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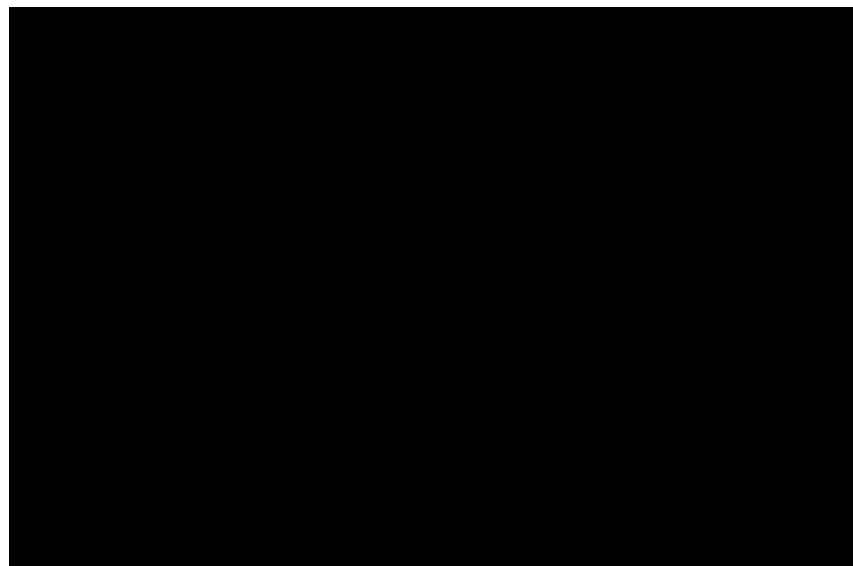
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## Rajon Rondo raises \$76K for upgrades at Boston basketball courts

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 3, 2011 08:26 AM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

From the center of a basketball court at Malcolm X Park, Rajon Rondo told a group of Boston youth he wouldn't be the player he is now if it weren't for the time he spent playing on courts just like this where he grew up in Louisville, Kentucky.

"That's where I got my toughness from," he said, while answering a young girl's question about what is his favorite aspect of having played regularly outdoors during his childhood and teen years.

And, knowing the number of steals he made for the Celtics this past season could help improve the quality of outdoor courts across Boston, the star point guard said he had added incentive to pick-pocket his NBA opponents.

Through a [partnership](#) with energy drink company [Red Bull](#), Rondo Rondo's regular season thefts were worth \$500 a piece and helped raise \$76,500 for upgrades -- from repairing cracks and color seal coating, to replacing of hoops and backboards -- at 13 city-owned courts. Five of the courts, including those

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at the historically iconic Malcolm X Park, were selected through [online voting](#) to each receive \$15,000 toward major renovations.

“It means a lot that I can give back to this city,” he said, calling it his “second home.” “The city of Boston itself has always embraced me. I’ve been here for five years and I feel very welcomed.”

“It was important for me to give back. I love working with kids,” he added. “It’s very humbling for me to be a part of this.”

One season after posting career highs and leading the league in both total steals and steals-per-game, No. 9 ended this past year with the fourth-highest steals total in the NBA, despite playing in at least a dozen fewer games – largely due to a midseason ankle injury -- than anyone who beat him in that category. The 25-year-old’s 2.25 steals per game ratio was second-best in the league this past season.

Those stats are likely insignificant to many Bostonians, especially given the C’s recent early playoff exit amid a championship-blurred decade in Boston. But, Rondo’s 153 steals were far from unnoticed at the Malcolm X courts Tuesday.

There, Rondo, Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Red Bull officials from the

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“Boston’s Got Wings” program handed out 153 Nike basketballs to 153 children who attended the ceremonies.

“I tried to get as many steals as possible for [Red Bull] to come out and give back,” said Rondo, noting that during his youth, access to playgrounds was “key.”

“I wouldn’t have become the player I was today if I didn’t have street ball, playgrounds,” he said. “I was out here every day practicing. This is one of those sports you can [practice] by yourself.”

Boston Parks and Recreation spokeswoman Mary Hines, a longtime Celtics fan, said, “This is more than just someone giving back.”

“Rondo is demonstrating to the youth of this community that his commitment is more than just throwing a few dollars at something,” she said. “He cares about them.”

Eleven-year-old Zion Hunter, of Roxbury, said he liked the improvements to the four courts at Malcolm X Park, which are among the most popular in Boston and were named in Chris Ballard’s 1998 book “Hoop Nation” as one of the best 30 courts in the country for pickup games.

“This is nice,” he said, standing over his bicycle, freshly signed by Celtics forward [Glen Davis, who made a guest appearance](#) at Tuesday’s ceremonies. “When I first saw it I was like ‘wow.’”

Zion had stopped by the park with his friends Marlon Regis, 11, Javonne Scarlett, 13 and Jamiyl Gross, 11, who had each proudly collected Davis’ signature before Rondo arrived later.

Dolores Williams-Regis was looking after the crew of boys and carrying her one-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter Destiny.

“I love it,” she said of the freshly made-over courts “They needed that. It’s something for the youth to do, to keep them occupied and out of trouble.”

Other courts selected for major refurbishing thanks to the Rondo’s basketball thievery are: the two Jim Bradley courts Back Bay Fens; Smith Playground’s two courts in Allston’ Ramsay Park’s three courts along the South End’s border with Roxbury; and the two courts at Rogers Park in Brighton.

“Being on the court is a great place,” said Mayor Menino at Tuesday’s event. “I used to play basketball. I grew up playing basketball,” he said, cautioning the youth in attendance not to take foul calls or the game in general too seriously. “It’s a game. Make sure you have fun at it and learn from it. The friends you make today in this basketball game are your friends for life.”

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at [mjrochele@gmail.com](mailto:mjrochele@gmail.com).

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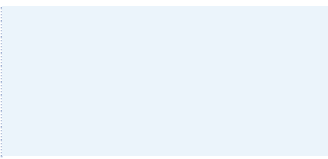
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