

NBA players give back at Tulane

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Nikola Jokic, power forward for the Denver Nuggets, greets a row of participants during Jr. NBA Day Friday, Feb. 17, at the Reily Recreation Center. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Hundreds of smiling middle-schoolers got the chance to meet—and ball—with some of their favorite NBA stars Friday on the uptown campus of Tulane University during Jr. NBA Day at the Reily Recreation Center.

Wearing bright red Jr. NBA shirts for a team-like feel, the students enjoyed games and drills under the leadership of Jr. NBA Day volunteers before heading to the basketball courts at Reily, where the NBA stars took the reins. There, the students participated in a skills challenge and a mini combine complete with an evaluation of height, weight, arm span, vertical leap, hand width and speed.

Charlston Nash, a Meisler Middle School seventh-grader, learned a new move that he said may take him a bit more practice to perfect. The move is known as “the matrix” and calls for the simultaneous dribble of two basketballs under alternating legs.

“I’m going to get this so that I can teach the rest of the team,” said Nash, a point guard and shooting guard for Meisler’s basketball team. “I’m just excited to be here with the NBA players and with my team. It’s pretty cool that these guys took the time to stop by and see us.”

The players, during their NBA Day of Service, offered one-on-one tips to the budding NBA stars while Tulane President Mike Fitts watched from the stands.

“To have so many incredible NBA All-Stars under one roof, shooting around with local elementary- and middle-school students, is an incredible opportunity for our community and a blast for Tulane,” said Fitts, who posed with the NBA championship trophy displayed at Reily for the day’s events.

Jr. NBA Day at Tulane was one of three sites in which NBA players volunteered for the NBA Cares All-Star Day of Service in New Orleans. Other NBA Cares volunteer opportunities included KaBOOM! and Rebuilding Together. Present at Jr. NBA Day were Nikola Jokic (Denver Nuggets), Emmanuel Mudiay (Denver Nuggets), Jamal Murray (Denver Nuggets), Joel Embiid (Philadelphia 76ers), Kristaps Porzingis (New York Knicks), Willy Hernangómez (New York Knicks), Danté Exum (Utah Jazz), Dario Saric (76ers), Domantas Sabonis (Oklahoma City Thunder), Buddy Hield (New Orleans Pelicans), Jimmy Butler (Chicago Bulls), DeMar DeRozan (Toronto Raptors), Paul George (Indiana Pacers), Kyle Lowry (Toronto Raptors), Isaiah Thomas (Boston Celtics) and Kemba Walker (Charlotte Hornets).

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