

## Hoop dreams: "They've got next"

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Published in Sports on July 2, 2015 1:48 PM

Styles Kendall waits patiently on the bench -- pulling at his socks and anxiously tapping his feet.

He unties his laces then ties them again -- saying nothing as he keeps one eye on the pickup basketball game taking place not three feet in front of him.

A whistle blows from the corner of the cluttered, dusty gym -- signaling the end of one game and the beginning of another.

Kendall hops off the bench.

"My turn," he exclaims, grabbing a basketball with the hope that possessing it will help him lay claim to the court.

"No, man," an older player says to him, brushing past Kendall and joining others at center court. "You've got next."

It's an unspoken hierarchy on pickup courts across the nation.

And Goldsboro's W.A. Foster center is no exception.

Younger players, like Styles, have to wait their turn.

But it's worth it.

"I like how you get to meet and learn about new people here," Styles said. "Then you get to play basketball with them."

During the summer months, the W.A. Foster Center provides children in the city -- younger ones especially -- a place to stay out of both the heat and trouble. It's a place where older kids can show off to the young guys and the young guys can prove themselves.

"I like it here because you can play with your friends," Demaj Oates, 11, said. "I'm probably the youngest one here. It doesn't matter though. I just play."

Demaj might be the youngest kid on the court, but he sure doesn't talk like it. He's only 9 years -- and about two feet -- shy of his dream, one that is shared by most everyone who shows up to the gym.

Basketball is not just a hobby.

It's their way of life.

And playing it professionally is the dream.

"My favorite team is the Los Angeles Clippers," Demaj says as he looks up and smiles. "Because I love dunking."

Playing professionally is especially fresh on the kids' minds as of late, with the NBA Draft taking place just last week.

Styles and Demaj watched as some of their favorite players fulfilled their dreams. They hope to follow suit.

"I watch a lot of NBA basketball," Oates said, adding that he would love to play for the Clippers or the Golden State Warriors.

But the team he lands on is negotiable, as long as he makes it to the NBA.

"I want to get paid," he said.

For some of the older kids who play -- many of whom you can find on area varsity teams come early November -- the draft takes on a whole different meaning. No longer is it a far-fetched dream that's talked about in the halls at school. For players like Rasheen Artis, 18, it's a goal; something to be taken seriously.

"(Getting drafted) is something I think about," he said. "It's something that I've thought about as long as I've played. I really want to go

overseas though. Everybody can't get into the NBA. I'm going to try though. But everybody tries."

Artis is one of the most popular players in the gym -- a star point guard at Goldsboro High School who's on his way to playing collegiate ball at Pitt Community College next year. It's players like Artis that the younger kids, such as Daveon Jones, 14, someday hope to be like.

"They're tough to play against," Daveon said. "I see them dribbling the ball and they ... rip it. They can get to the rim for layups so easily."

But for now, the younger kids will have to wait -- for their turn in pickup, to play high school ball, to get drafted.

But they won't have to wait much longer.

They've got next.

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