

# Washington DC Metro Based Track & Field Program Levels the Playing Field in Diversity and Youth Development

*Little & Junior TrackStars: Bridging the Gap in Youth Sports Equity with Inclusivity, Community and Opportunity*

LAUREL, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES, May 30, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a competitive landscape of youth sports often divided by race, resources, and opportunities, Little & Junior TrackStars ([LJTS](#)) is making its own lane in the Washington D.C. metro area. Founded and led by Shani Blount-Noel, the driving force behind the DMV's first and only youth track and field program catering to children as young as 3 years old led by an African American woman, LJTS offers a unique track and field program that goes beyond physical training. It fosters a space for all children to develop emotional resilience, mental fortitude, and a love for an often-overlooked sport.

## Barriers to Entry

The high costs associated with traditional youth sports programs present a significant hurdle for low-income families, often concentrated in Black and Brown communities. Registration fees, equipment, transportation, and uniforms create a financial strain that many simply cannot bear.

According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, there is a lack of access to sports for children of color, especially in underserved communities. Sport participation rates for White children exceed that of Black and Hispanic kids. In 2021, 38% of White children ages 6-12 played sports on a regular basis, higher than children who are Hispanic (32%) and Black (31%).

Geographical limitations further restrict access. communities may lack organized leagues or facilities, creating a physical barrier to participation.



Gold Place Winner for Little & Junior TrackStars Race Day

## Diversity in Youth Sports

Track and field drills provide a fantastic foundation for all sports,” says Shani Blount-Noel. “It builds speed, agility, and endurance, qualities that benefit young athletes in any discipline.” But her vision extends beyond athletic development. “I see a huge lack of diversity in many youth sports programs,” she continues. “LJTS is dedicated to creating a welcoming environment where children of all backgrounds feel comfortable and empowered to excel.”

This commitment to inclusivity is evident in LJTS’ diverse coaching staff and student body. Current and former high school and college track athletes, many of whom come from diverse backgrounds themselves, lead the program. They serve as role models, showing young participants that success in track and field transcends racial barriers.

## Building Well-Rounded Young Athletes

LJTS offers programs for children aged 3-15, catering to a wide range of interests and abilities. From the “Little TrackStars” foundational program that introduces the fundamentals of running to the “Pre-Season Athlete Training” for Junior TrackStars aimed at more experienced youth, the focus is on skill development, teamwork, and fostering a love for the sport. However, Shani emphasizes that LJTS offers more than just physical training. “We believe in developing the whole child and strengthening mental toughness” she explains. “Our coaches integrate elements of sportsmanship, goal setting, and perseverance into every session.”

The benefits of these holistic practices are undeniable. Studies have shown that participation in youth sports can significantly improve a child’s emotional well-being, self-confidence, and ability to cope with adversity. Additionally, the physical activity inherent in track and field promotes healthy habits and a strong foundation for lifelong fitness.

## Beacon of Opportunity

Little & Junior TrackStars stands out not just for its focus on diversity but also for its commitment to making the sport accessible to all. The program offers scholarships to financially disadvantaged families, ensuring that cost isn't a barrier to participation.

Increased public funding for youth sports programs in underserved areas, along with diversity and inclusion initiatives within sports organizations, are crucial steps towards a more equitable playing field.

LJTS is on a mission to leave its mark on the Washington D.C. metro area youth sports scene and beyond. The goal is to expand to other states through partnerships and franchising. With its dedication to inclusivity, well-rounded development, and accessibility, the program is poised to empower a new generation of young athletes, both on and off the track.

## About Little & Junior TrackStars

Little & Junior TrackStars (LJTS) is a unique track and field program serving the Washington D.C. metro area. Founded by Shani Blount- Noel in 2018, LJTS offers a welcoming environment for children of all ages and backgrounds to develop their athletic skills, build emotional resilience, and discover a love for the sport.

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