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Annual Neighborhood Athletic Competition to Mark 30th Anniversary

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Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer, Eli Pottash and Eitan Hariri (left to right) are shown at the Tour de Court in 2017. (File photo by Jeff Seidel)

Four years ago, 3x3 basketball made its Olympics debut at the Tokyo games. But an annual tournament in this sport has been a Pikesville tradition for decades.

Sunday, Sept. 1, will mark the 30th anniversary of the Tour de Court. What started as a casual day of neighborhood youth basketball has morphed into a major community fundraiser.

It all began in 1995, when Jon Minkove and some of his close friends spearheaded a 2x2 basketball competition among neighbors and peers at Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School.

After playing at one location, they rode their bikes to the next designated spot and continue competing until the presentation of the "Golden Helmet," a set of gold-painted bicycle helmets bearing the names of the winners.

TDC continued every year with Jon's brother, Sam, first playing in 2001. At its 10th anniversary, the tournament expanded to 3x3 basketball.

After the Minkoves' sister, Rachel, was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma at age 24, TDC became an event with a specific purpose.

"Rachel was an extremely strong advocate for young adults with cancer improving their quality of life and long-term prognosis," says Sam, 38, who lives in Baltimore and works at St. Joseph Medical Center as a pulmonologist/intensivist.

So TDC began raising money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society in 2011. After a brave battle that included chemotherapy, radiation and a transplant with Sam's bone marrow, Rachel passed away in July of 2012.

Since then, TDC has carried on as a tribute to her.

"The mission of our tournament and fundraising is to continue her legacy," Sam says. "It is a day we all look forward to all year, and in many ways is a celebration of Rachel's life. She loved getting friends together and was very social, even when she was sick."

Says Jon, 44, who lives in New Jersey and works as an attorney and partner in the Baltimore office of Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLC: "Tour de Court has become a staple of our community every summer since we were children, and it means the world to me and our family to be able to carry on my sister's memory in such a meaningful way."

To date, TDC has raised nearly \$400,000 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. "We are so grateful for Tour De Court's incredible dedication all these years," says Ria Freyberg, executive director of LLS's Mid-Atlantic region. "They have supported critical research to help advance treatment and cures for lymphoma. And with their help, we've been able to provide scholarships to 30 pediatric blood cancer survivors in Maryland."

TDC also has raised approximately \$50,000 for two more local charities.

"It's important for us to give back to the Jewish Caring Network, which has touched so many lives in the Pikesville community and was particularly meaningful to Rachel and our family during her illness," Jon says.

Says Stacey Goldenberg, JCN's director of operations: "Tour De Court makes a sad time a little brighter. We are so very grateful to the entire Minkove family and the incredible group of volunteers who make the event both meaningful and successful. Their efforts change so many lives and we feel so honored to be included as a recipient of funds raised at this incredible event."

Consistent with its mission of raising awareness and funds for young adults battling serious illness, TDC supports the Ulman Foundation and even plans to open a "Tour de Courtyard" basketball court at their downtown facility this fall.

"The partnership between Tour de Court and Ulman Foundation has been nothing short of transformative," says Kimberly Lennon Weiner, Ulman's chief impact officer. "By coming together, we are not only raising vital funds but also bringing hope and support to young adults and their families impacted by cancer in our Maryland community."

In 2019, TDC became an official nonprofit managed by Jon and Sam, who are coordinating logistics for this year's tournament and actively fundraising to meet the 30th anniversary goal of \$60,000. They have sponsor commitments from Beth Tfiloh, Clear Title Group, Key Investment Group, Lewis Brisbois, OrthoMaryland and True Sports Physical Therapy, and hope to receive more donations and sponsorships.

Registration is still underway, with more than 50 participants already signed up — males and females, ages 12 to 51, from Maryland, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, as well as Israel.

Special guests will include the Oriole Bird, Mayor Brandon Scott (who played last year), and local sports reporters Peter Schmuck and Jerry Coleman.

Still in Pikesville, this year's event will start from a new location: the Shopo Road cul-de-sac. The day kicks off at 8 a.m. when participants sign in and gather on bikes. After an opening ceremony, participants will ride off at 9:15 to basketball courts within a two-mile bike radius for a series of games.

At 1:30 p.m., everyone will meet at the Barton Oaks Road cul-de-sac for a backyard barbecue, the Final 4 and Championship games. The tournament concludes with the "Golden Helmet" presentation at 3 p.m. Spectators are welcome to attend the opening ceremony and championship game.

"It's wild to think that we have all come together annually for three decades to do this," Jon says. "When you think about the cast of characters involved in this group, it becomes easier to understand. Had Rachel not gotten sick, we conceivably would still be doing this purely for our own deranged entertainment.

"But now, there's an extra sweetness in the opportunity we all have to 'elevate the *shtick*' into meaningful philanthropy," he says. "It has been special to see the kind of support we have received from our extended community. Our kids may have never physically met their aunt, but they know they are going to her party every summer."

To register for the Tour de Court, donate or learn about volunteer or sponsorship opportunities, visit tourdecourt.org or follow on [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#).

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