



Elks Scholar Advisory Board Member Emily Mitchell (center) joins BackBoard members Fox Maikovich (from left), TJ Cahill, Jon Cloud, Katie Hoisington, Lindsey Guzek and Maci Coffey for a picture in front of the Chicago skyline before heading into the Adler Planetarium for the Hoop Shoot's Fun Fest.

Developing Gritty Kids

Curtain Call

Former Finalists Return to Share Lessons Learned

TJ CAHILL was one disappointed 13-year-old when he aged out of the Hoop Shoot Program.

"I hated leaving," reflects the Rhode Island native who competed twice at the New England Regionals and reached the National Finals in 2012. "My family had such a blast at the Hoop Shoot," he says, "from the hospitality rooms, to the Fun Fest, to the exciting competition. The Hoop Shoot was a great experience for us."

And just like that, it was over. He was too old to participate. That's enough to throw any teenager into a sulk. (Admittedly...)

Fortunately, TJ had a younger sister, Peyton, who went on a Finals run of her own in 2016. Suddenly, TJ and his family were back on the big stage, participating in the first National Finals in Chicago. And that's where he met a few members of the newly minted BackBoard, the program's alumni advisory board.

"I realized it wasn't over," TJ says. "I could still participate."

Modeled after the Elks Scholar Advisory Board, the BackBoard is composed of past National Finalists who attend the Finals as living proof of what can happen when you apply the lessons learned through the Hoop Shoot. During the weekend, they volunteer, lead, and act as role models for the 72 National Finalists. There are six alumni on the 2018 BackBoard.

Katie Hoisington, a second-year member from California, relishes the opportunity to connect with the Finalists and remind them to relax and have fun.

"I learned from competing in the Hoop Shoot that with courage, dedication, a positive mindset, and healthy support system, you can do anything," says Katie, who competed in the National Finals in 2004. "Whenever I doubt myself today, I look back at what I accomplished as a young and unsure 9-year-old. ... Knowing your hard work paid off is a feeling you never forget."

Maci Coffey, a three-time Finalist from Nebraska, draws on her Hoop Shoot lessons every day. Though the first-year BackBoard member never matched her sister Madison's championship, the skills she learned helped her develop into a collegiate volleyball player.

"I learned so many skills that have impacted my life," Maci says. "Confidence, sportsmanship, and the opportunity for self-growth through hard work and dedication."

"The Hoop Shoot really shows how practice and dedication pay off," adds Fox Maikovich, a 2010 National Finalist from Colorado who has served on the BackBoard since it was established in 2016. "When I was growing up, I was always one of the better free throw shooters on my teams—we practice so much for the Hoop Shoot. And when you combine natural ability with hard work, great things happen."



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Katie was excited to swap trading cards with all 72 Finalists. Gotta catch 'em all!

That's a lesson that translates off the court, as well, and it's not lost on the kids in the program, even the youngest ones.

"I quickly learned that the skills I developed through the Hoop Shoot translated to other aspects of my life," Maci says. "That's still the case today, whether I'm playing on the volleyball court for Doane or studying to become a teacher."

"Sports teach us dedication," adds Fox, who is a student at the University of Colorado Boulder. "When we apply that dedication to our schoolwork, it pays off."

Like Fox, Jon Cloud of Kansas was also a Finalist in 2010. His Hoop Shoot career started inauspiciously, though. In his very first contest in Abilene, he finished dead last.

"I shot miserably," says the first-year BackBoard member.

At the time, he thought that righting the ship, practicing religiously, refusing to give up, and eventually fighting his way to the Finals would be the hardest thing he'd ever do. In 2015, though, Jon learned what real hardship is. He contracted mycoplasma pneumonia and nearly died.

"I was in a coma for 10 days," Jon recalls. "I had to relearn how to walk and talk."

It was a much different fight with vastly more significant stakes, but still, he was able to draw on his Hoop Shoot experience to get through it: determination, perseverance, goal-setting and grit.

"It was really, really hard," Jon says. "But I was ready."

"The Hoop Shoot taught us all that anything is possible with hard work and dedication," says Lindsey Guzek, a

three-year member of the BackBoard from Minnesota.

As a kid, Lindsey dreamt of being a Hoop Shoot champion. More important, she turned her dream into a goal and then spent hours and hours in the gym in pursuit of it. Her hard work paid off in 2007 when she won the national championship in her final year of eligibility.

"That hard work has stuck with me throughout my career," says Lindsey, who is now a nurse in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Fargo, North Dakota.

"I still set goals and work to achieve them," she told the 2018 Finalists during the awards banquet in Chicago. "Each day I strive to provide the best care to my patients and make them and their families as comfortable as possible. Instead of spending hours in the gym, I spend hours in the hospital, but I'm still just trying to be the best that I can be. Just like you."

Armed with the knowledge that aging out didn't necessarily mean the end of his Hoop Shoot career, TJ went back home after the 2016 Finals, and that fall for his senior project, he organized and hosted "Free-Throw Friday," a free-throw shooting clinic for kids in his community.

"I did it to promote the Hoop Shoot," TJ says, "but also to pass on the lessons it teaches."

The following year, TJ applied for and was accepted to the 2018 BackBoard.

At the awards banquet, he addressed the 18 Finalists who were aging out of the program, emphasizing that their Hoop Shoot journey didn't have to end.

"Some of you have grown up with this Elks program," he said. "Now, you have a chance to give something back, like you did for the veterans [at Hoop Shoot Assists]."

"Stay in touch with your local Elks Lodge. Volunteer to help at next year's Lodge contest. Look for other ways to help the Elks help their communities."

"When you give back, it makes you feel like a champion."

The Hoop Shoot has been developing gritty kids for more than 46 years. For more information, visit elks.org/hoopshoot.



At the Awards Banquet, TJ Cahill encouraged the Finalists who were aging out of the program to stay in touch with the Elks.



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