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Bobcats, Jordan Host 2011 Fantasy Camps

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A gym full of kids sat in silent awe of NBA legend and Bobcats Chairman Michael Jordan as he spoke at the Bobcats Fantasy Camp on July 18, 2011 at Time Warner Cable Arena. Following the conclusion of his speech, Jordan opened the floor for questions from campers. Those who weren't frozen with eyes wide open asked the six-time NBA champion a variety of questions, one of which was if Jordan could still dunk.

He tilted his head forward and raised his eyebrows with a knowing smile that answered the question without a word.

And for those that still remained skeptical, Jordan would later respond with an action that spoke even louder.

As the adults' camp began less than an hour later with participants warming up, Air Jordan (at 48 years young, I might add) took a few strides and then rose for an easy right-handed flush. The campers, who formed a considerable crowd to watch Jordan take flight, expressed oohs and aahs at the dunk. And Jordan grinned.

"Did that surprise you all?"

Of course that was just one of the many memorable moments in an eventful basketball Fantasy Camp for Premium Season Ticket Holders.

The camp was split into two times with kids taking the early afternoon session and the adults holding down the court in the late afternoon.

The kids' camp consisted of stations focusing on different basketball fundamentals – layups, dribbling, defensive stance, defending passing lanes, shooting, passing – as well as a tour of the Bobcats locker room, weight room, and other rarely-seen parts of the team's quarters. Campers were coached through each drill by experienced coaches from around the Charlotte community, including high school coaches and

the Bobcats coaching staff of Paul and Stephen Silas, Ralph Lewis and Rob Werdann. With a knowledgeable staff to instruct the children along with playing basketball on the main and practice court, the camp created a thorough experience similar to being an NBA player.

"We were just trying to give the kids a taste of what it feels like to play in the NBA, but at the same time, understand what our jobs are – what we try to do from a basketball standpoint," Jordan said. "When the kids now start to watch, they can kind of understand things we go through as a basketball team and what players work on to improve on their weaknesses."

Bobcats President Fred Whitfield agreed, saying, "It's once in a lifetime having it run by MJ, having it on an NBA official court, to have an NBA team's coaching staff work them through their drills and just to be up close and personal with those types of people and the environment. Most kids never get a chance to do that."

To finish the camp, the kids eagerly listened to Jordan speak to them about the fundamentals and the struggle involved with working to be great, whether in basketball or any other pursuit.

The adults' session was quite different. Considering most or nearly all participants were well-versed in the fundamentals, they focused on competing. The first half of their camp involved stations of timed skills challenges in which the camper would scramble to finish a layup, rebound, complete a bounce pass, dribble through a set of zigzagged cones, complete a chest pass and finish another layup. There was also a shooting stars competition and a 3-point contest.

Jordan stuck around to help instruct and joke around with the campers as they exerted their physical abilities to the fullest in front of His Airness. He coached each participant through drills, giving encouraging words and poking fun, creating a friendly comfortable environment for everyone, even if that meant creating some playful pressure to make shots. He also rewarded campers with free shoes if they beat certain times in the challenge or sank free throws.

When everyone had gone through the skills contests and other drills, they sat on the court to listen to Jordan speak and awards were given out to the winners of the 3-point contest and the skills challenge.

And then as if a personal experience learning basketball from whom many consider the greatest to ever play the game wasn't enough, the camp then started a tournament pitting teams of campers against each other while Jordan refereed.

Though the focus of these incredible moments was about basketball and providing an amazing basketball experience for everyone involved, Jordan made certain to note that the event was so much more than just basketball.

"I have always said that we're going to reconnect back to the community. And this is just one step towards that. I think it's also a 'thank you' to the season ticket holders for their support. Obviously we're going through a difficult time right now, but I want them to understand our commitment to them," Jordan affirmed. "We're part of the community and we want to hold their hands as much as they hold our hands."

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