



The Milwaukee Bucks and the Boys and Girls Club have teamed up to encourage student achievement.

## Bucks assist in encouraging local student achievement

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"It's huge," says Boys and Girls Club of Dane County President and CEO Michael Johnson. "It's one of the best partnerships that we have."

Johnson is pretty excited about the new Boys & Girls Club partnership he has with the Milwaukee Bucks that he considers a win for everybody involved. The Bucks are lending a hand to encourage student achievement by donating huge groups of seats — 30 tickets — to Madison-area students who show measured improvement in the areas of literacy, behavior and attendance.

"We're working with [Madison Metropolitan School District Superintendent] Jen Cheatham and her team to make sure we pick the right kids to participate in this program," Johnson tells Madison365.

So far this season, they've taken busloads of students from Madison Memorial and Madison East high schools along with different middle schools throughout the city. The Boys and Girls Club of Dane County has orchestrated seven total trips and have taken at least 30 students every time. Johnson says they have another six or seven trips to go.

The Boys & Girls Club provides at-risk youth with the opportunity to learn and grow in a safe, fun and nurturing environment six days a week. Club members participate in educational activities, creative and performing arts, college preparatory programming, and sports and recreation. In addition those services, each member is served a nutritious meal every day.

Johnson and BGCDC is in the midst of trying to put 250 Boys and Girls Club kids to work this summer through paid internships.

"Last year, we had 32 different companies from CUNA Mutual to UW Health to Saris Cycling to Dane County," Johnson says. "I want to double down this year and see 60 companies hiring kids. And these are not free internships ... these are good-paying internships."

The partnership with the Milwaukee Bucks is not just about watching a basketball game, but learning about all of the jobs that are associated with the Milwaukee Bucks and meeting key employees and players.

"Not too long ago, I met with people from the Milwaukee Bucks and told them about how we hoped to do something special for the kids. I told them about how we put 200 kids to work and we want kids to get the kinds of internship opportunities that can provide exposure for them," Johnson remembers. "They told us that they would love to partner with us and get our kids tickets to Bucks game, and to meet some people in the organization, and let them see what they do behind the scenes."



Johnson has been around for a little bit and has gotten a ton of free tickets over the years for his Boys and Girls Club kids. He knows that many times when that offer gets made by sports teams, they often get seats in the nose-bleed section of the arena.

"I'm always thankful, but I think we can do better," Johnson smiles. "I asked the Bucks what else they might be able to do, and they came back and said, 'What if we got you 30 tickets right off the floor, and we reward those kids who are doing well in school and are improving in attendance?' These turned out to be some *nice* seats. You are close enough that you could literally throw something at the players!"

But you shouldn't throw anything at the players. "No, no, no. We would never advise anybody to throw anything at the players!" Johnson laughs.

For the rest of the season, BG CDC also got four floor court side seats that belong to the owner. Young people who are lucky enough to be in those seats get to go and spend time behind the scenes to see how the operation is run and to meet the players. The total value of the entire incentive program donated by the Bucks is about \$55,000.

So far, the partnership has been a rewarding endeavor for everybody involved. Johnson shared a recent e-mail from Alicia Dupies, Milwaukee Bucks Vice President of Community Relations, who expressed her pleasure with getting to hang out with the kids from Madison.

"It was wonderful to meet the group of students from Madison East last night. A great group of independent and confident young people with great futures ahead," Dupies said in the e-mail. "The students I spend time with always amaze me. This program is changing kids' lives and outcomes, and we are thrilled to be a small part of it."

Johnson says the relationship they have with the Bucks is what makes the partnership such a good one, and the experiences the kids are having they will remember for the rest of their lives. "The kids have fun and are just psyched to be there," Johnson says. "This last time they were hanging with [former Packer star] Jermichael Finley."

Johnson has long made it a habit of working the Milwaukee Bucks, Green Bay Packers and Wisconsin Badgers in any way possible to help expose his BG CDC kids to a new experience, get them to meet amazing new people and to explore the teams' professional facilities.

But is there any conflict for Johnson going to all these Bucks and Packers games as a man who hails from Chicago?

"I am now a Green Bay Packers fan. I'm out. My family and friends give me a hard time," Johnson laughs. "I was actually considered to be a member of the Green Bay Packers board, but I think my affiliation with the Chicago Bears doomed me. I was honest with them. I'm sure that hurt me."

"Back when I first actually started wearing the Packers gear, though, all my homies from Chicago were like, 'This is a damn shame,'" Johnson adds. "I get some heat. But it's been a couple years. You're not breaking any news, by the way."

Johnson says there are so many important lessons that young people can use from sports.

"I played Big Ten football and some of those things I learned playing football still apply today," Johnson says. "Our Boys and Girls Club is a team and building a strong team around you is what leadership is all about. There's no "I" in team. All of those sports sayings apply to life. The chances of actually making it to the NBA or NFL is pretty small, but I think that there so many important concepts and lessons that young people can learn from being exposed to sports."

**More Information...**

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