



MARK MARCONEY/Sun-Gazette

Jalil Harris, 8, of the city, handles the ball Tuesday for the blue team during opening day for the fifth season of the Summer Youth Basketball League, sponsored by the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action. Games were held began Tuesday night at Penn Vale in Loyalsock Township.

Youth hoops league aims to keep kids out of gangs

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can be all the time."

McKenna, who heads a department that has seen an upsurge in violence believed to be caused by drug dealers and gangs targeting youngsters, reminded the players how much the police appreciate the league.

"I am proud of the effort each one of you is taking to make the community better," he said. "The community sees what you are doing — setting a great example. Each and every day, try to do your best."

Eileen Harley, organization vice-president and its academic support coordinator, introduced the teams, coaches and fifth-year referee Rodney Wilson.

Organization executive director Loni Gamble said he appreciates parents who get involved and encouraged more volunteers.

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Loni Gamble,
executive director,
Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action

program, but is a youth intervention and development program, teaching children to give back and participate in their community, Gamble said.

Each child who plays basketball here and at Kennedy-King, a housing project in the city's West End, must also volunteer to do a community service project, attend workshops on conflict resolution.

The whole purpose of this program is to give them an outlet and to teach them civic responsibilities, he said.

On this afternoon, basketball was on the players' minds.

"I think this does keep kids off the streets and away from gangs," Alphonso Kelly, 15, of the city, said.

The games were played with teams in these...

a buzzer for breaks, halftime and the end of the game.

Sometimes, players would double-dribble, walk with the ball, or foul each other. The referee kept things in order, but fun was the name of the game.

"When I blow this whistle, do you know what that means?" Wilson asked the teams as the children laughed and so did some parents.

"It's all about teaching them things," Gamble said. "In some cases, nobody ever told them before."

When there is a safe place with chaperones for children to play, that's giving back to the community, he said.