



FOCUS | SUMMER CAMP

More than just sports

Memphis Athletic Ministries' program focuses on academics, faith

By Anne Chambers, *Special to My Life*

A group of middle school-aged boys crowded around computers in **Memphis Athletic Ministries'** new computer lab asking "Where's the sports?" The occasion was the academic portion of MAM's Summer Academy program where the youth were taking a tour of E-Appeal, The Commercial Appeal's online newspaper.

Like the newspaper, MAM's Summer Academy is more than sports. In its second year, the Summer Academy was held at two MAM centers, the Memphis Grizzlies Center and Olivet Fellowship, to offer more than 65 rising sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade boys from under-resourced neighborhoods the opportunity to learn life-empowering skills, along with academics, sports and Bible studies, in a safe, fun environment.

"The purpose of MAM's Summer Academy is to give us the chance to impact these young men's lives for Jesus Christ at an early age," said Craig Howard, director of the Summer Academy. "Our desire is to see these young men grow into Godly examples who can navigate life's challenges based on biblical principles for the rest of their lives."

For six weeks, the boys participate in not only academics but sports and other activities that teach them how to make good decisions, handle conflict, avoid drugs and alcohol, stay out of gangs and more.

"My coaches tell us to stay away from negative influences and to choose our friends wisely and to be a leader instead of a follower," said Jeremy Hayward, a soon-to-be eighth-grader at Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering. "They also teach me about God and how He wants me to live."

The boys are exposed to other areas of our community with field trips to the Collierville Malco Theater, Winchester Bowling, Davis YMCA and Power House Memphis, a contemporary art studio in Downtown Memphis.

This year a financial literacy curriculum has been added to the academic side of the academy. Six lessons designed for middle schoolers are completed with testing to gauge each boy's understanding of basic money management principles. Pre- and post-testing in reading and math are also given. In 2008, testing showed that Summer Academy participants had a 76 percent increase in reading comprehension and 87 percent increase in math scores.

And every day after the lessons are done, the youth fill the gyms with laughter as they enjoy dodge ball, relay races, and volleyball tournaments along with cheering their coaches in a pie-eating contest.

To learn more about MAM and its mission, go to mamsports.org.



In its second year, the Summer Academy was held at two MAM centers, the Memphis Grizzlies Center and Olivet Fellowship, to offer over 65 rising 6th, 7th and 8th grade boys from under-resourced neighborhoods. This group learned about the E-Appeal, the Commercial Appeal's online newspaper. PHOTO BY EMILY ADAMS KEPLINGER