

Globetrotter spins students a lesson

Essay contest wins middle school visit from player from famed team

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RALEIGH - The Harlem Globetrotters may be known for their humor and skill on the basketball court. But as a member of the famed squad showed in a visit to Carroll Middle School on Wednesday, they are about more than fun.

Globetrotter Aundre "Hot Shot" Branch came to Carroll as part of an essay contest sponsored by the Globetrotter organization and the Newspapers In Education division of The News & Observer. Entrants were challenged to submit "Why I Want A Globetrotter To Visit My School" in 100 words or less.

The winners were Jasmine Galloway, an eighth-grader, and Elizabeth Olsson, a seventh- grade special programs teacher.

"I was in shock when I found out I'd won," Jasmine said.

The essay contest was part of the Globetrotters' CHEER character education program. The acronym stands for cooperation, healthy mind and body, effort, enthusiasm, and responsibility.

The troupe of athletes/entertainers has brought the program to nearly 1,000 schools across the country, according to the organization's Web site.

Branch provided the audience at Carroll with signature Globetrotter ball-handling skills and humor. But he also delivered a message.

"Whether you aspire to be a basketball player, the next American Idol or what have you, you must get your education first," he told the crowd.

"You must keep trying in life," Branch said. "Don't be ashamed to fall -- it's going to happen. But get up. Try again."

Olsson's winning essay focused on character education at her school.

"The character traits we stand for -- responsibility, accountability, taking things seriously, and respect -- fit well with the Globetrotter's CHEER program," she said. "The more good role models these kids can see who have succeeded, the better off they are at a young age."

Galloway's essay contained similar sentiments.

The Globetrotters "proved that because you came from the streets, you do not have to be of the streets," she wrote.

The Harlem Globetrotters, founded in 1927, have traveled the world bringing audiences their brand of basketball that mixes competition with show-off athleticism and slapstick comedy.

The program was designed with assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and state educators.

After hundreds of entries, The Harlem Globetrotters hand-selected the winning essays from a pool of finalists.

"I feel grateful that we were chosen. I'm proud for our school and feel very fortunate," said Olsson.

The Globetrotters will play next month at the RBC Center.