Gym rocks to the rhythm of young lives being changed

THE TIMES Christmas Appeal

These teenagers are not at ease with authority, but thanks to their coach they know about respect and discipline, **Greg Hurst** reports

Boom. Boom. Boom. Pounding noise echoes around the high walls of the gymnasium, drowning out speech. Its incessant rhythm serves to focus the minds of the teenagers within it.

Around they circle, concentrating utterly on the source of the crashing sound: a basketball in each of their hands. Dribbling with a basketball each, they warm up before splitting into groups to work on elements of their game — shooting, defence, passing.

They joke and jostle with one another as they break away for individual duels beneath the hoops, but when one of their coaches calls out a command they comply instantly.

Usually, these young teenage boys are not comfortable with adult authority. Yet their coaches, employed by the charity Greenhouse and posted full-time in schools, have managed to overcome their urban belligerence and inspire total respect.

Training sessions such as these, taking place after school in a deprived part of southeast London, often last until the evening. They start again the next morning before school, from 7.30am until classes begin.

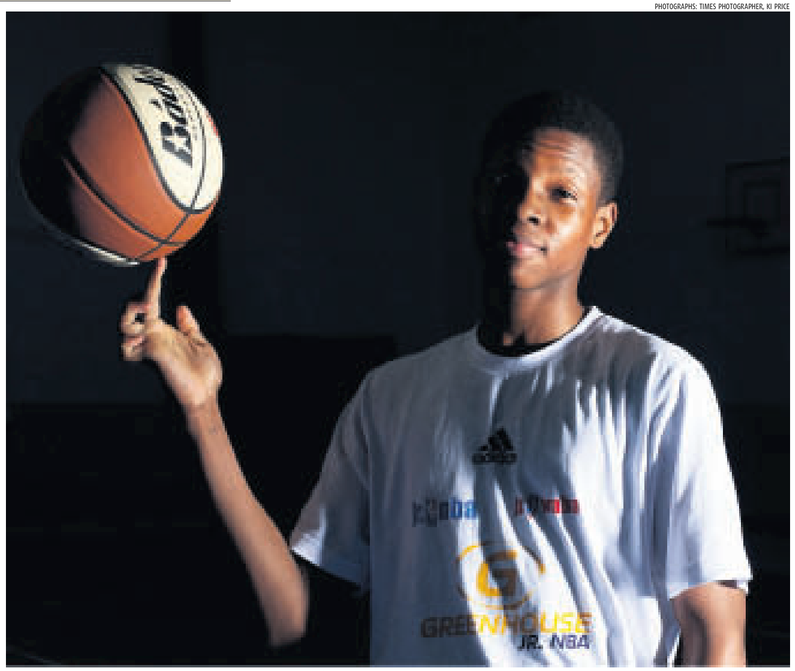
Basketball gives these boys much more than fitness, companionship and fun. For some it is an escape route from delinquency; for others it offers a structure on which to develop academic achievement at the highest level.

With his slight build and engaging smile, Ibrahim, 14, is an example of the former. Two years of basketball training with Greenhouse staff have changed him totally, he says.

"Before I used to be, after school, going home, getting changed and going out doing things I shouldn't be doing in the roads," he says, his voice trailing off. "I was rude, later and later for school … Now I couldn't go a day without playing basketball. It's like a drug, it is just addictive."

The attraction, he says, is that no player or move is perfect. There is always room to practise, improve, learn from mistakes. Basketball has taught him discipline, he adds. It has also given him a mentor, his softly spoken Greenhouse basketball coach, Predrag Krneta, a former international player from Bosnia who has taught Ibrahim how to work towards achieving his broader goals. "My coach Predrag is not only teaching me basketball but also lessons of life," he says, with admiration.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TIMES PHOTOGRAPHER, KI PRICE



Ibrahim, aged 14, has found a mentor in Predrag Krneta, right, and says that he is learning about life as well as sport

Gregory, 16, has come a long way since he started playing basketball with Greenhouse five years ago when the charity arrived at the school. Articulate and quietly confident, he is now taking A levels in economics, maths, biology and geography and wants to study politics and economics at the London School of Economics. He talks of working as a banker.

Greenhouse, one of the charities chosen to benefit from *The Times* Christmas Appeal, helped him to apply the discipline of the game to his studies and break down the defence to his academic work. "It helps you structure things, gives you a good method with which you can work, helps you problem-solve," Gregory explains. "It is like maths — to tackle a question you have various methods. In basketball the aim is to score and you have various methods which you use."

The school's director of sport, Sue Ponulak, testifies to the transformative effect of Mr Krneta's coaching. "He has been able to engage some of the most challenging children at the school, get them more onside and where they are supposed to be, and help with focusing them on their studies," she says.

Suspension from basketball training has proved a powerful deterrent to pupils whose attendance or behaviour worsens. Mr Krneta acknowledges that his approach is tough, but says that children respond to his refusal to offer false praise. Sometimes parents seek his advice on bringing up their children. One father even asked him if he would tell his son to clean his bedroom. "I have seen some kids change from being nearly excluded from school to going on to basketball camps [at national level]," he says. "I am personally trying to be very honest with kids. If I need to be strict I am very strict. I would say kids know where the line is."

