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Dressing Up Caesar
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ON GIVING

Memphis Athletic Ministries

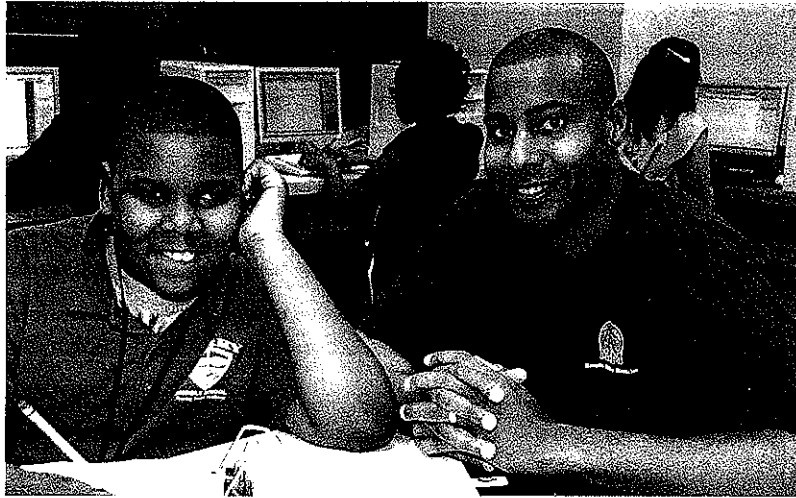
By: Josh Davis

There are few things in life that unify more than athletics. Race can divide. Politics can divide. Economics can divide. However, in athletics, superficial distinctions become irrelevant. Anytime you get around a group of sports fans talking about their favorite team no one seems to care the background of the people in the conversation. They just want their obsession heard. The same thing goes for the games we love to play. When I play golf with a good golfer I could care less about his political views. I want to know his golfing secrets!

With this in mind, Memphis Athletic Ministries (MAM) uses our love for sports as a tool to attract and positively influence young people and their families. While MAM's name doesn't say it, its mission statement does: "MAM's mission is to use organized sports to share and model Christ to urban at-risk young people and to foster unity among diverse segments of our community."

I recently sat down with MAM President Gib Vestal and Community Director Kelvin Bowen at their state of the art ministry center, the Grizzly Center. I was struck at how the conversation centered around things like financial literacy, academic enrichment, devotions and spiritual maturity. Admittedly, I was a bit confused because on the surface the Grizzly Center

seemed no different than any other inner-city community center. There were



kids – lots of kids – either playing basketball or waiting to play. Gib and Kelvin explained to me that in order to really make a difference in the life of a child, you have to have the tools to attract them. We laughed that the "Grizzly Financial Literacy Center" wouldn't be attracting the throngs of young people the same as hoops! However, MAM serves not only as an athletics program, it is a life tools program, and most importantly, it is a faith-based ministry.

MAM has 12 community centers all in under-resourced parts of our city that serve over 5,000 inner city youth. MAM also partners with over 144 schools, churches and other community organizations. Over 8,000 youth participate yearly in "tools" such as soccer, golf, flag football as well as basketball. The parents of MAM kids have had a wildly positive reaction to the impact MAM has had on their child's life. In a recent survey 95%

reported that they had noticed a positive improvement in attitudes toward peers and other races and had noticed an overall better outlook on life from their child. Somehow I don't think your typical community center has the same effect on young people's lives.

As you might expect it takes a lot of manpower to manage 12 community centers and over 13,000 young men and women. MAM has over 40 dedicated staff members but what really

makes the operation are the hundreds of volunteers that donate thousands of hours to coach, mentor and teach the youth that pass through the doors. MAM, like so many of Memphis's great non-profit organizations, could always use more dedicated volunteers. If you would like to coach or teach at MAM they will give you all the tools and training you need. If those aren't your gifts, they are always looking for help with technology, administration, lawn care, marketing and many other areas.

I have always heard the saying, "the name says it all" and in many cases that may be true. In the case of MAM however the name is only a tool and that tool is making Memphis a better place to live one life at a time! †

To find out more about MAM visit www.mamsports.org