BOSTON COLLEGE WOMEN’S BASKETBALL PLAYERS
SHARE COLLEGE HOOP DREAMS WITH
BOSTON ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Players help Step UP and Winthrop Elementary focus on college readiness

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (October 2008) – Seven members of the Boston College women’s basketball team visited Dorchester’s Winthrop Elementary School this month to talk to students about setting goals to attend college and then working tirelessly to achieve their dreams.

The players went to the Winthrop on Friday, October 17, on behalf of the Step UP Initiative, which partners the Brookford Street school with experts from BC’s Lynch School of Education. Step UP is at work in 10 Boston Public Schools, where the city’s five largest universities commit resources and expertise toward coordinated learning support services designed to raise academic achievement.

RIGHT: Pictured at Dorchester’s Winthrop Elementary School, members of the BC women’s basketball team (L-R): Brittanny Johnson, Veronica Wilson, LaShaunda Pratt, Carolyn Swords, Victoria Jones, Jasmine Gill and Corey Rusin.

Towering above the third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students seated on the auditorium floor, the players offered their own life lessons about achieving goals and striving to be the best, stories Winthrop Principal Emily Shamieh says will help engage her students and their parents in embracing college readiness at the earliest possible age.

“These women are athletes, but they are students first,” said Shamieh. “Their visit lets my students see that you can be a great athlete, but you also have to set goals and develop academically. I want my students to see that any dream is possible, but that there is a lot of work involved.”

The visiting players included seniors Victoria Jones, Brittanny Johnson, and Corey Rusin, sophomores LaShaunda Pratt, Carolyn Swords and Veronica Wilson, and freshman Jasmine Gill. They were joined by assistant basketball coach Angelita Forte, Boston College Neighborhood Center assistant director Moe Maloney and Lynch School Urban Outreach staff Laura Avalos and Steve Prudent.
Each player spoke about the work they had to do to achieve as student athletes.

LEFT: Boston College women’s basketball player Veronica Wilson, a sophomore from Pickering, Ohio, visits with students from the Winthrop Elementary School in Dorchester.

Co-captain Corey Rusin talked about the sacrifices she made when she was growing up in order to play at the highest level of women’s collegiate sports. First, she made sure she was the best female basketball player in her town. Then she started playing against boys. All of the time spent practicing and studying meant she couldn’t always head out with friends.

“As much as I wanted to go out or hang out with my friends, I had to separate myself and work hard to be the best if I was going to achieve my goal,” said Rusin, of Wilmington, Vermont.

Senior Victoria Jones said she had to work hard because she’s not the tallest player on the court.

“I’m 5’4” and I’m a basketball player. How many basketball players do you know who are 5’4”?” she told the students. “A lot of people told me I wouldn’t play basketball in college. So I went to the gym every day and worked on my shot, my vertical jump, my passing. So when college coaches saw me, that’s what they saw. Not just someone who was 5’4”.

BC student athletes visit Boston Public Schools through the Help Educate Through Athletic Responsibility (HEAR) program, a joint effort of the BC Neighborhood Center in Brighton and the Athletics Department. Student athletes share who they are, where they are from, what sport they play, and how they planned for college. Their stories speak to overcoming adversity, balancing life priorities, and emphasize the importance of goal setting.

In addition to the athletes’ visit, the Lynch School of Education works with the Winthrop on a range of projects through Step UP. BC provides student teachers, professional development for teachers and administrators, and support for programs related to literacy, college readiness, science education, and assessing student progress.

“It is so critical for all students to start seeing themselves as future college students as early as possible and for educators to help fuel those dreams,” said Lynch School Director of Urban Outreach Catherine Wong, who coordinate’s BC’s Step UP activities. “When a diverse group of BC student athletes deliver these messages, children are hearing from young adults they can relate to and who reflect the neighborhoods and backgrounds that they come from. They can see that despite the challenges or circumstances you might face, you can achieve the goals you set for yourself.”

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