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Poetry Hits a “Slam” Dunk with Kids and Marbury

by Alyson Furch

NEW YORK, February 1, 2006 -- The inspiration and emotion was contagious as the 12 finalists of the third annual “Knicks Poetry Slam Series, presented by Canon Business Solutions featuring Stephon Marbury” competed for one of the five spots on the 2006 Knicks Poetry Slam Team. Over 600 students gathered in the Theater Lobby at Madison Square Garden on Wednesday, February 1 to share in what proved to be quite an inspiring afternoon. However, the poets weren’t the only ones drawn to the competition. Knicks star point guard [Stephon Marbury](#) and Ja Rule were on hand to honor the poets and be entertained by their artistry. Former Knick great Jerome “Junk Yard Dog” Williams was also in attendance serving as a guest judge.

The Knicks Poetry Slam program is designed to promote and encourage creativity and inspire kids to be more excited about the importance of education. Since its inception three years ago, the program has used the combination of rap, hip-hop and poetry to teach skills students can use in the classroom. Throughout the year, the Knicks, along with Urban Word NYC, helped host a series of eight workshops at various sites in the five New York boroughs. Each workshop was led by an Urban Word NYC adult poet and youth poet who helped students learn how to write and perform their poetry. A Poetry Slam kick-off assembly was held at Washington Irving High School at the beginning of the year and the semi-finals were held at The Nuyorican Café on the Lower East Side.

Knicks Vice President of Community Relations and Fan Development, Karin Buchholz, addressed the audience before the competition to explain why programs such as these are necessary for today’s youth. “I am so proud to be a part of this program again this year,” she said. “I hope all of you can take something away from each performance and understand the confidence and character these finalists are displaying.”

The universal message shared by the finalists was spreading and promoting positivity through artistic and poetic expression. Each poet shared the sentiment that by having their voices heard, they would hope to promote appreciation for the arts, societal awareness and acceptance.

“The purpose of my poem is to inspire all listening and to change the way we all approach life”, Roxy Azari said after performing before the lively crowd.

When asked how to prepare for a competition like this, one of the finalists, Marcus Wright, said he listens to three songs; anything by Jay-Z because it gets his blood flowing, “Heard ‘Em Say” by Kanye West for it’s poetic content, and “Motivation” by the rapper T.I. His reasoning was, “Why not use one form of art to help foster another?”

These poets are a shining example of how stereotypes can be crushed and personal expression can be used as a tool for healing and growth. One young poet spoke about the trials of being abused as a young girl and how the Poetry Slam helped her express feelings and emotions she had always kept bottled up. Through her words she hoped to encourage other young people to find happiness through the arts. She wasn’t the only finalist who used this series as an avenue for healing. A young boy, one of the five winners of the competition, told the story of how he used his poetry to connect with his mother. No matter how these kids used their artistic gift, they all took pride in making a choice to turn their negative experiences into positive ones.

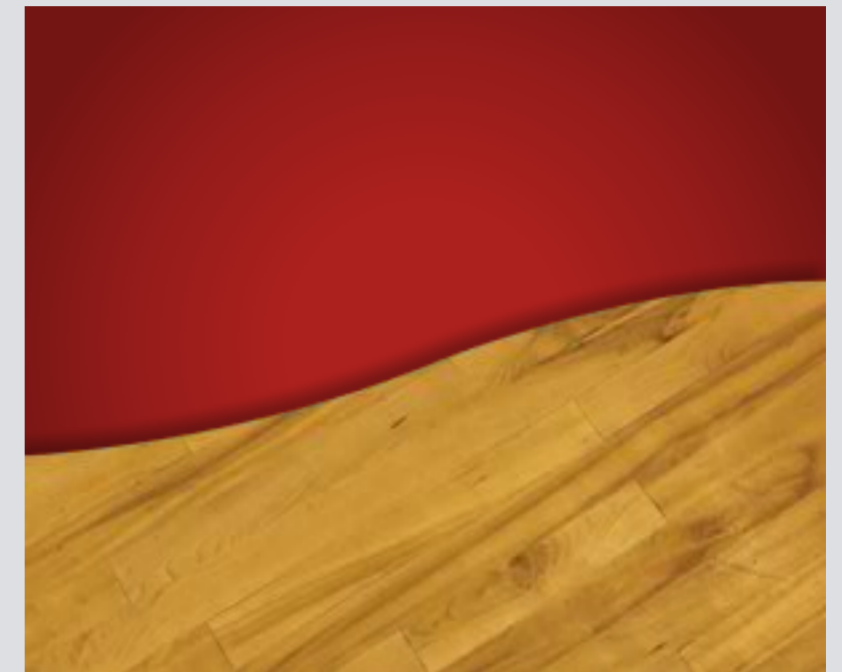
Stephon Marbury and other judges at the Poetry Slam
MSG Photos

Before every “Slam,” host Mike Ellis reminds the audience that the number one rule of “The Slam” is to “respect the mic” and you can’t help but respect the level of talent and courage these poets exhibited.

It was impossible to leave the theatre without feeling touched in some way. Whether it was from the heart felt words of high school students or the pure entertainment of their performances. Not only did both the program sponsor Canon Business Solutions and Stephon Marbury agree to continue their involvement in the Poetry Slam, but guest judge Jerome “Junk Yard Dog” Williams announced he would contribute \$1000 grants to each of the seven finalists who were not named one of the five member of the 2006 Knicks Poetry Slam Team.

Jerome said, “I was moved and wanted to do something for the kids, to me they are all winners.” He couldn’t be more right.

For more information on Urban Word NYC and the services they provide, please visit their web site at www.urbanwordnyc.org.

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