

Men in Black showdown a slam dunk success

Father T. Austin Murphy paced courtside in Archbishop Spalding High School's gymnasium Nov. 5.

The archdiocese's director of vocations felt a momentum shift. On the court, his brother priests and seminarians had teamed up to play Anne Arundel County youths in the fifth annual Men in Black basketball game.

The youths jumped out to a sizable first-half lead. During the third quarter, Father Murphy pumped his fists, chanting, "Men in Black!" Soon, the hundreds of people in attendance joined him in a loud chorus to support those who have followed the religious calling.

The Men in Black, led by Father Brian P. Nolan and Father Jesse L. Bolger, staged an inspired comeback, taking a lead with under two minutes remaining in the game. The crowd roared its approval.

The youths, though, got clutch baskets from Colin Rainey and Stephan May, both of St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park to seal a 44-41 victory with seconds remaining.

"They always bring it," Rainey said of the Men in Black's intensity.

May said, "They're ordinary people, and it's nice to share a game we all love."

The youths have now won all five Men in Black games, which have been sponsored by the Anne Arundel County Vocations Committee Ministry and the archdiocesan vocation's office.

Organizers Marlene Lauer and Christine Butrim beamed with pride at the night's end.

"There was a lot of energy and a great deal of fun," Butrim said. "There were a lot of families and I love seeing that."

The youth team was told early on to bring their “A” game. Coach Rob Miller warned of the Men in Black in a pregame speech: “They’re not here to say Mass.”

“It’s exciting for them to see priests are normal and fun and they’re competitive,” Lauer added. “They’re out there to win, even though they’ve lost every time.”

Butrim, a parishioner of St. John, promotes vocations because the call is “a path to happiness.”

She was pleased to see the free game had a near-capacity crowd. Attendees donated money for seminarians while dining on snacks.

Lauer, a parishioner of Glen Burnie’s Holy Trinity parish, wore a “Be a priest” T-shirt and helped coordinate a tailgate party.

She said young Holy Trinity parishioners pray for vocations and the parish organizes informational rectory visits.

“Some are just unaware that priests are normal people with special gifts given by the Lord and the Spirit,” Lauer said. “Being a priest is a great life and that’s what we want youths to know – that if they’re called, to not run away from that call, but to embrace it.”

Father Murphy said the Men in Black game breaks down preconceived notions.

“You realize none of these people were hatched out of an egg,” he said. “They actually grew up in families and do the same things everyone else does. It can help a young person who is discerning say ‘Well, I might be on the right track and be exactly where God wants me to be. I don’t have to give up the things that make me unique, make me who I am.’ ”

Eamonn Clark, a freshman at Mount St. Mary’s University and a college candidate for the seminary, played with his potential future brothers.

“It was just so fun to come out with all the guys and try and spur on a little fervor for vocations,” he said.