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# **Belmont Teacher Uses Squash to Help MS 45 kids**

By Brian Costa

A dozen sweaty heads bobbed up and down as students from Middle School 45 in the Bronx hopped across a squash court at Fordham University. The drill was called squat jumping, a real leg burner. And in the middle of the group, in perfect form, was Tim Wyant. "I gotta push these kids," said Wyant, 27. "I gotta push 'em."

Wyant is executive director of CitySquash, a four-year-old nonprofit that teaches squash and provides academic support to students at MS 45 in Belmont. To the 40 students in the program, most of whom are black or Latino, Wyant is more of a big brother than a coach, and there are few aspects of their lives he is not immersed in - from squash to schoolwork and, in some cases, even family life.

Though he has a full-time staff of four to help the kids in squash and academics, Wyant often stays in the office until late at night. It's a long way from where Wyant grew up, playing squash at country clubs in suburban Cincinnati. One of four children in a family where everyone plays squash, he began learning the game by age 5.

Wyant went on to become an All-American in each of his four years at Harvard, where he was captain of the squash team. He also volunteered at SquashBusters in Boston, an urban youth squash program begun in 1996 that spawned CitySquash.

After college, he played professionally for two years, first in England, then back in the U.S. Then he saw a job posting in 2002 for CitySquash, which was founded by Sanford Schwartz, a Westchester businessman and squash enthusiast who had sold administrators at MS 45 on the idea and had lined up arrangements for the team to practice two days a week at Fordham and two days a week at Concordia College, in Bronxville.

But Wyant still had to make parents and students believe in the program's value. "I didn't know what squash was," said Maria Vasquez, whose daughter, Tanesha Jackson, was one of the first students in the program. "I thought it was vegetables." The first year, 31 students tried out for 16 spots. The staff made selections based on attitude, academic standing and athletic ability.

This year, 111 students tried out for 40 spots. And the program has produced some of the top-ranked young squash players in the country while helping students boost their grades

by an average of six points. Neil Aliberti, an assistant principal at MS 45, credited Wyant for CitySquash's popularity. "He has a demeanor about him that comes across very easily with children and definitely with parents," Aliberti said.

At first, Wyant lived in Manhattan, hanging out with friends at night and on weekends. But that felt too removed, so he moved to Belmont last year. "I always felt a little off about the idea that you come in during the day, you do your job and then you go back to your comfortable surroundings," he said. "I just felt like if I'm going to do it, I should do it. If I want to serve the community, I should live there."

For all Wyant's involvement in students' lives, he still faces a persistent culture gap. But to the extent he can, he said, he's starting to overcome it. At a recent dinner with a CitySquash financial supporter and student Christopher Fernandez, the supporter asked Christopher what he thought of Wyant.

"Oh," Christopher said, "he's the coolest white guy I know."