

Kingston

SUCCESS STORY

Tay Fisher, a 2004 graduate of Kingston High School, has spring-boarded his dedication, perseverance, and talent into a fantastic career as an internationally known Harlem Globetrotter. But for this 2004 Kingston High School graduate, the future wasn't always so bright.

In fact, Tay specifically credits the support of the faculty and staff at J. Watson Bailey (JWB) Middle School with helping to direct him on the path to success in college and beyond. And while having a career with the Globetrotters is rewarding, Tay derives just as much pride from his second career as founder of the Tay Fisher's Fundamental Basketball camp. It is his early mentors, says Tay, that have motivated to give back to his community.

Growing up, Tay says his talent for basketball was recognized at a young age. While still in JWB, he earned a spot on the KHS Junior Varsity Basketball team. "I was only 13 years old and playing with high school players," he enthuses of this early acknowledgement of his skills by JV coach Mark Wynkoop. But while his moves on the court were advanced, Tay admits that he still had a lot of growing up to do. The challenges, he says, were exacerbated by the culture of his neighborhood and peers.

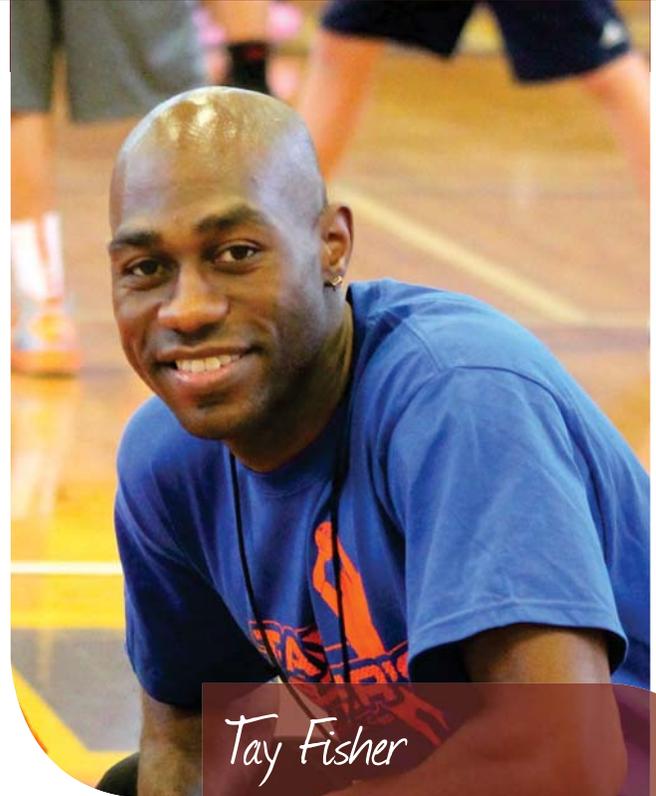
"I grew up on Van Buren Street," describes Tay. "In middle school, I was fighting between two things. Did I want to be a basketball player? Or did I want to hang out on the street?"

While athletic success came easily, academic success did not. Tay recalls having trouble in school, and

sometimes acted out during class. "I've always been driven athletically, but with the help of the teachers at Bailey I learned to push myself academically," he says. "Middle school was a big turning point for me." Teachers like Dale Thompson and Mary DiChristopher helped Tay to see the impact of his personal choices – and helped to listen, guide, and advise Tay during the tumultuous early teen years. Long afternoons spent at Kingston's branch of the Boys and Girls Club – where he was recognized as Youth of the Year – also helped Tay to stay focused and positive.

In high school, Tay's talent enabled him to set a slew of records as a varsity player. He notched 2,119 career points which set KHS and Section 9 MHAL records, and was also highlighted as one of New York State's finest players for 334 career 3 pointers. Thanks to early academic intervention, Tay had built a great foundation of study skills and was able to give a solid performance in the classroom as well. "School was something I learned to do better in over time," says Tay, explaining that while middle school was difficult, academics became easier as time went on.

Thanks to Tay's dual appeal as a scholar athlete, he was recruited to play Division I basketball for Siena College.



Tay Fisher

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Tay Fisher's Hall of Fame



Tay Fisher gets a hug from a happy camper at Tay Fisher's Fundamentals

Playing basketball was definitely a huge focus of Tay's college years, but he also knew that his degree could play an important role later in life. While at Siena, he majored in psychology, and faced the hurdle of adjusting to new and higher standards. "Freshman year was tough," says Tay, "the first year was definitely difficult. But it is also when I realized I was a role model and needed to do a little bit more."

Tay's freshman year marked the launch of a two-day basketball clinic, which has since evolved into an enormously popular multi-week camp with outlets in both Kingston and Saratoga Springs, NY. Partnering with one of his middle school role models and former JV coach Mark Wynkoop, Tay began the camp as a way for students to improve their basketball skills. Soon, though, the camp took on a focus of educating the whole player in life and social skills—just as Tay's early mentors had done for him.

"The camp isn't about me – it's about the kids," says Tay. He loves connecting with area youth over his passion for basketball, and judging by the reaction at J. Watson Bailey Middle School, the students love it too.

"He's definitely a celebrity here," comments school resource officer Harry Woltman. At a recent visit to the school, Tay's presence elicited shrieks of delight, rousing cheers, and requests for autographs and pictures from students. However, some of them don't know Tay as an international basketball superstar. To those students, he is a hero from their favorite basketball camp.

During the camp, Tay related stories of his early struggles to students. "I keep things real," he says. One lesser known story he shares with students is how the first time he auditioned for the Harlem Globetrotters, he didn't make the cut. "When I first tried out in 2008, I heard a lot of you're too small, you're too this or that," says Tay. "My failures are what have motivated me to be successful," says Tay. It is a message that is tantamount to the philosophy of his camp and his desire to give back to his hometown community.

Giving back to the community is so important to Tay that he recently launched a new venture, an annual breast cancer fundraising rally. Over 300 attendees – including at least five breast cancer survivors – gathered at Kingston High School for a special exhibition game by Tay's former camp students.

"My campers were playing basketball, but that wasn't the main focus of the night," says Tay. "It was an emotional day for me because I was able to bring the community together for something that wasn't basketball related.

As Tay's campers can tell you, there are life lessons to be found in basketball. "Basketball taught me to be passionate about life," he says. For Tay's campers, self-improvement is all about finding that passionate- basketball or otherwise. "I try to get them to be better in every way," Tay says with a smile.