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SPORTS

Harris documentary sets the record straight on TOC[Full Story >>](#)**Teaching life lessons through tennis**

By Felicia Purcell-McDaniel,
Globe Sports Editor

A beautiful, sunny day was the perfect backdrop Saturday when Just Cause Tennis Inc. held its tennis clinic fundraiser at McClymonds High School in West Oakland.

About 50 children attended the annual event that has grown since its inception in 2004.

Robert Hadden, program director and dropout prevention specialist for Just Cause, and his wife, Patricia, said they feel it is their mission to enhance life through athletic participation.



From left: Don Johnson, Robert Hadden and Larry Atkins

"This is where we want to be," said Patricia Hadden who along with her husband runs weekly tennis clinics at Ira Jinkins Recreation Center the McClymonds tennis courts in Oakland.

At a time when most African American athletes are dominating basketball and football, parent Elisa Cecai-Gilliam says she wants her children to be versatile in all sports.

"I don't want to limit them," said Cecai-Gilliam, who along with her husband, LaRon, watched their three sons Kanoa, 7, Kaleho, 9, and Kalani, 12, participate in tennis drills with former tennis pros. "We want their God-given talents fostered."

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Two clinic attendees participate in drills.

The free event had a carnival-like atmosphere and included appearances by noted tennis personalities Larry Atkins and International Hall of Fame tennis coach Don Johnson and turf dancing by area youth.

"I want these kids to learn about character, I want them to know that their word is their bond," said Robert Hadden, whose organization was named after his late son, Justin, who died in a fire in 1995.

Robert Hadden was the first black all-city tennis player in the Oakland Athletic League at Castlemont High School, and his talents were recognized early on by a man named Richard Gohlke — a former sportswriter who worked at an Oakland community center that Hadden attended as a youth.

Because someone gave so passionately to him, Hadden says he decided to use his gift of empathy and nurturing to give back to youth in Oakland.

"It was fun helping kids who haven't played," said 13-year-old Laurence Atkins. He and his brother, Joshua, 10, under the coaching of their father, Larry Atkins, have become two of the most notable up-and-coming tennis players in Northern California.

"It was fun to meet the Hall of Famer, Mr. Johnson," said Joshua, whose favorite player is Rafael Nadal. "He told me that no one has mastered the serve."

It is the goal of Just Cause to expose youth to an athletic pursuit other than the more popular sports that people of color dominate.

"I want kids to learn about life," said Robert Hadden. "It's important how we teach others."

The tennis organization not only teaches tennis to inner-city youth and seniors, it is a program that also offers mentoring and teaches life lessons and proper nutrition. It established the first OAL boys' tennis team at McClymonds, which in 2008 finished third in its division. Organizers are currently recruiting for the girls' team for the 2009 tennis season at McClymonds.

"We want children to know that tennis has something to offer, too," said Patricia Hadden.

For more information, visit www.justcausetennis.org.

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