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Legends put on a show in Marietta

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MARIETTA - Vintage basketball showmanship came to Southern Poly's gymnasium on Saturday as the Harlem Legends took on the Smyrna All-Stars in a celebrity basketball game.

Proceeds from the game, won by the Legends, 91-74, benefited the Smyrna Stars. The organization prides itself on being an AAU basketball program that "promotes and teaches teamwork, sportsmanship, good conduct, leadership and character values to young men 9-17 years old," according to the team's mission statement.

"The Smyrna Stars has been around for 18 years," president and founder Gary Graham said. "This event gives us the opportunity to fund-raise, so that we can provide these kids with what they need to become leaders and to compete in tournaments across the country. I'm proud to say that 90 percent of the kids that have come through the Stars have gone on to play college basketball."

The Legends' Larry "Shorty" Coleman scored a game-high 19 points. Wayne Arnold had 18 and Teron Trahon, Kenny "Skywalker" Saunders and Michael Douglas each had 12.

B.J. Jennings, a rising junior on the Southern Poly men's basketball team, led the Smyrna All-Stars with 14 points, while former Whitefield Academy standout Tim Morris finished with 11.

Gar Heard, a former NBA player and coach, helmed the All-Stars. He was assisted by Jarrett Jack, a former Georgia Tech player now playing for the Indiana Pacers.

The Legends' Douglas, a former Harlem Globetrotter, founded the group as part of his youth foundation. The team consists of former Globetrotters and former players from a variety of professional leagues. Among the Legends was former Life University player Tyron Gainer, who scored six points in Saturday's game.

"I've been playing with the Legends since 1997," said Gainer, who won an NAIA national title while at Life. "I love being a part of this team. It's a beautiful experience being able to come out here and entertain people and put smiles on their faces."

The Legends did that, and more.

As play went on, Douglas and Coleman constantly entertained the crowd, and many of the Legends players showcased their aerial skills and dribbling tricks. An ode to the Globetrotters' classic shtick, buckets of confetti and water, drew a great ovation from the crowd.

Morris, who recently completed his first season playing professionally in Germany after playing collegiately at Stanford and Washington, had a great time and enjoyed being a part of the festivities.

"I played with the Smyrna Stars when I was 13, and I have a few friends who are involved with the project," said Morris, who helped lead Whitefield to a state title in 2003. "They asked me to come out, so I decided to play. Being a member of the Stars gave me an opportunity to grow. I'm glad I was able to help out. They're doing good things for the kids."

Jack was also happy to be a part of the event.

"It's my second year with this charity event," he said. "I played against the Stars as a youngster, so I was glad to help out. It doesn't take much to take some time out of your day to be involved in causes you care about."

