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Rondo D's up: Fleet point guard to raise funds for city courts

Posted by Matt Rocheleau January 4, 2011 03:53 PM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

The four tiered courts at Roxbury's Malcolm X Park were chosen as the first recipient for money from Red Bull donated for each steal by Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo this season.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

No single steal has meant more to Boston's basketball fans than [Havlicek's](#).

But Rajon Rondo's collective on-the-court thievery this season will literally cement his legacy in the Hub's hoop scene.

The more take-aways the point guard posts during his fifth NBA season, the more money he will help dish out to refurbish city-owned outdoor basketball courts in need of TLC. Through a partnership with Red Bull, Rondo is poised to generate tens of thousands of dollars for court improvement projects.

And, stealing is Rondo's forte. Boston's basketball burglar led the league last

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season in total thefts (189) and steals-per-game (2.33). Though the one-time All-Star's total steal numbers this year have suffered from his recent two-week injury absence, he's averaging 2.23 take-aways per contest – above his career average and good for third-best in the NBA.

“Having this caliber of basketball team here and supporting us is what it's all about,” said Mary Hines, spokeswoman for the city's parks department and long-time C's fan. “It sends a message to people that they care enough about these parks and the people who play in them to help out like this.”

For every steal No. 9 makes, the energy-drink-making company donates \$500 to the operating budget of Boston's [Parks and Recreation Department](#). After each set of 30 steals Rondo makes, whichever court in Boston has the most votes in [online polling](#) is then budgeted to receive the \$15,000 amassed during that 30-steal interval.

The money from the “Boston's Got Wings” campaign will go toward “pretty much anything and everything you can think of,” said Hines, including new paint, backboards, nets, fencing and court surface repairs. Projects will not begin until the weather warms in spring, at the earliest, she said.

Before opening the rest of the initiative to online voting, the Malcolm X Park in Roxbury was chosen as the first recipient of a \$15,000 bonus. The historically iconic playground and its four courts at the intersection of Washington Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard were named in Chris Ballard's 1998 book “[Hoop Nation](#)” as one of the best 30 courts in the country for pickup games.

Hines said the court, though empty Tuesday aside from snowy remnants left by recent blizzard, is one of Boston's most-heavily used. It's popularity, location in the “heart of the city” and need for repairs made it an ideal place to kick-off the refurbishing venture.

“If you're going to start anywhere, why not start there,” she said, adding that such parks offer city youth a positive place to spend free time.

Five other parks are in contention for online voting during this round, which will end after Rondo's 60th steal of the season. The four parks that don't land the most votes will move on to subsequent rounds for as long as the 24-year-old keeps nabbing the rock from opponents.

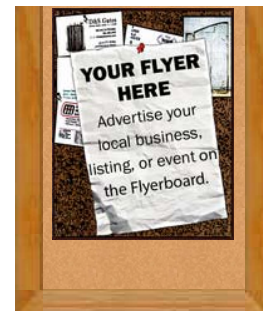
“The City of Boston is thrilled that Rondo is on pace to generate more funds than originally expected, because it means more support for Boston parks,” said Mayor Thomas M. Menino in a Red Bull press release. “Everyone in our community should rally around Rondo and celebrate his performance.”

In order of highest-to-lowest vote recipients thus far, parks being in the running include the two-court Smith Playground in Allston, the three-court Ramsay Park along the South End's border with Roxbury, Fallon Field's two courts in Roslindale, the five courts at Harambee Park along Dorchester's border with Roxbury and Mattapan, and the two Jim Bradley courts in Back Bay Fens. Participating parks were chosen based on popularity and need by city and Red Bull officials just before the season began, Hines said.

If Rondo continues the pace he set through his first 22 games this season, he'll end the regular season with 158 total steals, which means \$79,000 toward city basketball court refurbishing – enough to provide five full \$15,000 checks to specific courts.

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"It's great that my play on the court is directly tied to helping Boston parks," said Rondo in the release. "Hopefully, I will continue to rack up plenty of steals for my team and for Boston."







But, the finally tally could weigh on the health of Rondo's left ankle. A sprain sidelined the six-foot, one-inch guard for seven games before [returning Sunday](#). He had one steal in Boston's win over Toronto and another Monday night as the Celtics "stole" a victory away from Minnesota with a late offensive push led by none other than Rondo.

With a reputation of being more likely to pass to teammates than take a shot himself, Rondo is equally as unselfish off the parquet, Hines said.

"He's not one to look for attention at all," she said. "If anything, it's the opposite with him."

To track Rondo's progress and to vote for the next city park to receive funding, visit www.redbullusa.com/Rondo.

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