

Basketball game honors Merrick teen's legacy

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Photo credit: Tara Conry | Alumni and coaches of the Hebrew Academy of Five Towns and Rockaway played in the Jacob Greenberg Memorial All-Star Basketball Game. (April 14, 2013)

When 14-year-old Jacob Greenberg collapsed on the front lawn of the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway in Lawrence in 2005, Yoni Lipshitz was there.

The boys were playing football with friends when Greenberg suddenly fell to the ground. Lipshitz, then 15, thought Greenberg had simply tripped, but as he rushed over to his friend, he noticed Greenberg was struggling to breathe. It turns out, his heart collapsed, and neither the school nurse nor the paramedics could revive him.

Since then, Lipshitz, 22, of Woodmere, and his friends have been committed to keeping Greenberg's memory alive. Each year, they hold an annual breakfast in his honor. On Sunday, they hosted the second Jacob Greenberg Memorial All-Star Basketball Game inside the school's new gym, the Hawks' Nest.

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The game pitted former HAFTR Hawks basketball players from 2004-2007 against alumni from 2008-2011 in a friendly matchup that paid tribute to Greenberg and raised about \$1,700 for superstorm Sandy victims.

Although Greenberg's favorite sports were football, hockey and wrestling, Lipshitz chose basketball because HAFTR is known for its basketball teams, and he knew he could draw a bigger crowd if he assembled some top players from the past.

"To have an opportunity to be on the court with these guys is like a dream come true," said Lipshitz, who organized the event along with Aaron Neufeld, and played on the 2008-2011 graduates team, which won the game.

More than 100 people turned out to watch the showdown, including Greenberg's parents, Hope, 46, and Adam, 47, and his siblings, Seth, 19, Joanna, 17, and Eli, 12.

"It's really about the friendship of these kids," said Hope Greenberg, of Merrick. "They just have really kept him [Jacob] in their hearts in everything they do, whether it's a basketball game or praying . . . They miss him and they want to do this for him to keep his memory alive."

Both Lipshitz and Neufeld remember Greenberg for his good heart, his infectious smile and his concern for others.

"He was an amazingly kind person. who was always there to help you out," said Neufeld, 22, of Valley Stream.

Neufeld and Lipshitz said they could not think of a more perfect way to honor Greenberg's legacy than to help others. When they held the memorial basketball game for the first time in 2011, they raised \$1,000 for an ambulance corps in Israel. This year, all the proceeds from ticket and raffle sales will be distributed to families still recovering from Sandy through HAFTR.

Lipshitz plans to make the basketball game an annual event in Greenberg's honor.

"Even though he was only 14, Jacob was a role model to me," he said. "I want to live like Jacob . . . It's impossible to fill shoes like that, but you can never go wrong trying to be that kind of person."