

DUKESTURF

Day with the Dukes

JMU students help create a level playing field BY MAKENZIE WALTER ('12)

Sixty local Special Olympians spent a beautiful October Saturday learning and interacting with dozens of JMU students and athletes during the fifth annual Day with the Dukes.

“The Dukes, and this event, truly are a shining example of the good things that can happen when the community gets together for a great cause,” says Daniel Leake, Shenandoah Region director of Special Olympics Virginia.

JMU students in the Psychology Peer Advisers program paired each Special Olympic athlete with a JMU buddy to offer one-on-one interaction throughout the day. “Having this day to spend time and get to know somebody on a different level is really special,” says Catherine Clarke, special events coordinator for the Psychology Peer Advisers.

Day with the Dukes began in Bridgeforth Stadium, where the Special Olympians met members of the JMU football team. They ran drills, practiced passing and kicked field goals. Being in the stadium and interacting with the players is just one of the highlights of the day. “The Special Olympians get to do things that nobody else gets to do. They’re out on the football field with the guys; nobody gets to do that,” says Leake.

After the football drills, everyone moved to Godwin Hall to meet with the men’s and women’s basketball and soccer teams. In the gym, students and Special Olympics athletes shot hoops,



JMU student-athletes, Psychology Peer Advisers and local Special Olympians share laughs and fun during the fifth-annual Day with the Dukes. The program was established by former peer adviser Jesse Tarr ('08).

dribbled basketballs through obstacles and learned some soccer skills and pointers.

After an active morning, everybody gathered for a tailgate lunch before heading back into the stadium to watch the Dukes take on the Maine Black Bears.

The Day with the Dukes program was founded in 2007 by then junior psychology peer adviser and tennis player Jesse Tarr ('08). “I was looking for ways to give back to the community,” says the Huntersville, N.C. native. “I thought JMU is such a cool place, we can do something special.”

In its fifth year, Day with the Dukes is not just a fun-filled day for the Special Olympians; it also provides a valuable learning experience for the JMU students and student-athletes involved.

“Sometimes practices and games get really hard and we forget how much fun it is to be able to play basketball,” says Andrey Semenov ('12), men’s basketball forward. “This day reminds us that what we do is a whole lot of fun.”

The success of the day beams in the smiles of everyone involved. “It’s a win-win situation for everyone,” says Leake. “The interaction among our Special Olympian athletes, the JMU athletes and the peer advisers is just a wonderful relationship.”

* See videos from Day with the Dukes at www.jmu.edu/jmuweb/general/news/general11760.shtml.



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