

People

Organization squeezes sport and smarts into students

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As the organization begins its dozenth year as a growing non-profit, those invested in the program are reaping huge benefits. No, the compensation is not monetary right now, but the long-term outlook for the students involved is much brighter than it might have otherwise been.

SquashSmarts combines sport and studies to round out a student's CV, help them "fit" physically and mentally into a continually changing world, gives them opportunities to contribute to their own communities and teaches that patience and practice can bring about amazing results. Students are given the tools they need to succeed in the program, i.e. intense coaching from noted players of the fast-paced game (some participants have learned their physics and math subjects on the court by watching the way the ball responds) as well as the academic support to excel. With 100 percent of the youth graduating from high school and being accepted at college, the program is obviously working.

One of only four such initiatives in the country, the Philadelphia branch operates out of Drexel University and the Lenfest Center in the northeast section of the city. The latter site was put on the map last summer, after a visit by **Michelle Obama**. She was in town, with other health advocates, to tout getting in shape through food and physical movement. More light was shed on the unique operation last fall as the U.S. Squash Open was hosted at the college.

Executive director Steve Gregg attributes part of the program's success to the use of incentives such as summer camp experiences or getting to go to see the Sixers at home. It also helps that students are led through the process of higher education options, whether go to a secondary school or college bound.

Don't let an inability to play the game squash a desire to help out. Volunteers are welcome to help with schoolwork, plan a fundraiser or just sing the praises of an inner city success story.

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