



FAST BREAK

CTK CYO MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Pastor: Father Robert Ketcham

Executive Director: John Newman

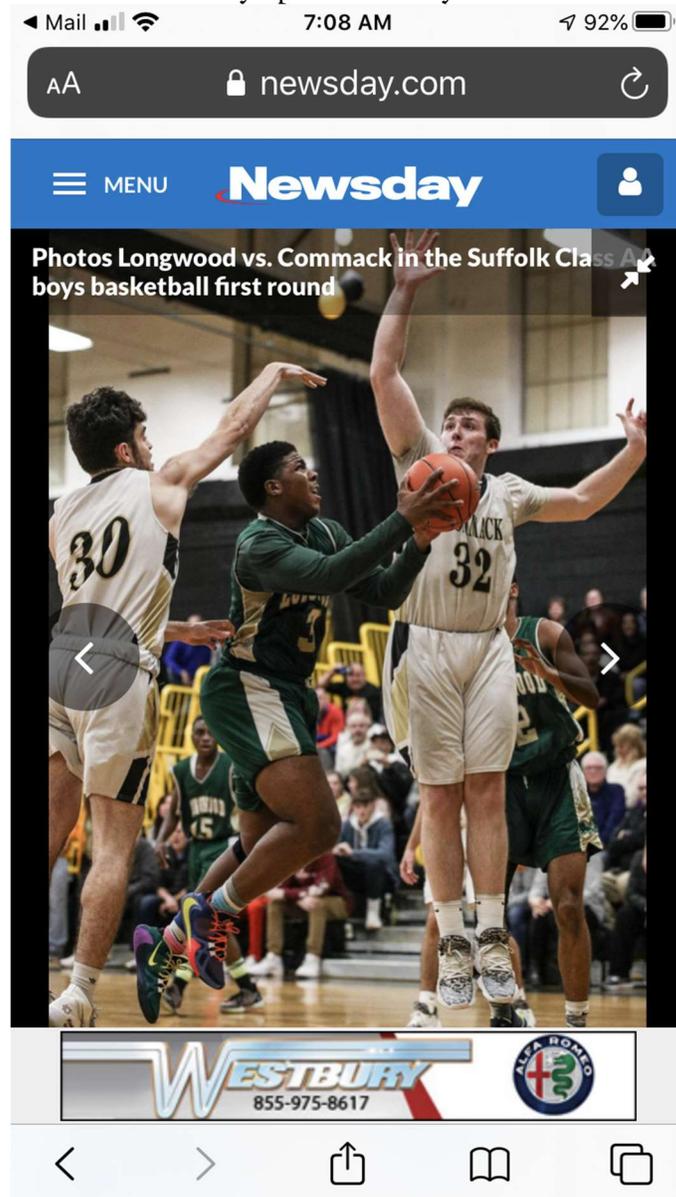
Assistant Director: Dennis Briordy

Executive Assistant: Michelle Mardiney

Director's Message

It's been quite some time since we have had the opportunity to participate in or observe any organized sporting activity due to the COVID-19 crisis. This has given me the time to reflect on things that normally I don't think about because of the hustle and bustle of everyday living that we all get caught up in. I thought this would be the perfect time to share a story about two boys that played on Commack High School's Varsity Basketball team this past year. It's a story that I think many of you can share with your own sons and daughters, grandchildren, nieces, nephews or anyone else that could use some inspiration and or direction in their athletic endeavors. It's a story about two boys that few people believed in as they started to play youth sports at about the age of eight years old. They both struggled early on because of different reasons in both basketball and baseball compared to a lot of the other kids their age. I was fortunate enough to coach both of them and I could see that both boys possessed probably the most important trait any athlete could have....."coachability". What is "coachability"? It is the desire to get better and the willingness to listen to coaching in order to reach one's maximum potential. Some kids experience early success and become resistant to coaching thinking that they know better. These kids eventually are caught up to and ultimately passed as they get older. I have always tried to impress upon parents that the best 6th graders will not necessarily be the best 12th graders. These two boys were clearly not the best players at a young age but because of their efforts they would become key players in Commack's historic 2019-20 season. This is the story of Spencer Malloy and my son Travis Newman, both of

whom I am very proud to say that I coached.



Travis Newman #30 and Spencer Malloy #32

Spencer Malloy Class of 2020

I first met Spencer Malloy in the summer of 2011 on the baseball field at Wicks Park. Travis had just started to play baseball in the Commack South Little League and Spencer was of course in the same age division. I became the summer travel team coach and both boys played for me that summer. It was evident that Spencer came from a supportive family as his mother, father, brother and grandmother came to every game. This strong support group would be crucial later on in Spencer's development.

Spencer was very big for his age and because of this he had trouble getting his body to do what he was asking it to do. This is not an unusual experience for many kids that have an early growth spurt. In spite of some early struggles Spencer began to show signs of improvement and was clearly headed in the right direction. I recognized that summer one thing about Spencer that I think many others overlooked. Often times coaches to a fault will focus on a player's weaknesses and have those things completely overshadow the strengths. Spencer was not a fast baserunner and had trouble covering ground in the field. However I did notice that he had "quick feet" and his first step was really quick for someone his size. These "quick feet" would nine years later make him one of Suffolk County's best basketball players in 2020.

The following winter I observed Spencer playing basketball in the CTK Intramural League for the first time. He was the biggest player in the league and usually grabbed most of the missed shots solely because of that size. However, he had difficulty making a layup and making a jump shot was out of the question. Not surprising though was his apparent joy in playing the game even though he was having limited success.



Spencer Malloy #55 CTK All Star game 2013

Spencer continued to play in the CTK Intramural league through the 7th grade. After that season I approached his mother and suggested to her that Spencer come join the 8th grade travel team the following season. I thought that it would help his personal development if he had better coaching and began to play against better competition. I had developed a good relationship with Spencer over the past two years during baseball and felt confident that he would decide to join us for travel basketball. A few weeks later his mother told me that he would like to join us for travel basketball in 8th grade. I was ecstatic and anxious to begin coaching someone that I thought had real potential.

Spencer did not play on the 7th grade CMS team in 2015. He did try out for the 8th grade team the following year and played for Coach Pugh along with Travis that school season. He also joined our 8th grade CTK travel team that was coached by Daren Macchio and myself. I think his parents and grandmother made every game to support him that season. This season began the transformation of a boy that merely played basketball to a boy that would become a force to be reckoned with 4 years later.

That winter it was becoming clear that Spencer was getting better each game. Although still struggling to make shots on the offensive side, defensively he was fearless and becoming a force under the backboard. Spencer and Travis would lead the 8th grade CTK that year to the Nassau-Suffolk CYO Championship game. The team would lose that game but the fire had been lit and the desire to excel had now taken hold of Spencer.

