Central Buckeye Conference hosts inaugural athletic event for special needs students

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BELLEFONTAINE — Wet weather did not dampen the inaugural Central Buckeye Conference Cup on Friday, May 3, at Bellefontaine High School.

The CBC, comprised of 12 schools across Logan, Champaign, Union, Clark and Madison Counties, came together to produce a day full of high-fives, smiles and sporting events as 86 special needs students were presented their first opportunity to compete in a league-sanctioned athletic event.

“After seeing how much these kids enjoyed themselves, I truly believe this is going to be the premier event of our conference,” said Bellefontaine Athletic Director Matt Comstock. “I have been to a lot of league competitions, but I have never seen every participant as excited as these kids were today.”

While walking from his office to the school’s baseball and softball fields one afternoon in the spring of 2018, Comstock took pause when he saw a local Special Olympics group on the school’s practice football field.

“I was struck with how much fun they were having and I thought it would be great for our students to have an opportunity like that,” said Comstock.

He came up with an idea for the conference to highlight its special needs students in a field-day style competition, later pitching it to his fellow CBC athletic directors.

Comstock did not have to do much convincing. The response from the rest of the league was entirely positive. A committee was quickly formed to organize the details of the first CBC Cup.

“It gives me a lot of pride to see this come together,” said CBC commissioner Mike Ludlow. “I have always been impressed with this group of ADs. They are so progressive. I just think it’s exceptional that Matt brought the idea to the league meeting, and then to see everyone jump on board was tremendous.”

A stirring opening ceremony kicked off the festivities, with each team of athletes getting introduced as they made their way into the gymnasium through a tunnel of cheerleaders.

An energetic crowd, which included the entire Bellefontaine High School student body, welcomed the competitors with roaring cheers.

“I wasn’t expecting all of this,” said Bellefontaine resident Dr.
Scott Costin, one of the many proud parents in the crowd. “I about cried when I saw my son Jack come through. It’s hard for him to get experiences like this. He still asks me if he can play basketball or baseball like the other kids, and it’s hard for me to have to redirect him and tell him that he can’t. There was nothing like this when I was in school. It’s great to see these kids get real-life opportunities like this.”

Some last-minute tweaks had to be made after morning rain forced the competition to be moved inside. The 100-yard dash, for one, had to be shortened to a 40-yard sprint down a school hallway. None of the competitors seemed to mind the changes.

The participants also tossed bean bags, hurled frisbees, threw footballs, kicked soccer balls, shot basketballs and hit softballs during the various competitions.

“It is inspiring to see a conference come together to put on an event like the CBC Cup for students in their league,” said Ohio High School Athletic Association representative Tim Stried, who was on hand for the event. “The OHSAA commends Matt Comstock for getting this event organized and it was great to see so many Athletic Directors and school administrators from around the CBC help during the event, as well as with the designated ‘coach’ students from each school. After seeing the high-fives and smiles on the faces of the competitors, I’m sure that all involved will remember that event for a long time.”
The Athletic Directors from the conference ran each station, tabulating scores and providing instruction to the athletes. Each competitor was paired with a peer “coach” from their school.

“It was really cool experience,” said Isaac Newman, a member of the Bellefontaine football and baseball teams who served as a coach for one of his classmates. “It was an opportunity to work with some kids who we don’t normally get to be around. These kids show us a lot of support when we play and this is a way they can see that we support them, too.”

Following a lunch that was provided through donations from local businesses, an awards ceremony concluded the CBC Cup. Just as the conference does for the rest of its championship events, Sportsmanship Awards were handed out to a member of each team. All of the athletes were presented with medals that they proudly displayed around their necks as they posed for a group picture.

In Comstock’s final comments to those in attendance, he said time constraints would prevent him from announcing the winners for each event. Nobody seemed to care, though. On this day, finishing first was not as important as the memories that were created.

“It was a beautiful thing to see today,” added Ludlow.