasters children, who come from all social and economic backgrounds, range in age from 5 to 17.

The kids can participate as part of two leagues. One a practice league, the other a league that travels to locations, including the regional finals in Florida.

Made it to the finals

Last year, Wilkes's team of 9- to 10-year olds were good enough to make it into the regional finals but could not go. It's an expensive venture physically, financially, and emotionally, and often hard on the younger ones and their parents. This year he coaches 12-, 13-, and 14-year olds.

"This is the time when they really know what they want to do with their lives," Wilkes says.

After giving up coaching years earlier to focus on his career at Metro, Wilkes found his way back to coaching through Hoopmasters.

He became involved with the organization after joining his brother, who was a volunteer coach.

Wilkes's influences may range in life experience, but not in spirit. One

football coach he recalls fondly was Larry Boglin who, despite having one arm, would be out on the field making tackles with the team and pushing them hard.

‘Never give up and never quit’

“He was tough and a little guy, too, but he taught me to never give up and never quit,” Wilkes says. “You’ve got to have that desire to keep moving and drive on; if you say you can’t, then you won’t. You gotta believe.”

John Wooden the former UCLA basketball coach, also played a positive role in Wilkes’s life. He models himself after Wooden’s pyramid of success.

Wooden taught a five-tier pyramid of success, little elements that he chose to work on every day that he believed would make him successful. Wilkes follows this pyramid and makes sure every one of his players has a copy.

“Whatever you’re going do, be the best,” Wilkes says enthusiastically. “[The kids] just need to believe and have confidence in themselves, they don’t have to be on the basketball court, just be a good person.”