As the 2016 school year wound down I approached Spencer's parents with the idea of summer workouts in my backyard with Spencer and Travis. They were receptive to the idea and told Spencer about the proposal. He was excited about the opportunity and agreed to start workouts as soon as school ended.

I try to impress upon players and parents the concept that practices are more important than the games. You have to work harder in practice than the game so that the games become easier and success is more attainable. The problem is most players and parents have it backwards. They think the games are more important and that practice is just some kind of necessary happenstance. These same people then can't understand why they experience limited success even though they participate in many games.

In July of 2016 I got both Spencer and Travis to buy into this philosophy of hard practicing. At least twice a week and sometimes three times the boys would meet at 1030 am in my backyard to practice until 12 noon. It didn't matter what the temperature was that day because we had a practice agenda and we would finish it. The boys worked together and separately on drills that I designed specifically to address their weaknesses. They would do the "Mikan Drill" until they were able to finish it in the assigned timespan. In addition I had them do a "Reverse Mikan Drill" where they would have to make reverse layups with both hands. This drill would pay dividends four years later for Spencer as the baseline drive to a reverse layup from either side would become his signature move that defenders could not stop. The boys worked on their high and low post moves, agility, shooting, hook shots and rebounding skills. There were many times that Spencer's ride had to wait overtime because we had not finished. Not once did anyone complain! By the end of the summer it was quite evident that Spencer had begun to turn the corner and his confidence level was high.

In 2016 I placed our team the Commack Spartans in the Sports Arena travel league. It was Spencer's first taste of competitive AAU type basketball. He responded and helped lead the team to the championship in the 14 yr old division. People were starting to notice and asking me where did this kid come from? I told them the surface was just scratched and the best was yet to come.

Commack Spartans 2016

Sports Arena Champions

Back row L-R: Coach P. Lanci, M.Lanci, M. Cohen, S.Malloy, T. Newman, Coach Newman

Middle row L-R: M.Pecoraro, A.Foti, D.Waring

Front row L-R: G.Newman, Z.Lagrasta



As the boys headed to high school they still played summer baseball but it was clear that basketball was now the sport of priority for both Spencer and Travis. Spencer and Travis both made the JV team as 9th graders and played for Coach Dave Moran. Spencer began the season on the bench but by the end of the campaign was seeing action for most of the game. He had continued improving and was now becoming a force both defensively and offensively.

Spencer's improvement was remarkable at this point and surprisingly he had never yet attended a basketball camp. I was coaching at Gus Alfieri's All American Basketball camp since 2005 where both my sons Travis and Gavin had been attending since the 4th grade. I approached Spencer with the idea of attending the camp with us that summer and after consulting with his parents he decided to come. It was a wise decision and would play a key role in his development.



Spencer Malloy with Gus Alfieri

That summer of 2017 Spencer initially had planned to attend one week of camp. After the first week Coach Alfieri took a liking to him and invited him to stay for the remainder of the summer. Spencer stayed and this extra time with the coaching staff proved to be invaluable. Having a basketball in his hands and being exposed to experienced coaches for seven hours a day was exactly what he needed and wanted. This would elevate his game

to the point where he would be taken up to the varsity at Commack for the 2017-18 season as a sophomore.

Spencer would gradually put baseball aside because now he was getting calls from many different teams asking him to play for them. He was playing at CTK, the Commack Falcons and Long Island Lightning almost simultaneously.



Commack Falcons Champions 2018

The 2017-18 season at Commack High School would be a learning experience for Spencer. He would come off the bench for most of the season but would start some games that year depending on the situation. The team did not make the playoffs that year but was headed in the right direction with high hopes for the following year when a talented JV group would join them.

After spending another summer in 2018 at the All American Basketball Camp and playing in different summer tournaments Spencer had begun to clearly establish himself as a top player to be reckoned with. The 2018-19 School season could not come soon enough.

The 2018-19 School season saw the Commack Varsity basketball team make the Division A playoffs for the first time in several years. Led by returning seniors Aidan Keenan, Kyle Murphy, Zach Feingold and the now improved Spencer Malloy the team challenged eventual League champion Brentwood and won a first round playoff game. Underclassmen like Brendan Chang, Travis Newman, Nick Greco, Jack Reardon, Blaise Cammaratta and Tom Abbott contributed quality minutes

that year and gained valuable experience which would set the stage for 2019-20.

Spencer by this time was playing a lot with his AAU Long Lightning team. He would invite Travis to play with them whenever the team needed an extra player. The two of them were great to watch as they instinctively knew each other's favorite spots on the court and would pass the ball to each other for scores. The many hours of playing together would pay huge dividends for Commack HS during the 2019-20 season.



Spencer Malloy and Travis Newman Florida AAU 2019 Tournament

When the 2019-20 season began Coach Smith and the team had high hopes and looked forward to competing in League II. The team roared through the regular season posting an overall record of 16-4 with a League II best record of 11-1. Spencer had clearly shown himself to be one of the top players in League II and in Suffolk County. Commack found itself as the #3 seed in the AA division playoffs, a place it had never been before largely because of the very broad shoulders of Spencer Malloy.

The team faced off against a feisty Longwood team in the first round and managed to get by with a 48-42 victory. The second round saw them take on North Babylon, a team which they had beaten earlier in the season by a narrow six point margin. Spencer would lead the team to victory with a 20 pt. and 13 rebound effort as the team defeated North Babylon 64-55. This set up a semifinal matchup with undefeated #2 seed League III champion Northport.

With a 12 game winning streak coming into the game Commack felt good about their chances. Earlier in the summer the two teams had faced off twice with Northport winning both games by one point. This rematch would prove to be a mirror image of those games.

The game started off well for Commack as they jumped out to an early 17-9 lead. Spencer was playing well and the team was clicking both offensively and defensively. After a timeout by Northport things quickly changed as the Commack offense bogged down and saw Northport go on a 13-0 run and a 22-17 halftime lead. Northport would extend the lead to nine points before Commack made a run late in the 4th quarter and would regain a one point lead. Northport took the lead again and with 45 seconds remaining in the game had a two point lead and possession. Commack miraculously forced a turnover with 24 seconds remaining and had a chance to tie the game.

