

By Richard Slate

CONSIDERANT

When someone thinks of elite basketball players, the image usually is of tall athletes who spend a good deal of time playing above the rim, gathering rebounds, blocking shots and dunking the ball.

But one could argue that the most important job on a basketball team is that of the point guard, a role usually filled by the smallest person on the court. The point guard sets up teammates, establishes the tempo both offensively and defensively and has to do a majority of the dribbling. What a point guard lacks in height, he usually makes up for it with extra hustle and overall gritty play.

Mighty Mike Simmel showed what hustle and gritty play can do for a player on Aug. 10 at the Tom Donovani Basketball Camp at Beverly High School. Simmel displayed his extraordinary dribbling ability and focused on how the campers could improve their skills. That would be all campers, not just the smallest ones.

"Never stop being able to handle the ball," Simmel said. "That's how the game is changing. Big guys like

Kevin Garnett are dribbling more and more."

An apt word to describe Mighty Mike and his show is energy. Throughout the program, Simmel did various drills with some kids behind him. He demonstrated the maneuvers first and then let the kids practice the precise moves he had in his repertoire.

Simmel was a true showman as he worked the crowd with jokes and played some of his favorite songs by rapper Jay-Z, all while doing incredible things with one or two basketballs by his side.

The kids were all impressed with the moves, but what the coaches and camp counselors noticed about the demonstration is that Simmel stressed the value of fundamentals and teamwork as well as dedication and extra effort.

"The fundamentals come first, that's what gets you to the next level," Simmel said. "It's all about pushing yourself to the limit. Challenge yourself while still having fun."

Mighty Mike Simmel has certainly carved his own niche in the basketball world. He was a three-year

> SEE SIMMEL, PAGE 14



... like dribbling two balls while wearing a blindfold ...

MIGHTY GOOD

> SIMMEL, FROM PAGE 13

starter at Don Bosco Prep, a powerhouse high school in northern New Jersey. From there, he moved on to SUNY Purchase in New York where he was a two-year captain and led the team in assists and steals. He resides in Allendale, N.J., and currently plays for the Harlem Wizards professional basketball team when he's not on the road doing one of his shows.

When he was younger, Simmel started working at basketball camps. He was always a skilled dribbler and he soon realized he could start his

own program. He started out doing shows for next to nothing but slowly he built up referrals to the point where he does about 60 shows a year.

Simmel is a featured performer at halftimes of basketball games and he's also a spokesman for the Epilepsy Foundation-Epilepsy Awareness. Simmel speaks annually and performs at the Epilepsy Foundation of America's *Speak Up* and U.S. Public Policy institute in Washington.

Any younger basketball fan knows all about the AND 1 Mix

Tour. The tour is a playground style basketball league featuring "streetballers." They are sponsored by the basketball shoe company AND 1 and their games have morphed into a weekly show on ESPN2, a worldwide tour, lucrative videos and not to mention fame for the players. *Sports Illustrated* even highlighted them with a cover story earlier this summer.

From the outside, Simmel's show might resemble the AND 1 performers, but Mighty Mike was quick to point out the differences between what they each attempt to do.

"What they do is great entertainment," he said. "The purpose of it though is not to teach the game so kids can't really learn from it although they certainly emulate it. I always remind kids that the AND 1 guys started out with great fundamentals before they could do the things that they do."

Mighty Mike picked up most of his drills from former coaches. Many of the tricks he learned from teammates. Of course, many of the unique moves he taught himself.

Simmel realized a long time ago that to get anywhere in basketball, he had to outwork people. At 5-foot-9, Simmel was always one of the shortest people on the court. He is living proof that things like heart and desire can still push an athlete to a very high level no matter what the obstacles are their way.