



Mitch Williams, a world-ranked professional racquetball player, recently conducted a free clinic at the Greenbrier North YMCA. Williams used to play in the facility's amateur tournaments.

Pro player's free clinic is thanks for his times at Greenbrier North

By Dan Cooley
Correspondent

When third-year racquetball pro Mitch Williams signed a contract with the Wilson Company last August, it was time to celebrate. And a time to repay those who helped him get there.

The Greenbrier North YMCA, where Williams conducted a clinic recently, was one such place.

Williams grew up in Raleigh, N.C., and attended North Carolina State University. From there, on weekends, Williams traveled to racquetball tournaments. One regular stop was Greenbrier North, which provided good competition four times a year.

"I used to play in a lot of open money tournaments; it beat looking for a regular job," Williams said. "I've been to Greenbrier countless times."

Williams competed in amateur tournaments from 2001 through 2005. A year later, he entered the professional circuit.

Williams' father, Dale, introduced him to racquetball at age 10. He made it to junior nationals his first year.

After graduation from N.C. State, Williams went on to



David Kriparos, 12, left, of Hickory was thrilled to get to play with Mitch Williams, above.

graduate from Colorado State University-Pueblo, where the squad won the college national team title. He also earned his master's degree in marketing.

Williams made a remarkable leap his first year on the pro tour, going from a 112th ranking to No. 9. Today, he is ranked sixth in the world.

On the pro tour, Williams said the top players make a comfortable living, but not

an extravagant one. He estimates the top five players make about \$100,000 and those ranked fifth through eighth, about \$60,000. Those figures climb higher with endorsements. Williams, 26, and single, currently has two sponsors - Wilson and Central Bank Mortgage.

Greenbrier North racquetball director Malia Bailey remembers Williams as the guy who won all the facility's tournaments. He was a natural for the clinic.

"We had people of all ages, from youth to adults and everybody got something out of it," Bailey said. "We had so many asking when is he coming back, that we are looking into bringing him back this summer."

David Kriparos, a sixth-grader at Hickory Middle School, even got to play against Williams.

"I think he's a really great guy on the court and off," David said. "He's enthusiastic about everything and willing to help. I learned a lot."

David's mother, Cindy, said he came home with a big smile on his face.

"He was on cloud nine for several days after that," she said.

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