Commack's season was about to come down to one final possession. There are defining moments in everyone's life and we never know when they will present themselves to us. It's how we respond to those very moments that ends up defining who we are and what we are made of. This was one of those moments for the five boys chosen by Coach Smith to play the final seconds of the most important game Commack had been in, in over 20 years. Spencer Malloy was one of those on the court and it was him that was chosen to take the last shot for Commack. As the boys took the court after the timeout, not one of them showed any fear given the circumstances that was now before them. As the ball was inbounded and the clock ticked off the remaining seconds the play was developing into a high/low setup with Spencer and Travis. When Spencer and Travis exchanged spots Spencer was at the low post and Travis at the foul line. The ball was dumped into Spencer at the low post with his back to the basket. This very play had been Commack's bread and butter all year long. Now if this had been Hollywood the shot would be taken and would spin around the rim three times before going in. Unfortunately this was not the case as the Northport defense held tight and the ball went out of bounds off Spencer's hand. Commack's season had ended with Northport sealing the win with two more foul shots.

For Spencer and the rest of the Commack team it had been a magical ride. The loss was difficult to take but the boys showed great sportsmanship as they congratulated

Northport after the game. All year long everyone connected to the team had hoped for a crack at Brentwood which was considered the best team in the county. It was not meant to be but nonetheless nothing could be taken away from this group and what they had accomplished.

Sometime late in the season I was having a conversation with Spencer's mother. During this conversation I told her how well Spencer was playing this year. It was at that point that she told me something that every coach holds dearer than any personal award or any championship trophy. She told me that Spencer had said to her that I was the best coach that he ever had. I was surprised, flattered and happy at the same time. You see, as the years pass, the trophies and the medals gather dust and gradually lose their luster. However, the relationship and moments that a coach and player share last forever and get better with age. That's why I coach and will continue to do so for as long as I can.

I want to thank Spencer's parents for showing faith in me and entrusting me with the responsibility of coaching their son.

As for Spencer, I want him to know that he does not owe me anything because everytime I asked him for something he gave me everything he had. I watched someone that couldn't make a layup and was supposedly to immobile to play as a 5th grader become one of the most fearsome players in the county seven years later. The memories of our times on the field and the court spent together will last forever and something that I will always cherish.

Travis Newman Class of 2020

In order to understand the present we have to go back to the past and see how we got to where we are today. Such is the case with my son Travis because his story begins at the age of three years old.

As Travis turned three years old it was becoming more apparent to my wife and I that there was something not right about his behavior. He was still having difficulty speaking and communicating with us and his brother Gavin. Travis would experience difficulties completing most tasks that we would ask him to do. I mistakenly thought this was a rebellious three year old acting out. I couldn't have been more wrong. After having discussions

with the pre-school staff they agreed that something was amiss and recommended that he be evaluated by a professional. After going through a battery of tests and sessions it was determined that Travis was suffering from an affliction known as Auditory Processing Disorder(APD).

APD is a hearing problem that affects about 5% of school age children. Kids with this condition can't process what they hear in the same way other kids do. They have trouble discerning words that sound the same and have trouble making sense of those sounds. The most common signs of this disorder are:

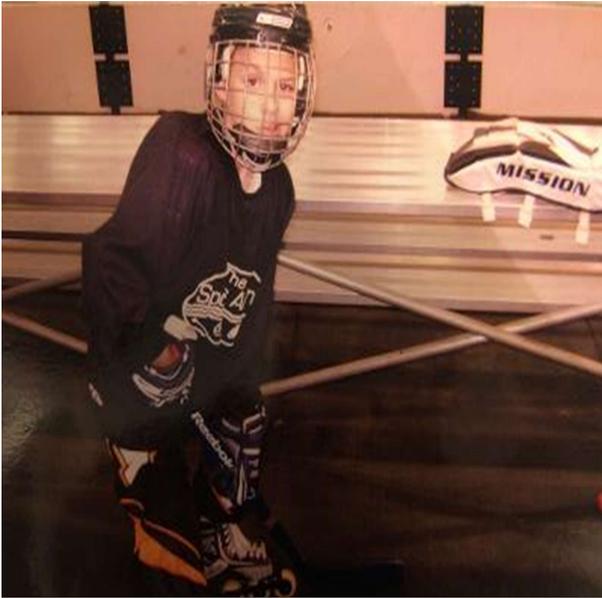
- 1-difficulty following spoken directions especially multi-step ones
- 2-asking people to repeat themselves or saying "what" or "huh"
- 3-trouble following a conversation especially if there are multiple speakers or background noises
- 4-trouble remembering details of things that are spoken or written
- 5-trouble with reading or spelling which require procesing of sounds

As it was explained to me it became quite clear that Travis was in fact one of the 5% of kids that would have to deal with this problem. We were told that he would have some difficulties in school but it was something that he could overcome with the right approach.

Now that we understood why Travis was having some difficulties it was time to start trying new approaches in our dealings with him. I tried to get him involved in sports as he turned 4 years old. Of course being a baseball coach at the time that was the first one I tried doing with him. He did not take to it and lost interest almost immediately. I tried almost every sport hoping that one would click but none seemed to pique his interest. Finally we found one by accident.....roller hockey. His uncle at that time was part owner of the Sports Arena in St. James and got him on skates. He loved it and subsequently joined one of the teams.

It was just what he needed at the time for his personal development. He had the chance to meet new friends and experience what being part of a team meant. He struggled in the beginning trying to figure out his responsibilities and compete. After a couple of seasons he gradually

became a pretty good skater and scored the winning goal in a championship game. He really seemed to enjoy it and I was happy that he was experiencing some success.



Travis Newman Defenseman

We started to talk a little about basketball and watched some games on TV at that time. Travis and Gavin seemed interested so I bought a piece of plywood and a couple of 4x4's and made a homemade basketball hoop on the patio outside. I attached the rim at about 6 ½ feet so they could reach the basket with no problem. I remember calling them outside to play one day and their reaction was like they just stepped onto Madison Square Garden. They loved it and went outside constantly to shoot on this homemade contraption. They both caught the basketball bug and wanted more.

I brought Travis to his first clinic at the Dix Hills Basketball Association. I coached it and there were about ten other boys in the group. I also put him in a clinic that year in the Commack Youth League which was held at Rolling Hills School. He loved both clinics and basketball was now something he wanted to do all the time.

Travis was tall for his age but was pretty athletic and the roller skating had been good for his overall coordination. He now had two sports he enjoyed doing and was experiencing success. I couldn't have been more happy for him.



Commack Youth League Clinic 2008

At about this time Travis was beginning to show progress in his schoolwork and was enjoying the basketball and roller hockey. Somehow both he and his brother suddenly became interested in karate and wanted to try it. I thought it would be a good thing for Travis because I knew it required discipline and focus in order to achieve the rankings. We went forward with the experiment and it turned out to be a good decision.

