

Sports

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SECOND AVENUE SUMMER LEAGUE



Photos by TOM HINDMAN | Gazette-Mail

Teams S. Fresh and Educated Thugz of the Second Avenue Summer League compete during a game at the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Neighborhood Center on Charleston's West Side. The league was founded and is run by former Capital High, University of Nebraska and West Virginia State standout Cookie Miller.

A welcome respite

Miller gives back to West Side community with culture-changing basketball league

By Chuck McGill
Staff writer

THE BASKETBALL games in the Second Avenue Summer League are played on the cracked and faded concrete courts at the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Neighborhood Center on Charleston's West Side.

The white backboards at each end of the court have started to rust and grass pokes through the surface's fissures, but these imperfections aren't a concern on one of the summer's rare days of blue skies and no rain. What matters is what's transpiring outside the lines.

There are two sets of aluminum bleachers and they're filled with spectators as two of the league's top teams — Educated Thugz and S. Fresh — compete in the twilight of the regular season. There is steady traffic into the community center's cafeteria, where a team of volunteers prepares fried chicken, fish and hot dogs in the kitchen. The smells waft to the playground, where children are swinging and sliding as the sun begins to set. A young girl on a pink bicycle speeds away with a red popsicle secured in her left hand.

The cacophony of sounds — hip-hop music blares from two giant speakers, players exchange good-natured banter and young boys hoot and



Friends and neighbors gather to socialize and take in the games in the Second Avenue Summer League.

holler as they sneak in a couple shots when the action stalls on the other end of the court — doesn't seem to faze residents. This is a welcome respite.

There are no gun shots, no drug deals, nary a sign of anything nefarious on a street that has seen its share over the years.

"Some of the things we've seen ... we've seen it all, we've heard it all, we've ducked and dodged and ran," said Beverly Burton, whose mother lives within eyesight of the outdoor court. "Now, it is more settled here. You don't have to run and you don't have to look over your shoulder."

The credit is being heaped on a

culture change led by Josh "Cookie" Miller, a 28-year-old professional basketball player who starred at Capital High School and West Virginia State. He grew up on Second Avenue. He survived Second Avenue. Now, he's giving back to Second Avenue.

SEE LEAGUE, 7D

COA stipends won't make college athletes rich

By Dave Hickman
Staff writer

MORGANTOWN — In a lot of ways, Wendell Smallwood is probably like many college athletes in regard to the new cost-of-attendance stipends coming their way this fall.

It's a nice bump. It's certainly welcome. But it's not something most have put a calculator to in order to figure out where they'll spend their new riches, mainly because it's not exactly going to make anyone rich.

"All I heard was we were getting more money," said Smallwood, West Virginia's junior running back and slot receiver. "So that's a good thing."

Beginning this fall, athletes in all

sports at the Power 5 conference schools will begin getting stipends added to their scholarships designed to cover the full cost of college attendance. In addition to having tuition, fees, books and room and board paid for, they will get a check each month, essentially to cover miscellaneous expenses. For the most part that would cover trips home and general day-to-day needs or wants, the type that most college students face.

"I think it's going to be helpful because a lot of guys, myself included, we struggle with that," WVU safety Karl Joseph said during last week's Big 12 football media days in Dallas. "Just being able to buy food and things like that is tough."

The cost-of-attendance stipend paid to athletes varies widely across the country, a figure established by each school's financial aid department based on a variety of factors, not the least of which is the cost of living at each location.

West Virginia's figure is actually among the lowest of the Big 12's 10 schools, but seems not far off the national average based on scattered reports of what each school plans to provide. WVU's stipend will be \$2,400 per year for students from West Virginia and \$2,700 for those from other states.

Broken down further, out-of-state student-athletes at West Virginia will receive \$1,800 annually for transpor-

tation expenses and \$900 for personal expenses. For in-state student-athletes, the transportation figure is \$1,500, accounting for the \$300 difference.

For out-of-state students, it amounts to \$300 per month for nine months — no stipends will be paid at WVU during the summer months — or about \$69 a week over 39 weeks. For in-state students that's about \$267 per month or \$61 a week.

"It would help a lot just to have a little extra money in our pockets for anything," Smallwood said. "Meals, whatever, it's really expensive. So whatever it is, I'm happy we're getting it."

SEE STIPENDS, 7D



MITCH VINGLE

WVU's Gee on Holgorsen, COA stipends

THIS PAST week, I had a chance to meet with WVU president E. Gordon Gee. If you missed Friday's column, it was an eye-opener. Gee, you see, is one of only three members of the Big 12's "Composition Committee," which deals with expansion.

We did, however, speak about other topics.

Among those was WVU football coach Dana Holgorsen's standing. You might know over the past three seasons the Mountaineers are under .500 at 18-20. Gee, however, said he's give the program a "B-plus."

"We're right on the cusp of greatness," said the school president. "I really expect us to be very competitive in the Big 12 this year."

If not? Is there a number of victories Holgorsen needs to hit? Seven? Eight?

"There's not a number," Gee said. "In fact, the new athletic director [Shane Lyons] and I haven't even had a chance to talk about it. [Lyons] makes the call. He'll counsel with me, but if you hire good people, let them make the decision. I have great confidence in Shane."

So there you go. The call is up to Lyons. Know, however, Gee has expectations.

"This is my expectation: I expect us to get better in physics; I expect us to get better in chemistry; I expect us to get better in music; and I expect us to get better in football," Gee said. "Folks don't expect us to win the national championship every year, but they do expect us to be competitive."

Another topic broached was that of cost-of-attendance payouts. For those unaware, schools are now allowed to pay athletes COA stipends — money for gas, groceries, travel home, etc. — based on school financial aid office estimates of what's necessary.

Gee is all for it.

"Cost-of-attendance is what we should be doing," he said. "We do that for our other scholarship students. We need to make sure we're meeting the financial obligations of our recruits, which is different from pay-to-play or pay-for-likeness."

"I believe student-athletes are students. I believe they are talented athletically. I think band members are students that are able in music. I think the notion of paying students is not in the best interest of the university — or the students. But cost-of-attendance is different."

The current setup, however, does have a distinct odor. The aforementioned stipends are based on a formula that can range anywhere from \$2,000 to \$5,000. WVU is set to give athletes arriving from out of state \$2,700 and those from in-state \$2,400. That's nice, but estimations are Tennessee will be handing out \$5,666. Within the Big 12, Texas Tech is expected to present checks of \$5,100.

The differences might not have been a factor in the last recruiting classes, but expect that to change.

"It will be a factor," Iowa State coach Paul Rhoads told the Ames Tribune, "and it was certainly talked about and utilized to showcase how the kids are going to be helped out and receive more expense money to get back and forth easier."

He added the Cyclones "had teams trying to use that against us because they had a higher amount."

Rhoads said he tries to preach the decision shouldn't be based on a few thousand,

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