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PLAYERS

Poughkeepsie City Striders using track to teach youth commitment



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Offering a chance for local youth to get experience in track & field from a young age, Damien Powell had a few goals in mind with the Poughkeepsie City Striders AAU program.

First to mind is simply the opportunity to teach growing athletes the intricacies and strategy that comes along with the sport, preparing them for when it's time to compete for school or other programs at an older age. He also wanted to foster a team and family that prided itself on competitive spirit while also put sportsmanship and community at the forefront.

"We really speak on the importance of being on the same family. That family aspect of it where we're rooting each other on," Powell said. "We want to make sure that we're known as encouragers ... we build that comradery. We do that as the striders but also in the track world."

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Most importantly, Powell wanted to help build future leaders and exemplary people, first and foremost. Using the sport he loves so much is his way of doing so.

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"We have that mentality to help one another. Our older kids are working with the younger kids ... one good thing is that all of our older kids get to be in a leadership role," Powell said. "There's not a lot of kids who get to say that they helped run a team of 30-40 kids and have this leadership aspect about them."

The Poughkeepsie City Striders (PCS), created by Powell in 2012, a registered member of the United States Track and Field Association, is a local team that is made up of kids aged 6 to 18. Continuously growing since its inception, the Striders have seen massive success throughout the past 14 years.

The success comes from the type of dedication, commitment and training that Powell and the rest of the coaching staff ask of the athletes. All are welcomed by the PCS, but incoming members and athletes are made aware that the training will be rigid and require a full buy-in to the mentality to work hard. In return, the athletes will receive key fundamental aspects of training that will help carry over into every aspect of life, regardless if it's sports or not.

"It's a very disciplined sport. if you don't work it, you're not going to get better at it. One of the things we're trying to show them is that the discipline that they're learning in track and field is going to help them, even in their non-athletic venues," Powell said. "Being able to understand how to break down a race will also help you break down your study habits to make it proactive and productive."

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While participation is accepted for everyone at all levels of competition, Powell and the team also aim to compete at the highest levels and make the striders a competitive hot spot for all who want to succeed in the sport. The results are evident with the team sending over a dozen young athletes to Des Moines, Iowa, in the upcoming weeks for the AAU Junior Olympic Games at the Drake Stadium Complex. With competition set to take place from August 3-8, the team saw 13 members of the team qualify for the games.

Local competitors

Preston Botchway, 8 & under age group, 800m run, 1500m run
Prince Botchway III, age 10, 1500m run
Carmella Dancey, age 9, 800m run
Malika Dixon, age 15-16 group, Shotput
Jordyn Elem, 8 & under age group; 100m dash, 200m dash, Long Jump
Gabriella Flanagan, age 14, Shotput, Discus
Ruben Flanagan, age 11, Shotput, Discus
Jeremy Fournier, 8 & under group, 800m run
Noelle Gonzalez, age 14, 100m dash
Kaison Johnson, age 10, 200m dash, 400m dash
Jordan-Anthony Powell, age 14, Long Jump
Asha Rashid-Scherrer, age 11, 800m run, 1500m run, Long Jump
Oscar Reap-Robilotto, age 12, 1500m run

"Everybody is building that excitement, not only with the Junior Olympics, but with what's happening the next season," Powell said when asked about the group's pride and excitement about getting to compete at such a big stage. "The excitement is at over 100."

More than just teaching the youth the lessons that all sports can bring, Powell wants the Poughkeepsie City Striders to be a spotlight of the area. Proving that elite athletics can be found in the Mid-Hudson Valley and show the rising athletic stars that representing the area should be an area of pride. The conception of the program was partly due to the lack of availability in the area, paving a way for youth track & field stars to compete without having to travel throughout the rest of the state to find a home.

"Usually when you think of track & field, you think of Florida, Texas or California," he said. "It's great to show that we have great athletes ... it's showing that New York does have track runners."