The karate school was very structured and required everyone to adhere to a strict code of behavior. The instructors were firm and demanded each child's attention. This was exactly what Travis needed at this point. At times he struggled with the demands because the instructors insisted upon doing things the right way and did not accept anything less. He gradually got better and was able to work himself up the rankings to a blue belt. I was extremely pleased with his progress not only with the karate but more importantly with his ability to listen and apply things that he was taught.



Travis Newman getting ready for class

The karate school was now beginning to demand more time from Travis as he approached the next levels of rank. It was now apparent that although he enjoyed the karate he was now more interested in basketball. The decision was made to drop the karate and concentrate on basketball. I would recommend the karate to anyone whose son or daughter is experiencing similar difficulties because of its demand for focus and attention to detail. This was a big step forward in Travis's personal development.

As more basketball was being played over the next two years the roller hockey was gradually being pushed aside. When the two seasons coincided it became extremely difficult to do both. A decision had to be made to choose one or the other and basketball was the choice.

Travis had now begun to focus his attention to basketball and was now enrolled in the CTK intramural programs. He was doing well and participated in the 3rd grade division which I had coached. The following summer something happened and I'm not sure why but I will never forget it. Travis had shown no interest in playing

baseball and I did not want to force it on him. His brother Gavin loved baseball and he and I practiced in the backyard constantly. I would always ask Travis if he wanted to join but the answer had always been no. One day out of nowhere he came to me and asked if he could start practicing baseball with Gavin and myself. I initially was shocked and surprised but had him jump right in and start playing with us.

He was eight years old and had virtually never batted or had a catch with anyone. We started from scratch and gradually moved forward with learning how to play. I put together a fall baseball team that year and it was Travis's first experience on a baseball team. He was clearly behind all the kids his age as most of them had already been playing since they were five years old. I'll never forget the first game he played in. In his first two at bats he struck out and did not even foul a ball off. He was really disappointed and it showed on his face. The third time he batted the bases were loaded and he got down two strikes again. The next pitch he made contact and the ball found a hole and he had gotten his first hit. You would have thought he hit a home run to win the World Series with the excited reaction he had. We played out the rest of the fall season and he really started to enjoy the game. Baseball had now somehow taken hold of him and he wanted to succeed at it.

As 4th grade basketball season began CTK would put together two travel teams to play in the CYO league. I was not asked to coach nor was Travis asked to play that year. I did not think he was ready to play under that kind of scrutiny yet so it was best that he stayed in the intramural league. What I have come to realize is that this is the age where the kids that are initially more athletically gifted are quickly siphoned off into the competitive travel leagues. Kids like a Travis or Spencer Malloy are quickly dismissed because of a perceived lack of athleticism or lack of ability. These kids often don't get a chance to reach their potential because they get labeled as inferior. They don't get exposed to quality coaching and competition and subsequently never reach their full potential. One thing I have learned in my 46 years of coaching, because I have seen it many times, is to never underestimate a kid that is willing to work. I was not going to let this happen to Travis nor any other boy that I felt was willing to work and get better. When the time was right I would form my own group and try and take those boys to a place where nobody thought they could get to. It first would start with a baseball team....the Commack Spartans.

The following spring Travis participated in the Commack South LL for the first time. I coached the team and most of the boys Travis knew from school were on it so it was a comfortable environment. He struggled in the beginning but as the year progressed he got better and better. Somehow the team made it to the championship game and we managed to win the game over a much more experienced group. Travis was ecstatic and had experienced success in his first real baseball endeavor. I will always remember the speech he gave in front of the team and parents thanking me for coaching the team. I was proud of him for speaking in front of such a large public group with confidence. He was making great strides not just in baseball but more importantly with his speech and his confidence. That summer was where I first got the opportunity to coach Spencer Malloy. The CSLL placed two teams in the District 34 tournament and I was selected to coach the "Black" team. The better players were on the "Gold" team and we took the remainder of the boys that wanted to play in the summer. We had the opportunity to practice twice a week and play in the tourney which was great for the boys. We only won one game but the group took big strides and the bond between Travis and Spencer had begun to form.

When the summer was over a group of boys wanted to continue to play in the fall. I took all of those boys and formed a team which I called the Commack Spartans. I gave the team that name for two reasons. The first reason was that it had been the mascot name for Commack South HS before the consolidation of the two Commack High Schools. The other reason was that a Spartan represented a fierce and dedicated citizen, loyal to his beliefs. I wanted the boys to embrace the ideal of dedication and commitment to their sport every time they put their shirt on. It started with a baseball team and soon thereafter it would become our basketball program.



2011 Commack South "Black" District 34 Team

Commack Spartans Fall 2011 Baseball

As Travis entered the 5th grade and was getting ready for the basketball season I still felt he was not ready for the intensity of travel basketball. At this point it was more important to his development to have more time on the court rather than to face an increased level of competition. It turned out to be a wise choice as he got the opportunity to mature both physically and emotionally. Sometimes parents get concerned when their son or daughter at a young age is not playing at the highest level of competition. I try to stress to those parents

that time on the court is sometimes more important than level of play in the development of a player.

I highly recommend to parents that if possible to send their child to a basketball camp during the summer. It is a great experience and definitely helpful in their personal development. I had attended Gus Alfieri's All American Basketball Camp as a youngster in 1968 and came back years later to coach there. I brought Travis there in the 4th grade and he flourished in that environment. It helped him with his social skills as well as his basketball skills. He would continue to attend the camp every summer until graduation. Often times he and Spencer Malloy would face off against each other or play together against the coaching staff at lunchtime. These moments helped fortify the bond between them when they played together.



CTK 5th Grade Champions "Kentucky" 11-0

That season Travis had also been selected by his teammates to play in the All Star game. I was worried that the pressure and big crowd at the game might be too much for him to handle. I couldn't have been more wrong. He played great and way beyond what I thought he was capable of doing. He was given an award for the outstanding player of the game. He was thrilled and proud of what he had done and so was I.



Travis Newman All American Basketball Camp 2013

Travis began to excel in the 5th grade CTK intramural league and helped lead the team to an undefeated 11-0 1st place finish. He had clearly taken big strides and was our most improved player that year. The success that he was experiencing was a huge boost to his confidence. He was slowly showing more maturity and his communication skills were getting better. He began to believe in himself and basketball was helping him get there.



Travis Newman Outstanding Player CTK All Star Game 2013

After the season was over I felt that he was ready to take on the next challenge of competitive travel basketball and he would tryout for CTK's 6th grade team the next year. In order to prepare for that endeavor I made the decision to start my own basketball program the Commack Spartans.

