

# Rochester Students Honor Arthur Ashe and Spend A Day at the New York Open

In early February, more than 2,000 students from the Rochester City School District took part in a tennis workshop to commemorate Arthur Ashe Legacy Lives Day.

The event came on the heels of the district learning about the USTA's Tennis in Schools program, which provides equipment and instruction to local schools so they can introduce tennis programming into their curriculum.

"I was invited to a regional training workshop, and on the last day they brought everyone out to some tennis courts for a discussion," said Nurse Bowick, who has been integral in getting tennis into the Rochester School District and wanted to do something to bring tennis to the kids in the district while also honoring Ashe's legacy. "A gentleman from the USTA gave a talk about tennis in the schools, and he said that a child will only touch a racket maybe six times between kindergarten and graduation. I couldn't get that thought out of my head, and I said I'm going to change that."

So with that inspiration, Bowick began to put together the tennis programming to be introduced into the district's 57 schools, and implemented a rap contest where kids would put together a rap to honor Ashe and his legacy. These had to include his name, his college, his wife's name, his daughter's name, some of his tennis accomplishments, and the country that he was fighting for just prior to his death, Haiti.

"Those were the components that had to be in it. We offered New York Open tickets to the winners, which made it a big draw," said Bowick.

Bowick, contest winners and some of their parents then planned a trip down from Rochester to Long Island on the day of the New York Tennis Expo, to enjoy the free day as their love for tennis continues to grow. Bowick fundraised in order to get funds for a Greyhound bus down to Port Authority in New York City, and then a



shuttle bus from Port Authority to NYCB LIVE, home of the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Despite the hectic travel and all the logistics that needed to be worked out, it was all worth it.

"Every single one of those kids wants to play tennis, and these were kids that were not playing before Arthur Ashe Legacy Lives Day," said Bowick. "And the moment they put on their designer sweatshirts and got their bag of tennis equipment, they were amazed. One of the boys came up to me and said, 'I'm a celebrity'. And I felt like watching them walk a little bit taller that day made every sleepless night I had putting this together worth it. I could see the kids transform, the wide eyes as they were looking out onto the black courts and actually able to walk on them."

The kids were honored prior to the afternoon's second Speaker Session, with their names being read aloud to a round of applause from the audience. They were also treated to a special clinic from legendary tennis coach Nick Bollettieri, who took the time to work and speak with the kids.

"He didn't just come down and say hi, he was interacting with them and teaching them for a half-hour," said Bowick. "At one point during the Q&A part of the panel, I told him that I was introducing a group of brown and black kids into a predominately white sport, and what do I need to do as a coach to prepare them for this. Mr. Bollettieri said you have to be honest with them, and you have to tell it to them like it is. And whatever incidents they may face, give them the opportunity to talk through it. And then give them support and the encouragement to continue on."

That piece of advice will go a long way for these special kids who were able to come down to Long Island and experience a day like that. With tennis being incorporated into all the schools in the Rochester School District, it will be amazing to see the impact the sport has on those kids, and is proof that the legacy of Arthur Ashe still lives.

"When you think about that little wooden racket and those strings, and the impact that it has on 22 people from Rochester, N.Y. in just one day," said Bowick. "It's truly amazing."