

# More than just a game

## Hoops bring Jewish and Muslim schools together

by Matthew Hoekstra

Staff Reporter

In the Middle East, Muslims and Jews are fighting. But on Richmond's Highway to Heaven they come together—to shoot hoops.

A historic first meeting between basketball teams of a Muslim school and a Jewish school are a sign of positive relations that could blossom into more, their principals say.

Boys and girls teams from No. 5 Road's Az-Zahraa Islamic Academy and Richmond Jewish Day School met for the first time last week on Muslim turf. This week, the teams converged on the Jewish school's gym.

Principal Ella Levy said the games help to build more than tolerance among the two groups of students, they build friendships.

"In other parts of the world, the Jews and the Muslims are fighting, and we're trying to set a small example of how two religions and two cultures can collaborate and live together in peace—and not only that, have great relationships."

Levy said staff at her school have put their heads together to come

up with other ways to get together with their Muslim neighbours.

Although the 136-student Jewish school has challenged other schools to sports matches in the past, this is the first year for Az-Zahraa's basketball team. The Islamic school is four years old and has 70 students.

Principal Zainab Dhanani said the matches have special significance for her students, some of whom are from Lebanon.

"In their home they've been talking about the events over the summer and the events that are still continuing on, so it's very real to them in the sense that they know personally their relatives are affected by the violence in the Middle East."

Dhanani said families in Canada aren't responsible for the politics in the Middle East and therefore they shouldn't blame their neighbours for the events there.

"Even as a religion, we have more similarities to Judaism than differences, and it's our obligation where we have common ground and to build upon that."

Everyone on each team is a winner, the principals will say, but the kids might be keeping score. The Jewish squad won both boys' matches—while the Muslim girls' team won their opener.

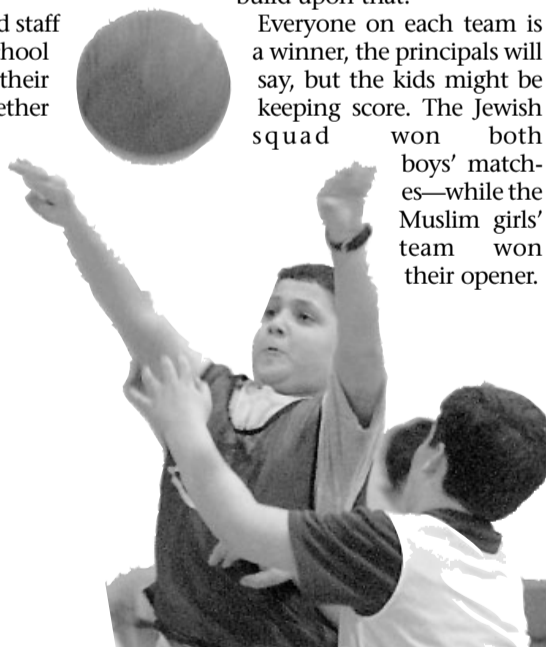


Mark Patrick photos

Mohtadi Alkhaliq cheers for his Lions as they took on Richmond Jewish Day School's basketball team.

**"In other parts of the world, the Jews and the Muslims are fighting, and we're trying to set a small example of how two religions and two cultures can collaborate and live together in peace—and not only that, have great relationships."**

— Ella Levy



### In Brief



This group of Hamilton students designed snowflakes for tonight's event.

### 2010 countdown party tonight

Richmond's pre-Olympic bash takes place tonight as the city marks three years until the opening of the 2010 Winter Games.

Held at Richmond City Hall and Brighthouse Park, at No. 3 Road and Granville Avenue, the first annual Richmond Winter Festival kicks off the festivities at 5 p.m.

The free family event includes a street fair with live musical and cultural entertainment, an outdoor skating rink and a fireworks show.

Bring your own ice skates to the artificial ice surface to be set up on Granville Avenue from 5 to 9 p.m., or take advantage of free rentals.

Live entertainment includes Juno nominated bands Hedley and The Paperboys.

During the event, a "Richmond venue city" logo will be projected onto the tower of city hall before fireworks light up the skies and wrap up the festivities at 9 p.m.