It began with some of the boys that I had previously coached in the CTK clinics and intramural league. We

started off by going to the Wood Park School outdoor basketball court and having group workouts. Gradually the word began to spread and more boys started to come down and participate. As the program moved forward I needed more help and I was fortunate enough to recruit Tom Hackett whose son Danny had become part of the Spartans. Tom was a terrific coach and knew the game well and assisted me with the boys. The improvement of all the boys was remarkable and the program proved to be a huge success. It would take the next step the following winter.

I have come to realize that in youth sports, especially at the younger ages, coaches seem to feel it is necessary to have a winning record in order for it to be a successful season. As a means to that end, often times those coaches will focus their attention on the player or players that at the moment are the more talented or advanced in order to meet that goal. It is not unusual for a basketball team to have 2 or maybe 3 players that are responsible for the bulk of scoring and handling of the basketball during a game. The remaining players are often just necessary parts to fill out the roster and the required 5 player minimum on the floor. It is not unusual to hear parents complain about their son or daughter either not getting the ball during the game or not getting enough playing time. This situation is very common and is why kids switch teams or give up the sport altogether.

Over the next two years while at CTK Travis would experience this very dilemma. Initially as I watched this situation develop I thought it would have a negative effect on Travis. Once again I was wrong. What it allowed Travis to do was to understand how to play the game without the basketball in his hands. He began to learn that he could be a very useful and valuable member on a basketball team and he did not need to score. He would do the things on a basketball court that most players simply don't want to do because it's harder and doesn't grab the headlines that scoring points does. I remember one game in the 6th grade when Travis had not taken a single shot the entire game as the game went into overtime. The opposing coach had told his players to completely disregard Travis and double team one of his teammates as soon as CTK had gained possession. I saw Travis frantically waving under the basket unguarded but still never received the ball. Finally with the game still tied with seconds remaining a teammate spotted him and Travis made the winning basket with his only shot of the game. He never complained about his lack of scoring opportunities during that year. He started and played in

every game that season. Travis had a moment that year that no player ever wants to have happen to them. In the heat of a close game he rebounded a ball under the other teams basket and put it back in for two points for the other team. He was devastated by this mistake but he shook it off and helped the team the rest of the game and they won. He played hard each and every game. Rebounding, defense and energy were the three things that he gave to that team. It also allowed him to begin to develop his uncanny ability to block an opponent's shot which he would do many times in the upcoming years.

After the season was over I had taken some of the Spartans that I thought were ready and entered a Spring league in Wyandanch. The league was being run by Jess Cohen who had just started an organization called the TITANS. Jess is now the Frosh coach at St. John the Baptist HS and would later take Travis onto his Titans AAU High School team. I felt it was important for the boys to learn to play against a faster more aggressive style of player if they were going to develop. It was an eye opening experience for both the boys and the parents. The boys adapted well and gradually adjusted their style of play and competed well in that league. The Spartans would play in Wyandanch for the next two years. The Spartans were also holding workouts at Gym Plus in Commack on Friday evenings with about 25 different boys. We usually broke into small groups with Tom Hackett taking a group and myself the other. It was well organized and the boys were making great strides.



Commack Spartans at Gym Plus Commack

The Spartans program would prove to be a great success as it helped produce 11 of the 16 players on the

Commack HS 2019-20 Varsity, Matt Fajfer and Danny Hackett would play at Stony Brook and St. Anthony's HS, and Dylan Waring and Johnny Melville would play at Connetquot. Those were some memorable winter Friday evenings and summer games with a terrific bunch of boys.

I think back to the spring/summer of 2013 as a big turning point for Travis in his personal development. He was now playing baseball regularly and was improving every game. However because of his late start he was still behind a lot of the boys skill wise. I was constantly hitting him flyballs and pitching batting practice to him in his spare time. I could see that he had a natural instinct for going back on a fly ball and getting a good jump. His arm strength was also on the rise as was his hitting prowess. He was right on the edge of breaking through to becoming a good player when the tryouts for the Summer District 34 were held. At the tryout there were only 12 boys in attendance, Travis being one of them. After the tryout the boys were told that a list would be posted at Wicks Field the following day designating the summer team roster. We went the next day to Wicks Field to look at the list for the team. Travis Newman's name was not on the list. Travis had been cut from the team.

I had coached baseball at St. Anthony's HS for 30 years and had to cut players many times. It was not unusual for me to receive phone calls from parents demanding an explanation for my actions. I would always be honest in my explanations and tell them how I evaluated their son. The one thing I had always told people was that there were now two ways to go: 1-give up and dismiss the sport or

2-use this as a motivation to improve and come back next year and prove me wrong.

In June of 2013 as I looked at the disappointment on my sons face, those very words that many times I voiced to parents at St. Anthony's were now coming forth once again. I remember taking the list off the wall and telling Travis that I thought a mistake had been made by not taking him on the team. I told him that we would tape the list on the wall in his room and everytime we went out to practice on our own, to look at the list as a motivation to improve. He nodded his head and never cried but I knew this had gotten to him. I never called out anyone or complained about what happened. I knew it was a mistake but I was determined to have Travis prove it not me.

A couple days after the list was posted I received a phone call from the CSLL that Travis was being placed on the summer roster. The reason given was that it was necessary to have a minimum roster of 12 so Travis was to be added. I told Travis and his face lit up with excitement. We talked about this now being a chance to prove everyone wrong and to go out and work hard. He said he was ready for the challenge.

The team practiced six days a week leading up to the tournament and Travis and I attended every practice. As I watched I could see the improvement in his game each day. I knew all he needed was some more experience and he would crack the barrier of becoming a good player. As the summer progressed he gradually became a starting outfielder and would bat as high as 6th in the lineup. He had done it! He realized what he had accomplished and overcame to get to where he now was. This experience which had started off negatively had now boosted his self esteem to the highest level. He would carry this forward in the years to come which would help propel him to even bigger heights in basketball.

In Middle School the 7th grade is when interscholastic sports can be played by a student. This would be Travis's first experience and he was excited about the opportunity. He tried out for the team and Coach Joe Pugh took him on the team along with 14 other boys. Coach Pugh's philosophy was to play every boy in every game and not only try to win but develop players for the future. He did a terrific job and would take the boys up to 8th grade the following season.

The 7th grade CTK team was condensed into one team with Daren Macchio and myself coaching the team. Travis would start and play in all 12 games that year. In the beginning of the year the team struggled to find its identity. Like most teams at this age level the majority of the shots taken were by the guards because they have the ball in their hands most of the time. Travis would take 3 or 4 shots during the course of the game but once again was doing yeoman's work on the boards. I decided to chart our teams shots for a couple of games and after doing so came to a conclusion that completely changed Travis's role on the team. I noted that almost 75% of the shots taken were from the right side of the court, probably because all of our guards were right handed. I also noted that of those shots over 60% were being missed and almost 66% of those misses landed on the opposite block.

