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## Saint Mary's Basketball Star Dedicates Time to Children

By Mikaela Cowles



Omar Samhan (50) Photo: Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's men's basketball center Omar Samhan devotes time off the court to visiting schools throughout Northern California.

Sometimes he goes it alone, other times with his team. He is passionate about encouraging children to succeed in the classroom and fulfill their goals of going to college.

Samhan admits that he struggled academically as a child. Diagnosed with a learning disability early on, he was enrolled in the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) at his school. "I was never just good at school," Samhan said, "I was the last kid to be able to say my ABC's. It was always a lot of work just to get by. My main struggle was reading comprehension and still is."

Knowing first hand the struggle children face in the classroom, Samhan's words of encouragement are extremely important. Sam Strube, Assistant Principal at Williams Middle School in Tracy, said, "As educators, we can tell kids what they need to do in life to succeed, but it means a lot more to them when it comes from a young adult who has similar life experiences."

Samhan faced the discouragement of not only struggling academically, but also continually hearing he would never go to college. He said teachers would tell him he wasn't "college material." Thanks to the strong and supportive role model he found in his mother, Samhan continued to work hard. "My mom has always been a big believer that you can do anything. It's just going to take a lot of work," Samhan said.

Taking his mother's lesson to heart, Samhan has worked to succeed academically as well as on the court. He recognizes the struggle it took to make it, and understands the importance of providing a positive role model for children.

Samhan has set a goal of visiting 25 schools throughout the year. He is dedicated to providing a positive example of hard work and achievement, in the classroom as well as on the court. Samhan said, "I want to make a difference," and he has been putting in the effort to accomplish his goal.

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