A GRIDIRON ALTERCATION LANDS TWO FOOTBALL TEAMS IN…A SHARING CIRCLE?

Players from Eastside and Dwight Morrow talk it out at EHS Peace Center

***Photo attached: Student-athletes, coaches and administrators from Eastside and Dwight Morrow high schools at the end of their meeting at EHS’s Peace Center***

PATERSON – When a fight broke out during the October 18th football game between Eastside High School and Dwight Morrow High School, the players involved knew that there would be consequences. But they didn’t expect to end up where they did — embracing each other as brothers instead of rivals, friends instead of enemies — on Thursday, less than a week later at Eastside High School’s new Peace Center.

The Peace Center had opened just a few days earlier as part of the district’s restorative justice initiatives. Restorative justice is a practice that encourages students to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups. Typically, it is applied to students in the same school who are in conflict over personal matters.

But this was the first time the district hosted a sharing circle for players of two opposing athletic teams. Four players from each side, accompanied by their coaches and administrators, sat down to repair whatever damage that had been done during a fight on the field. Dwight Morrow’s team, coaches and administrators had graciously accepted the invitation of their Eastside counterparts to come to the Peace Center to talk out their differences.

The group agreed that only one person was allowed to speak at a time. The talk was candid and meant solely for the people sitting in the circle. There were apologies and admissions of fault. There was talk about how things could be different in the future. At the end, there were bro-hugs, group photos taken, and lunch.

“Sportsmanship begins with recognizing your opponents’ humanity and building empathy, all which is a major part of restorative justice” said Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer. “To use restorative justice techniques to the aftermath of something that has gone wrong in the athletic arena is innovative, but it also involves some risk on the part of the participants. I want to thank and commend everyone at both schools who was willing to take the risk, try something new, and enable all of our student-athletes to work toward attaining the highest level of sportsmanship.”

“We want our student-athletes to be competitive, we understand that emotions can run high in the heat of competition,” said Eastside’s Principal of Operations Gerald Glisson. “But we never want our student-athletes to forget that your opponent is just like you — hungry and determined. Most of all, opponents are to be respected because the player who is your opponent today could be your teammate tomorrow, whether it is in a different league or in college.”
“Having the opportunity for both programs to come together to have open dialogue about what transpired during our football game on October 18th was beneficial and rewarding for the student-athletes, coaches, and school administrators,” said Dwight Morrow High School’s Director of Athletics Richard Suchanski. “All involved demonstrated great maturity by taking responsibility and being accountable for the role each of us played in the incident. The student-athletes exhibited strength of character as they came to an understanding that both programs are capable of displaying better sportsmanship. Before leaving the Peace Center at Eastside High School, student-athletes from both programs, embraced each other and wished each other good luck on the rest of the season which resulted in a sense of accomplishment and closure. We appreciate the fact that both programs took the time to address the matter as it allowed us to learn from the experience and enhance our leadership skills and abilities.”

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