After sitting with Travis and showing him these stats I instructed him to immediately head to the left block and box out as soon as one of our guards began to come up the right side and started to shoot. The results of this adjustment were remarkable. Suddenly Travis was scoring in double figures and rebounding even more especially on the offensive side. It culminated in a game against St. William late in the season where he had 18 points and 22 rebounds. Almost all of this action came from missed shots. He had now figured out how to score without having to handle the ball. This approach would make him a valuable commodity in the future to coaches wanting a player who was willing to do the dirty work and not complain. He had also kept developing a knack for blocking an opponents shot. In a game against St. Pius he would block 12 shots. As he got older he would perfect this skill to not only block the shot but to also then recover the ball.

Travis continued playing after the CTK season and joined the Titans AAU program in Wyandanch. The program was being coached by Jess Cohen and Coach "Van" both of whom were excellent coaches. They were interested in developing players which is the main reason I sent Travis there to play. He would play with Kenny Lazo and Rumelo Wright and other Brentwood players that would eventually win a County Championship. It was demanding but he benefitted from the intense level of play and he learned to push himself against really good players.

As the 8th grade CTK season approached we had recruited Spencer Malloy to join the team. The team now had two "big", Travis and Spencer, that would be able to match up with any other team's size. The team had added some new members that had not played the previous year and they fit in perfectly. The team roared through the CYO regular season and made it to the Championship finale only to lose to a talented Infant Jesus team. It was a coming out party for Blaise Cammarata, Spencer Malloy and Travis along with Jack Walshe as they would lead the team to the finals. Spencer and Travis combined that year for an average of 17 rebounds and 4 blocked shots per game. The formula for future success had been developed and Commack HS would eventually become the recipient of it four years later.

In July of 2016 Travis and Spencer made the commitment to workout in my backyard at least twice a week. These workouts were started early in the morning and we would finish around noon. Both boys worked

really hard that summer as they improved their offensive moves around the basket. The change in both boys by the end of the summer was remarkable. They were getting stronger and more polished as they prepared to enter high school.

At this point in time Travis had also moved to another AAU team the Long Island Impact coached by Joe Iannotto. The team consisted of boys from the Sachem school district and another boy, Tyshawn Pannell from Central Islip. Fast forward to 2019-20 and Tyshawn would be the second leading scorer in Suffolk County. Once again Travis found himself on a team where his scoring opportunities would be limited. By now though he was used to playing with players like Tyshawn and was successful in doing all the little things that made him an asset to his team. The team did quite well and won several local tournaments. It was another good experience for Travis and he took another step forward.

When Middle School was over in June of 2016 Travis had on his athletic resume two years of basketball, two years of baseball and two years of volleyball. He had established himself as a top basketball and baseball player. I felt he was ready to play both sports as he entered high school but his true passion had now become basketball. As September of 2016 came Travis entered Commack High School with eyes open hoping to make his mark. He would not play baseball in high school because basketball had taken hold of him and wouldn't let go.

When 9th graders get to high school it is a difficult task for them to play interscholastic sports that first year because they have to play at the JV level. They have to compete against others who are at least one year older and may have experience from the prior season. Travis knew it would not be an easy task to make the team but he felt he was ready. I thought both he and Spencer would make the team based on the strides I had seen them take over the past year. Tryouts came and went and both Travis and Spencer made the JV team as 9th graders. There were only seven 9th graders on the squad of eighteen that year. I was proud that two Spartans had made the cut.

It would be a learning year for both Travis and Spencer as they saw limited action. Both boys performed well when called upon that year under Coach Dave Moran. It would be the following season of 2017-18 when both boys would make their presence known on the court.



Commack HS JV Basketball 2016-17

Travis and Spencer had now decided to devote most of their spare time to basketball as gradually baseball took a back seat. Travis would play in the CTK High School league and with the Commack Falcons with Spencer.



Commack Falcons 2017 Sports Arena Champions



Coach Moran talks during a timeout vs. Longwood



CTK High School League Champions 2017

As the 2017-18 school year began it was clear that both Travis and Spencer Malloy had made great strides in their game. They both had attended the All American Basketball Camp during the summer and all the coaches there were amazed at how much they had improved over the past year. Both boys felt confident as they tried out for the Commack HS team in November 2017.

When tryouts ended in November of 2017 Coach Smith had decided to take two sophomores, Spencer Malloy and Blaise Cammarata, up to the varsity for the year. Travis would stay behind on the JV with Nick Greco and Shane Macchio as the only remaining veterans from CTK's 8th grade team.

Under the guidance of Coach Moran the team had a great season winning the League I title. On this team Travis had to expand his role and become more of a scorer because it was loaded with 9th graders. Travis took to the role and would go on to lead the team in scoring and rebounding. He set the Commack HS JV single season scoring record in spite of missing a game because of an injury. Coach Moran awarded Travis the Coach's Award for outstanding player at the end of the season. He was on his way but there was still more work to be done.

Still looking to improve his game Travis would rejoin the Titans AAU program in Wyandanch. Coach Jess Cohen and Coach Van had recruited some of the better players from Brentwood, Deer Park and North Babylon to play. Travis was welcomed and gradually became an intricate part of their success. The team would travel to tournaments all over the tri-state area. The team did very well over the next two AAU seasons winning several tournaments and placing high in others. The coaching staff was demanding and expected each player to commit to playing tough defense and opportunistic offense. Travis fit in well because he was willing to play defense and do the little things on offense to help the team. Coach Jess saw what Travis brought out to the court and would eventually make him a starter on the team. The energy level and toughness that Travis displayed is what the coaches saw as his real value. Many of the boys on the team were better ball handlers and shooters but few were willing to make individual sacrifices like Travis was willing to do.

I can't stress it enough that parents must find a program and a coach that best suits your son. A coach that believes in him and can get the most out of him is what is most important. When you find that program stay with it and support it. The Titans AAU program was exactly what Travis needed and they helped develop him into the player he became.



Travis Newman Titans AAU 2018



Titans AAU Tournament Champions 2018



Titans Coach Van and Coach Jess

As the 2018-19 school year began Commack's Varsity basketball team felt good about its chances. With returning seniors Aidan Keenan, Kyle Murphy and Zach Feingold along with junior Spencer Malloy and newcomers from the previous years JV team the team was poised to challenge League I opponents.

