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SOMA Hoops Teams Up With Seton Hall to Build Community Through Basketball

Written By [SOMA Hoops](#) December 23, 2024



From [SOMA Hoops](#):

It's hard to believe that in a town where the popularity of youth sports has grown exponentially—and with Seton Hall just up the road—until last winter, there was no official youth basketball league in the towns of South Orange or Maplewood. While each town offered clinics for elementary school kids, there were no games, no jerseys, and no referees. Enter: [SOMA Hoops](#).

Spearheaded by South Orange Rec and a leadership team of motivated local parents, SOMA Hoops launched in Winter 2023 as South Orange/Maplewood's flagship community-based recreational youth basketball league. Word traveled fast, and the first season saw 340 participants from grades 2-8 with a waitlist of over 100. The league quickly realized it had tapped into something big, and planned for expansion.



SOMA Hoops players meet the Seton Hall Pirate mascot at the sold-out December 9 Spirit Night

Now in its second year, SOMA Hoops boasts nearly 700 players from first through tenth grade. The leadership committee, led by Taylor Valentine—a Maplewood dad of a fifth grader and kindergartner—has grown to 18 members, supported by over 225 parent volunteers. Teams are parent-coached and officiated by high school student referees, and a number of local businesses have signed on as sponsors, helping to realize the mission of “building a better community through basketball.”

With SOMA Hoops touching nearly every part of the local community, it was only a matter of time before the connection was made with Seton Hall University’s basketball program. That introduction was made by a Village employee back in October, and Seton Hall Women’s Basketball Coach Anthony Bozzella loved how many girls were involved with the program, specifically how many were trying organized basketball for the first time. He immediately offered up the idea of his players leading a free clinic for any girls participating in SOMA Hoops.



Coach Anthony Bozella and Seton Hall Women's Basketball welcomed 120 girls from SOMA Hoops for a special clinic in Walsh Gymnasium on December 15

Simultaneously, the SOMA Hoops Events Committee was planning a "Spirit Night" at Seton Hall for the December 9 game against Sacred Heart. The SOMA Hoops community sold out the group sales department's 350-plus tickets, with over 150 SOMA Hoopsters lining the pregame and halftime sideline for high-fives with the Seton Hall players as they took the court, winning 67-46.

Not a week later, on December 15, the Seton Hall women's team and Director of Basketball Operations, Shakena Richardson, led a free hourlong clinic for 120 SOMA Hoops female participants. Players worked on dribbling, passing, and shooting while receiving encouragement from the college players. The day ended with pizza, photos, and autographs.



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“We are so lucky to have access to top-tier Division I Women’s Basketball right in our town,” said Matt Gray, Director of Recreation and Cultural Affairs for South Orange Village. “For our participants to cheer the Seton Hall team on to victory from the stands, and then six days later find themselves on that same court working alongside the college players was truly special. We sincerely appreciate Coach Bozzella and Director of Basketball Operations Shakena Richardson for being such gracious partners and providing an unforgettable experience for our girls.”

Following this whirlwind two-week collaboration, SOMA Hoops leadership hopes to continue this valuable partnership with Seton Hall in the seasons to come. Said Gray, “As SOMA Hoops continues to grow, we look forward to engaging more of our community through basketball, both on and off the court.”

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