In the background, 90 minutes after the school day ended, the pounding noise continues. Boom, boom, thump, swish. It is the sound of purpose, of commitment, of lives being changed.

The Alan Cristea Gallery

A group of supporters led by the Alan Cristea Gallery is matching donations made to Greenhouse through The Times appeal

HALF PRICE CHRISTMAS

SAVINGS TO CELEBRATE ON PAY AS YOU GO

SAVE UP TO £70

NOKIA C1-01
WAS £49.95
FROM £24.95
HALF PRICE
Minimum top-up required①
simply tap NOKC101GREY

SAMSUNG TOCCO LITE
WAS £79.95
FROM £39.95
HALF PRICE
Minimum top-up required①
simply tap SAMSGH52300C

NOKIA C2-02
WAS £129.95
FROM £59.95
BETTER THAN HALF PRICE
Minimum top-up required①
simply tap NOKC20200

Extra £10 cashback if you buy via Simply Tap on your first purchase②
Simply Tap is an instant mobile checkout. Download on iTunes App Store & Android Market.

Geek Squad service plans available from £1.99 per month.

Call 0800 781 7975 or visit carphonewarehouse.com
Play Wonderland on our Facebook page and win great prizes

Carphone Warehouse

All information is accurate at the time of going to print. Important: due to the fast moving nature of this market, all offers, prices and availability are subject to change. ① A minimum £10 top-up is required. ② For full terms and conditions – see carphonewarehouse.com/simplytap

To donate to The Times Christmas Appeal

Visit thetimes.co.uk/timesappeal
Call 0870 043 3764
Or complete the form below

Please send to **The Times Christmas Charity Appeal**, Charities Trust, Suite 20-22, Century Building, Tower Street, Liverpool L3 4BJ
I wish to donate £..... to the Christmas Charity Appeal. The money raised by the Times Christmas Charity Appeal will be used by the charities for their general charitable purposes. All donations will be split equally between the appeal's three causes unless specified in the circle(s) below

◯ Alzheimer's Society ◯ Greenhouse ◯ War Child

Please include a cheque or postal order made payable to: The Times Christmas Charity Appeal or complete the Mastercard/Visa/Amex details

◯ Gift Aid Declaration

I would like the Charities Trust to reclaim tax on this and any future donations and to pass it on to the charity/charities specified. I confirm that I pay UK income tax at least equal to the amount which the charity may reclaim. Please ensure you provide us with your full address

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other.....
Forename..... Surname.....
Address.....
.....
Postcode..... Date.....
Credit card details
☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐
Valid from ☐☐/☐☐ Expiry date ☐☐/☐☐ Issue no ☐☐ If applicable Debit card only
Telephone number for confirmation purposes ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Please note Charities Trust will appear on your bank/credit card statement

Calls to The Times donation line are charged at the national rate of no more than 8p per minute from a BT landline. Charges from other networks will vary. Donations will be administered by Charities Trust (no 327489) on behalf of Alzheimer's Society (no 296645) Greenhouse (no 1098744) and War Child (no 1071659). Charities Trust will use your information for claiming Gift Aid. We will not send your details to third parties, other than your nominated charity/ies. If you do not want your details shared with your nominated charity/ies, tick here ◯

WELCOME BACK
WINTER,
I'M REALLY
LOOKING
FORWARD TO YOU

THE JEEP COMPASS, EXCLUSIVE WINTER OFFERS NOW AVAILABLE

The refined Jeep Compass offers 4-wheel agility, powerful performance and superb handling, making it the ideal choice whatever winter throws at you. What's more it's also available VAT-free* saving you as much as £3000 on the 2.2 Sport +. Enjoy an adventurous holiday this year.

Jeep
THERE'S ONLY ONE

jeep.co.uk | 00800 0426 5337

FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR THE COMPASS RANGE IN MPG (L/100KM): URBAN 25.0 (11.3) – 38.2 (7.4), EXTRA URBAN 40.4 (7.0) – 52.3 (5.4), COMBINED 32.8 (8.6) – 46.3 (6.1). CO_2 EMISSIONS IN G/KM 199 – 161. VEHICLE SHOWN IS A JEEP COMPASS 2.2 CRD SPORT+ 4X2 AT £16,699.17 ON THE ROAD (INCLUDING 20% REDUCTION), WHICH INCLUDES 12 MONTHS' ROAD FUND LICENCE, FIRST REGISTRATION FEE AND VAT. * No VAT promotion available on new Jeep Compass 2.2 CRD Sport+ 4x2 models registered between 2nd and 31st December 2011 and is a price reduction equivalent to the 20% VAT applied to original base price and includes any factory fitted optional extras. Dealer fitted optional extras are not included in the promotion. VAT is still applicable and will show on invoice. Offers may be revised or removed at any time and not available in conjunction with any other offer. At participating dealers only. Prices and specifications correct at time of going to press (12/11). Jeep® is a registered trademark of Chrysler Group LLC.