With the senior leadership in place, the team went on to finish second in the regular season to Brentwood. Spencer Malloy had come to be known as a force under the basket and Aidan Keenan as one of the top guards in the league. Travis would come off the bench and fill in as necessary at forward or on the wing. His role was to spell whoever was in foul trouble or who needed a rest and to give quality minutes while in the game. He embraced the role that Coach Smith had designated for him and did a great job off the bench. Against Brentwood he matched up against Bryce Harris in both games giving him fits defensively. He managed to grab a rebound, block a shot, score or make a pass every game in this role. Travis once again would come into a game and make something happen to energize the team. In a game against Patchogue later in the season when several teammates got into foul trouble, he would play almost the entire second half and score 9 points and grab 8 rebounds in the

win. Whatever Coach Smith needed Travis was there to help out.



Travis Newman gets past Brentwood's Jordan Riley

The team would make the playoffs for the first time in several years and defeat Riverhead in a first round game. They would meet Brentwood for a third time in the next round after having lost twice by nine points during the regular season. Unfortunately things did not go well that day and Commack was eliminated. Although disappointing the experience that the underclassmen had gained was invaluable and would help propel them the following year 2019-20.

The 2019-20 season came with high expectations for the Commack Varsity. The boys had played at the Hofstra spring invitational league in June and the St. Anthony's HS summer league in preparation for the season. The team performed very well against some very good teams and seemed ready to make its mark come November of 2019.

The team got off to a great start and never looked back as it took the League I title with a 11-1 record. The only blemish was an overtime loss to Bay Shore early in the season. The team had come together nicely and was being led by one Spencer Malloy who by now was clearly one of the top players in the county. Travis was once again coming off the bench this year but in a much more expanded role. Even though he did not start he was there at the finish in some of the most critical moments. He was providing Coach Smith with energy, intensity and toughness off the bench. Travis and Nick Greco were the super subs off the bench providing Commack with scoring and rebounding punch when it was needed.

The team met Longwood in the first round of the playoffs on 2/13 in the single elimination tournament. The game started slowly for Commack as they found themselves down by as much as eight points early in the first half. Coach Smith looked down the bench and put Nick Greco and Travis into the game. Longwood never saw them coming! With Travis providing the will and Nick the scoring the team went on a 12-0 run. The only thing that stopped it was a Longwood timeout. All year long whenever Travis entered a game there was a change in the character of the group on the floor. This game was no different as there was a new life in the team. Travis would score his last basket of the game with 5.7 seconds left in the 3rd qtr. to tie the game at 33-33. In the 4th qtr Travis never shot the ball but would make plays that would help turn the tide in Commack's favor.



Travis Newman ties score vs. Longwood

As the 4th qtr started Commack faced elimination unless they could manage to shake the feisty Longwood team. Spencer Malloy was being contained by their defense so the Commack offense had to come from somewhere else. It came in the form of Nick Greco with an assist from Travis. In the 3rd qtr. Travis had found Jack Reardon open at the three point line for an open jumper that put Commack ahead temporarily. As the game clock wound down and Commack down by one point Travis brought the ball over half court on the left side. The Longwood defense had turned its attention towards Travis, at that moment and without hesitation Travis whipped a diagonal cross court pass through the entire Longwood

defense to a wide open Nick Greco in the corner above the three point line. Nick took the shot and it would put Commack in the lead for good as they defeated Longwood 48-42. All those years when Travis had learned to play unselfishly and put the team first instead of himself paid dividends. His passing prowess had improved dramatically over the years and this one broke the back of Longwood.

After Travis made that pass and the crowd was yelling for him and Nick, I happened to glance to my left and saw many of the boys I have known for years. What was ironic was that some of those very boys now screaming for Travis, eight years ago were ahead of Travis on the Commack basketball depth chart. I then realized how far Travis had come in his development not only as a basketball player but as a person. All the worries, all the heartbreaks, all the concerns, all the time and effort spent trying to make sure Travis would succeed now seemed worthwhile. He had succeeded when others years ago said it was unlikely.

The next round Commack faced off against North Babylon but they did so without Travis. Travis had contracted a severe case of the flu and had to miss the game. Spencer Malloy and Nick Greco carried the team to a 64-55 win. The team would now be matched up against undefeated League III powerhouse Northport in the semifinals.

For the next week Travis was forced to stay home and missed practices leading up to the Northport game. The day before the game he went to school and practiced gingerly with the team in their final preparation for the semifinal matchup. He was at best about 50% of his normal capabilities.

The game against Northport started well for Commack as they jumped out to a 17-9 lead. After a timeout by Northport the Commack offense bogged down only to find themselves down 20-17 at halftime. Travis had come into the game in the first half and came up short on a jump shot and got winded after about four minutes of action. He was clearly not himself in the first half.

Northport would extend its lead to to as much as nine points but Commack would make a comeback in the 4th quarter. Travis entered the game again in the 3rd quarter and somehow mustered up enough energy to help get the team going. He set a vicious screen for Nick Greco freeing him for an open jump shot to get Commack back to within two points. When the 4th quarter began

Commack found itself down by only four points. The next few minutes the game seesawed back and forth. With about 5 minutes remaining Travis wrestled a rebound off a missed free throw from two Northport players and scored his only basket of the game to give Commack the lead for the last time.



Travis Newman grabs rebound from Northport player

The last five minutes Northport's biggest lead would be three points until the final play. Travis had exhausted himself and Coach Smith took him out. As the game clock dwindled down to less than three minutes Coach Smith put Travis back into the game. Travis found himself once again at the end of a game in its most critical moment. With Commack down by two points and 24 seconds remaining they forced a turnover giving them a chance to tie the game. Commack called a timeout and prepared for its most important possession of the season.

Five boys were chosen to take the floor for Commack with its entire season riding on the outcome. The fact that Travis was one of those five chosen made me realize the distance that he had traveled over the last eight years. The fact that he was not nearly himself physically and had somehow found it within himself to have the will to compete was something I never would have dreamed of eight years ago. The fact that Coach Smith saw Travis as one of his most trusted players to put on the court at this moment was testament to all the work he had put in over the years.

As Commack inbounded the ball they were able to set up their offense like they did all year. They got into a

high/low formation with Spencer at the box and Travis at the foul line. The ball was dumped into Spencer from the wing as he was isolated at the box. This play was Commack's most effective play all year long so it was no surprise that they went to the well. As soon as Spencer received the ball two other Northport defenders moved down to help defend against Spencer. As the seconds ticked off Travis found himself open at the foul line because his defender had left to help out. The foul line jump shot was a shot that we practiced all the time with CTK, the Spartans and in the backyard for this very reason. I remember watching the play and saying as it developed "Travis is open!" Unfortunately for Commack the Northport defense held and the ball deflected out of bounds off Commack. Northport would make two more foul shots to seal the 49-45 victory.

