

Youth basketball group playing to buy bikes for charity; ‘With the holidays coming up, let’s do some good’



Felix Daniel, left, prepares to take a shot during a Finish Strong basketball game Wednesday. The club will be holding several charity games next week for a bicycle drive. (Joe States/Lake County News-Sun)



By **JOSEPH STATES** | jstates@chicagotribune.com

PUBLISHED: December 12, 2024 at 4:14 PM CST

The basketball game looked a little unusual at the Highwood Recreation Center Wednesday evening. The players were fast and loose with the rules, and concepts like “offense” and “defense” were less critical than running as fast as possible to get the ball.

The players, all kindergarteners, are part of Finish Strong Kids, a local youth sports organization for preschool to middle school-aged youths. They’ll be helping raise money next week with several charity games to give other kids like them free bicycles.

Finish Strong owner and coach Ed Reformado, who hopes to make the bicycle drive an annual tradition, said the idea for a charity event came from the basketball season’s built-in buffer week at the end of the year, in case inclement weather canceled a game.



Coach Jason Chaplain explains some rules during Wednesday's Finish Strong kindergartner basketball game at the Highwood Recreation Center. Finish Strong owner Ed Reformado said he hopes to raise funds for 20 bikes to donate during next week's charity games. (Joe States/Lake County News-Sun)

With the season coming to a close and the group's families more than happy to play for another week, Reformado said he wanted to do something special.

"I was just thinking, well, we have this whole week, the kids still would like to play more basketball and I figured with the holidays coming up, let's do some good," he said.

He was inspired to raise money for bicycles because of his own family, Reformado said, watching the joy his daughters got from riding their bikes.

"I see them light up," he said. "Usually at the end of the day, I'm working on my feet, I'm tired. But no matter what, when they're like, 'Want a bike ride?' everything goes away. You don't even think about how tired you are."

The charity games will be at the Highwood Recreation Center and Holy Cross Lutheran Church on Monday evening. The fundraising goal is about \$5,000, Reformado said, for 20 new bikes from Kiddles Sports, which will donate two bikes for free and provide the rest at a discount. Parents have been encouraged to donate to [the GoFundMe](#), and donations from anyone else in the community are welcome, he said.