

# Officers mentor athletes

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The Columbia Heights Police Department (CHPD) has put the following thought-provoking statement by motivational speaker Josh Shipp into action.

"Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story."

When Officer Ryan Scheevel decided he wanted to get more involved with youth in the community, he researched and found a successful program in Florida. He set to work piecing together a similar program for Columbia Heights.

The first step was establishing a mentoring program with the boys basketball team this winter. The CHPD already has a mentoring program with the district's elementary schools in the form of a partnership with the Big Brothers Big Sisters program (BBBS).

Operating on the prem-

ise that each child learns differently, they do a variety of things with the young students including homework, playing games and socialization.

"We try to help kids build a community with their peers and work on social skills with one another," BBBS school match coordinator Ms. Paula Lien said.

With that program well established, the CHPD wanted to expand and continue to work with older students. Motivated,

Scheevel reached out to the BBBS program. Using school liaison officer Jason Piehn (JP) as a connection, this winter, Scheevel and other officers created their own partnership with the CHHS athletic department mentoring players on the boys basketball team. The goal was to provide

players with a mentor who could help with academic and non-academic issues. Program participants meet once a week on Wednesdays from 3:30 pm - 4:30 pm. The meetings typically start with Officer JP going over goals for the day. Lately, the boys have been focusing on class-

work. Athletes work on assignments and in groups while individual student-mentor check-ins occur.

"I can get my homework done, talk about

personal things that have been on my chest and bond with my team. The officers hold me accountable to stay on track," Wendell Matthews (12) said.

Not many high school students have the opportunity to build positive relationships with police officers. With this program,

students learn they can depend on officers in a non-official law enforcement capacity.

Organizers try to match an officer with just a few athletes so they can work one-on-one and develop more personal relationships.

"The idea of this program is to build better relationships within the community through the officers. It also helps give students a support system in school, at basketball and in their personal lives," Lien said.

The coaches, officers and coordinator all have the same goal, to help youth with high hopes of impacting their future positively.

"This program will build them up as individuals, which will give them strength as players, students and as citizens in the real world," coach Matt Birr said.

The BBBS and CHPD plan to continue the partnership by offering the program again next year with a different sport. They hope

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-Josh Shipp

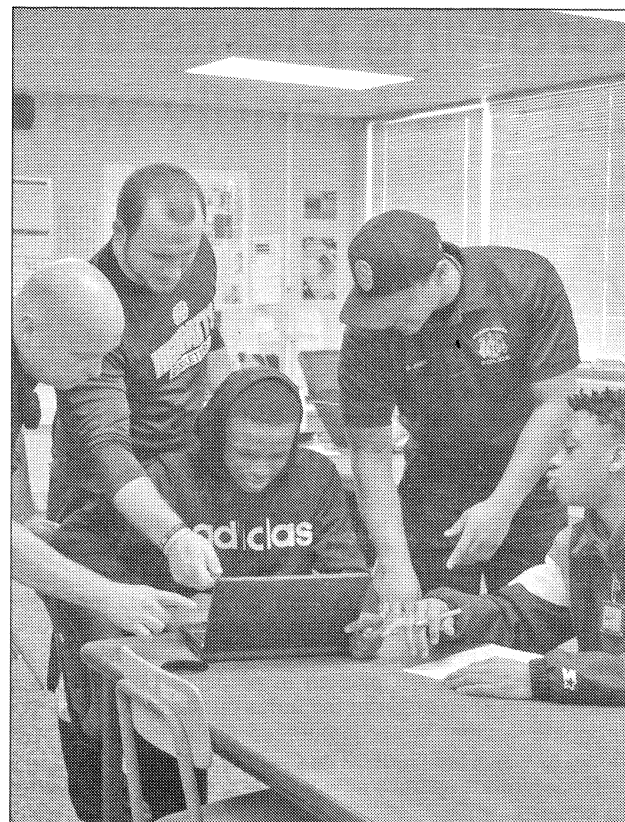


Photo by Alex Jones

Matt Birr, officers JP and Darry Jones help Johnta Gonnigan (10) and Jordan Jones (10) with homework.

to establish it as a long-term program by expanding it to multiple teams per season. Their goal is captured perfectly in a quote by Denzel

Washington.

"I think a role model is a mentor; someone you see on a daily basis, and you learn from them."