As time ran out and the buzzer sounded to signify the end of the game I watched as the boys went over to congratulate the Northport team. Their shoulders were slumped in disappointment especially the seniors because the sound of the buzzer signified more than just the end of a game. That buzzer signified the end of their childhood and the beginning of adulthood. When they stepped off the bus for the last time, the realization that moving forward the expectations and responsibilities that they were about to face were far different from any others they had ever faced up to this moment. It's a very scary moment for any 18 year old when they reach this point in time. Think back to when you were 18 and what did you have in front of you? For me personally I had absolutely no idea the direction my life would take me. As parents we need to remember this and give as much support as we can to whatever our kids decide to do.



On behalf of Travis I would like to thank the following people, all of whom coached Travis and helped him get to where he stands today:

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Gus Alfieri | Mr. Mark Algeri |
| Pete Cammarata | Jess Cohen |
| Mike Chidester | Pete Collins |
| Coach Van | Coach Fornier |
| Jeff Finch | Jeff Greco |
| Tom Hackett | Joe Ianotto |
| Don Kalinowski | Bob Kaible |
| Steve Leonard | Pete Lanci |
| Daren Macchio | Mr. Michael Kullack |
| Dave Moran | James Perrino |
| Joe Pugh | Anthony Rizzo |
| Troy Scanapico | Dan Schoenfeld |
| Russell Stang | Renshi Anthony |
| Sensai Mike | Pete Smith |

Travis was very fortunate to have each one of these dedicated people give of themselves to him. Every coach was different but each one treated him with the respect and understanding that he needed. They were able to get the most out of Travis and he excelled because of their guidance.

It is important for parents to understand that when you find a coach that your son or daughter connects with, to stay with that person as long as possible. Don't be swayed by promises of greener grass somewhere else. If your child is progressing that is where they belong. Don't fret over wins and losses or how many championships they win. In the end its their development as a person that matters the most.



Travis Newman

CTK Basketball Clinic 2009-10



Travis Newman

CTK Basketball Clinic 2019-20

As I look at these two photos it's difficult for me to realize how fast ten years can go by. I remember the clinic in 2009 and the boys that attended it with Travis. I never thought back then that in ten years Travis would be assisting me coach at another CTK clinic. Looking back I appreciate all those times we spent together on the court and the baseball field. I would never trade those moments for anything in the world. Watching my son grow up and being a part of it is what being a parent is all about. As I reflect on all the practices, the games, the workouts, the scrimmages, the shoot arounds, the tournaments, the

travelling, the camps and clinics we went to, a smile comes to my face. Why?.....because it was worth it and it's those moments that Travis and I will share together forever.



GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

The girls volleyball season was cancelled in mid March due to the COVID-19 crisis. We hope to resume the program this summer if conditions change and we are allowed to use the CTK Gym again. Please continue to monitor our newsletter and check the ctkcyo.net website for future updates.



Boys Divisons

As of 6/7 all basketball programs have been suspended due to the COVID-19 crisis. We are hoping to resume activities this summer if conditions change and we are allowed to use the CTK Gym again. Please continue to monitor our newsletter and check the ctkcyo.net website for future updates.



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Girls Divisions

The girls divisions registration is now open on the ctkcyo.net website for grades 4th thru 8th. We are looking to expand our rosters for the 2020-21 season in all grade levels. If anyone would like to volunteer to coach and/or

bring a group into our program contact Dennis Briordy at dennis.briordy@gmail.com

contact John Newman at theace5120@aol.com Check our website ctkcyo.net and follow our newsletter for updates on all our programs.



K-1 Clinic/Developmental League

The K-1 Clinic- The K-1 Clinic finished its tenth session on 2/16 with our clinicians taking part in a dribbling and shooting contest. Each player also received individual recognition for their participation and efforts during the year. It was another great year watching the participants interact and display their self improvement as the season progressed. Many thanks to Coach Chris Bohn and Travis Newman for their help with the clinic. Thanks also go out to Gabriella Newman and Charlotte Bohn for their help in demonstrating many of the skills taught to our clinicians. Thanks go out also to our parents that pitched in whenever we needed help. Pictured below is our 2019-20 clinicians and their coaches.



The K-1 Clinic will take place again this year with a target starting date of 11/15/20. The clinic will take place on Sundays at the CTK Gym from 12-1pm. Registration will open in September and will be limited to 25 participants. If anyone would like to coach at the clinic

The Grade 2-3 Developmental Program

The Grade 2-3 Developmental Program held its last session on 2/7 with a resounding 5 on 5 full court game. Our participants during the year had the opportunity to play in various 3 on 3, 4 on 4 and 5 on 5 game situations. In addition every week Coach Newman and Coach Bohn introduced them to new basic fundamentals of the game. It was great watching the youngsters compete against one another as they began to enjoy the competitiveness of actual game play. Many thanks to Coach Bohn and all the parents that helped out whenever they were called upon.

Any boys interested in playing in the 4th grade CYO Travel League for the 2020-21 season contact Matt Cohen at mcohen@longislandassociation.org

Any girls interested in playing in the 4th grade CYO Travel League for the 2020-21 season contact Dennis Briordy at dennis.briordy@gmail.com



Individual Instruction

Coach Newman has been holding individual and small group workouts @ CTK for the past several months. Participants (boys and girls) currently range from 1st graders to 11th graders. Each session is approximately one hour in length consisting of fundamental drills involving ball handling, shooting, dribbling, one on one moves, agility and conditioning. Anyone interested in improving their game is urged to contact Coach Newman @ theace5120@aol.com to set up a session.



Due to the COVID-19 situation all CYO activities have been suspended until 7/1. At that time the situation will be reevaluated and a target restart date will hopefully be given at that time.

CTK CYO now has our own Dr. Dish shooting machine. This machine streamlines shooting workouts and makes practice time much more efficient. In a 45 minute shooting workout the machine is capable of having a single shooter shoot over 700 shots. Coach Newman will be holding shooting workouts for anyone that is interested in improving their shooting skill. For information contact Coach John Newman at theace5120@aol.com

Pictured below are current Commack High School Varsity Basketball Senior Travis Newman and Coach Newman with the new Dr. Dish shooting machine.



The CTK CYO Shooting League has been suspended indefinitely due to COVID-19 crisis. Once we are able to reopen the gym the Shooting League can then take place. For further information contact John Newman at theace5120@aol.com

