

Athletes sign autographs for those who want to follow in their footsteps

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February 18, 2007

Thousands of area youth and parents made their way to downtown Abilene Saturday for the 2007 Dodge West Texas Youth Sports Expo at the Abilene Civic Center.

Kids were able to participate in various contests and games, and their parents were able to pick up information on multiple sports and activities in and around the Abilene area. The event, sponsored by the Abilene Youth Sports Authority, featured information booths on numerous organizations and activities such as softball, hockey, Little League and disc golf. Kids were also able to give many of the different activities a shot, as Spencer McCarty discovered.

McCarty, who stressed he is not 4, but "four and three quarters," struck out at the batting cage, but found his niche at disc golf. After missing the target on his first two attempts, McCarty nailed his last two shots, a wide smile quickly shooting across his face.

"It's a nice afternoon activity to burn some of his energy off," his mother, Cam McCarty, said, "and he likes to try new things."

The McCartys also took in the expo last year, and expect to make it again next year.

"I think the more we expose the little ones to positive activities, the better off we are," she said. "It's good to get them involved."

Athletes from Abilene universities were on hand to sign autographs, as were two former Abilene High stars, Taylor Potts and Lyle Leong Jr. Both are now playing football at Texas Tech University, where Leong also runs track.

"It's always fun, but it's kind of hard to understand sometimes, too," Potts said. "You look down and wonder, 'Why do they want my autograph?' But I remember when I was a kid and was the same way, so I enjoy it."

Justin Snow, a former Cooper High School standout and member of the world champion Indianapolis Colts, took over the autograph table around 1 p.m., and quickly outdrew even the air castle and inflatable boxing ring - complete with oversized gloves. Snow spent much of the afternoon talking with fans and signing autographs for kids and parents alike, and loved every minute.

"I feel like youth sports are a great thing for this community and the Big Country," Snow said. "I didn't have anything like that growing up. I guess as a kid you miss out on a lot of things like that, being from a small town.

"But the ability to compete and be with kids from other schools brings kids together, and that's a great thing."

Before the autograph session began, Abilene mayor Norm Archibald read a proclamation to the crowd declaring Feb. 17 as not only Sports Fitness Day, but Justin Snow Day in the city as well. Snow said hearing that made his return home even more special.

"I'm really just so honored. It's something I never thought in my wildest dreams would ever happen," he said. "To be able to come back to the city that has given me so much is great and every opportunity I have to come back I'm going to take full advantage of.

"It's nice to let Abilene kind of enjoy this with me."