

SOUTH BRUNSWICK - Islamic school wins Globetrotter visit

DATE POSTED: Thursday, June 9, 2011 1:07 AM EDT

By Charles W. Kim, Managing Editor



Staff photo by Charles W. Kim Harlem Globetrotter Kevin "the blenda" Rodriguez talks to the students of the Noor-Ul-Iman School in Monmouth Junction June 2.

Students of the Noor-Ul-Iman Islamic School in Monmouth Junction won a special visit last week by a member of one of the most storied teams in basketball, the Harlem Globetrotters.

Globetrotter Kevin "the blenda" Rodriguez came to the school June 2 to congratulate the students on accumulating some 300,000 points in the Campbell Soup Company's Labels for Education Program.

The 572-student school came in first place in the region out of "hundreds" of schools for registering people in the program and collecting labels from a variety of products, Campbell spokesman Kim McGluth said.

"This school really rallied," Ms. McGluth said outside of the special assembly in the school's multi purpose room.

Ms. McGluth said the program ran from October-March and allows schools to build up points that can be used in a merchandise catalog to purchase supplies for the school such as kick balls, art supplies and even computers.

Since it began, the program has helped distribute some \$113 million in supplies to the various participating schools, Ms. McGluth said.

After presenting the total points to the school in the form of a giant check, Ms. McGluth introduced the star attraction to an excited student body.

Called "the blenda" for his ability to handle the basketball, New York native Kevin Rodriguez, 32, joined the Harlem Globetrotters in 2007, according to his biography on the Globetrotters website.

Standing only 5-feet, 8-inches tall, Mr. Rodriguez said people used to laugh at him when he told them he wanted to be a basketball player.

"I followed my dreams," Mr. Rodriguez, who was considered one of the best ball-handlers in the United States in 2007, said. "I never gave up." During his presentation to the students, Mr. Rodriguez talked about the importance of teamwork and concentration in accomplishing your goals.

Mr. Rodriguez said playing basketball with the Globetrotters had given him the opportunity to travel the world and "change peoples' lives."

He advised the students to always give 110 percent and to stay away from the negative distractions.

"There is a lot of negativity out there, Mr. Rodriguez said. "It's easy to do bad and hard to do good."He also played several ball-handling games with the students including a brief version of the Globetrotters "magic circle" where team members pass the ball around using several different techniques.

Later in the program, Mr. Rodriguez led the students in a demonstration of "C.H.E.E.R." which stands for cooperation, honesty, effort, enthusiasm, respect and responsibility.

The C.H.E.E.R. program has been part of the Globetrotter communities outreach since it started with the U.S. Department of Education in 2003, according to the Globetrotter's website.

Students enthusiastically enjoyed the assembly and cheered their classmates who participated in the games.