

# PLAY: Program screens applicants

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mentally. It also recognizes that too many children don't have access to sports because of budget cuts or lack of teams.

The PLAY Corps looks for college-age students to coach community teams for city leagues, non-profit organizations and Kid-Sports. In return, Nike pays each participant \$500 for tuition and provides some equipment and uniforms.

The program has participants in college towns throughout the country. The University chapter came in second for recruitment this term with 22 applications, said Jarrad Smith, the University's Nike student representative.

"We're trying to provide these kids with a hipper student coach," he said. "We can talk the game, relate to the kids. It's a lot more fun having a college coach, anyway."

Zachary Wallace, a junior majoring in business, coached a YMCA basketball team this term. His team practiced twice a week and played games on the weekend; this required about a six-hour commitment each week.

"Every student can fit in five, six hours a week," he said. "It's not that hard. It's almost like a workout; you're excited, you're

motivated."

Tyler Bertsch, 12, played point guard and off guard for Wallace's team. The team played for fun, and he said college students keep that tone more than most parents.

College students also understand their players more, Bertsch said. They're younger and more like teammates than coaches.

"I've had a lot of parent coaches, and they weren't as fun as Zach," Bertsch said. "It was neat of him to come out and coach a seventh-grade team."

That's why the PLAY Corps looks for college students, Boogaard said. College students can relate better to younger players, and younger players look up to college students more.

The kids see their parents as authority figures, she explained. Because of that, they may rebel against their coaching or not interact well with them. University students, on the other hand, are just old enough to command respect and just young enough to make friends.

"We are at that age that they most admire, that they look up to," Boogaard said. "Once you get past that, you become a parent. They totally look up to you."

Student coaches can sign up for any term, including summer.

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Jarrad Smith  
Nike student representative

They can coach a team in any sport, as long as a community league in that sport exists. Students have coached ice hockey, cheerleading, track, baseball and swimming, Boogaard said.

Coaches go through an extensive screening process before the program accepts them. They also complete a short training program that prepares them to coach sports and to mentor children.

Applications for spring-term coaching are due Jan. 1, and applications for summer positions are due June 1, Smith said.

"You're going to get into volunteer work, and these kids need volunteers," Wallace said. "It's great for a résumé, and it's totally gratifying. I made a lot of friends with these kids."

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