



## CONNECTICUT POST

### Chris Elsberry: Matthews given a voice for his passion



Wes Matthews speaks at The Fairfield County Hall of Fame unveiling the new Hall of Famers' plaques Monday March 18, 2013 at the Hall of Fame at UConn Stamford ( Conn.). Photo: Dru Nadler

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[Dennis Kelly](#) had seen the results firsthand. His two boys, Richard and John, had been working with former [NBA](#) player and Harding High standout [Wes Matthews](#) in Matthews' Skills and Drills camp in Derby, and their improvement was hard to miss. So, Kelly, a former [NCAA](#) Division I basketball official, had an idea.

He went to Matthews and told him what he wanted to do. Matthews liked the idea and just like that, Dribble-Drive Basketball LLC was created.

"Wes was the only guy I trusted to teach my kids as a coach," Kelly said. "He can be a great voice for kids in skill development and I wanted to give him that platform to be that voice. His messaging is powerful."



"I had been working his two sons out in my camp," Matthews said, "and he came up with the concept to start our own LLC. And we put together a fundamental program where these kids can come out and learn the game. This clinic is an opportunity to get kids in tune with the mental side of the game because basketball is just not all about scoring."

Matthews played in the NBA for nine seasons, with the [Atlanta Hawks](#), [Los Angeles Lakers](#) (with [Magic Johnson](#)), [Chicago Bulls](#) (with [Michael Jordan](#)), [San Antonio Spurs](#), [Washington Bullets](#) and Philadelphia 76ers, winning two championship rings with the Lakers. He understood that he needed to be a good teammate more than anything else. Matthews needed to fit into the team concept and do whatever was needed to be done. That mindset allowed him to play in the NBA for close to a decade, averaging 7.9 points and 4.2 assists.

And today, that's the teaching he's working to get across to the kids, who are just learning the game or working to get better at it.

"These kids can't be just scorers. They need a good work ethic," Matthews said. "They need to be a good locker-room person, they need to have a good basketball IQ and they need to have the grades. It's so much more than just athleticism now. And if you follow the blueprint, there'll be success down the road."

Since early September at the [Derby Veterans Community Center](#) (clinics will continue through Nov. 23), Kelly and Matthews have been teaching boys and girls from the ages of 8 to 18 all the "intangibles," as Matthews calls them, about basketball. There's ball-handling, rebounding, conditioning, defense, teamwork and leadership skills.

"These kids have to understand that in order to be successful, you have to put in hours and hours of training and work," Matthews said. "Our mission is to make every boy and girl a better basketball player in all aspects of the game. And if you want to make your kid a better basketball player, what better way than to learn from a pro? I condition, train, do one-on-one drills, stuff that they're going to need for the next level or just to get better playing the game. It gives kids a positive work ethic."

It's a sight to see. Matthews, whistle in hand, program schedule rolled up and stuffed into his back pocket, directs kids of all ages around the court like a general. For someone who never gave much thought to eventually coaching, Matthews is having a blast.

"I like working with these small groups of 12 to 14 kids," he said. "It's been very rewarding for me to watch the kids' passion for the game. It's not just coming into the gym and shooting, it's playing all aspects. I call myself the 'clean-up man' because I clean up all these bad habits these kids get into and get them ready for the next level. I'm a hands-on guy, I'm serious. I'm passionate. I believe in the work ethic."



"These kids all talk about getting exposure but if they play the game right and have the right work ethic, these coaches will come find him. If you can play, they will go anywhere to find you."

In addition, the two men are creating a winter [Boys & Girls Club](#) basketball league that is going to get started within a month.

"We're running the league," Kelly said. "We'll be using the club's facilities (Stamford, Waterbury, Meriden, Bristol and Hartford are the first sites) and we're going to be doing player development, workout sessions and coaching clinics. That gives us a market in each of the cities where those clubs are. This is the next step for us."

Although the Derby workouts end in a couple of weeks, both Matthews and Kelly are looking forward to the next series of training clinics.

"This has become our passion," Kelly said. "We love to see players get better and Wes is the right guy to do that. He's the most credible resource in the state and I want to give him that platform to be the voice."

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