

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Sacramento high schoolers play nine hours of basketball in showcase for good cause

By Joe Davidson
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This wasn't the Final Four, but it was a Fun Four.

It was completely devoid of last-second controversy or chaos, unlike what unfolded in the NCAA Tournament.

Thank goodness. Chaos shouldn't be part of any high school event, especially one for charity.

In Oak Park on Saturday, four games played out to a frenetic and fun pace at venerable Dave Hotell Pavilion. Bodies hit the floor, shots dropped and there were even some defensive stops in an offensive showcase of area high school seniors.

Everyone went home spent, and for a good cause as the 42nd Optimist All-Star event was a rousing success, starting with small school games for the girls and boys, followed by the large school contests, each pitting area players who went from rivals to sudden teammates for a day.

"This was for all the right reasons," North large school coach Rob Richards said in sizing up the day. "The kids were here for basketball, to represent their schools, to honor the game, and they did it the right way. This was an absolute blast."

A closer look at the games:

BOYS – LARGE SCHOOLS

North 119, South 112 – Yaadvir Dhaliwal of Inderkum impressed with a 25-point outing in gaining team MVP honors in the caper of games big on scoring and highlights.

Jordan Bryant of Del Campo and Ty Burrell of Antelope scored 19 each for the North. Jake Paxton of Rio Americano, Jaylen Solich of Roseville and Jack Welty of Del Oro had nine points each for Richards, [who coached his last game](#) after 25 years in the business.

Bryce Johnson, a guard from St. Mary's, was the MVP for the South after going for 23 points. Kaito Williams of Sheldon scored 20, Bryce Fitzgerald of Monterey Trail had 14 points and Aidan Doms of Davis scored 11.

BOYS – SMALL SCHOOLS

South 124, North 108 – Demetrius Marshall of West Campus scored 28 points, including eight 3-pointers, in earning South MVP honors to lead an offensive showcase that included a flurry of long shots, drives and nifty passes.

Joseph Wood of Rosemont had 14 points, Nate Gotgotao-Washington of Elliot Christian scored 13, and West Campus teammates Jair Lang and Maurice Simms scored 12 each for their South and school coach Michael Lawrence. James Eagen of Pioneer scored 11 and Jaime Gonzalez of Liberty Ranch had 10 points for the South.

For the North, William Goebel of Foothill went for 19 points to earn team MVP honors. Skyler Tuttle of Foresthill and Philip Polezhako of Futures High scored 13 each. Tyson Duncan of Sacramento Waldorf had nine points.

The North was coached by Dean Stark, the classy coach who has won 614 games over 32 seasons at the small-school powerhouse. And ever the professional Stark wore a nice suit.

“I’m the first guy in the history of this game to wear this,” Stark said with a laugh.

The Small School game began last year to give more athletes a chance to showcase their skills. It was fitting that Stark was a coach as he has championed the efforts of such schools since the 1980s.

“The small-school players can play, and they deserve a game,” said Robert Fong, one of the event directors.

GIRLS – LARGE SCHOOLS

South 93, North 90 (OT) – RyAnne Walters of Sacramento scored 18 and won South MVP honors in playing on her home floor one final time. Jasmine Hess of Cosumnes Oaks had 18 points and Chance Sims of Christian Brothers scored 10.

Jada Lewis of Whitney was the North MVP with 20 points. Inderkum's Nailah Dillard, a 4.0 student headed to Texas Tech, scored 16.

GIRLS – SMALL SCHOOLS

North 80, South 62 – Barnada Rreshpja scored 19 points to lead the North in earning team MVP honors.

The Valley Christian Academy guard headed to Division I Duquesne in Pennsylvania turned heads with dribbling and shooting. Maylene Hughes of Center also scored 19 for the North, coached by Center's Jeff Wise. Hannah Boone, also of Center, had eight points.

Rachel Loya scored 11 and was named South MVP. Carley Zaragoza, a Bee All-Metro first-team selection for Union Mine, had 15 points and Lillianna Hammons of Pioneer scored 10.