

TV sports reporter Ahmad Hicks got a career boost at Kirkwood High



Ahmad Hicks, above, at work for KSDK-TV Channel 5 reporting on a sports event.

Ahmad Hicks, right, plays in the 2007 Turkey Day game between Kirkwood and Webster Groves high schools.



Sports reporter Ahmad Hicks of KSDK-TV (5 On Your Side) is a proud 2010 graduate of Kirkwood High School and an alumnus of the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corp. program.

“My time during the VICC program helped me expand my mind, let me know there was more to life than just sports and other things I witnessed in the city,” said Hicks, who joined the Channel 5 sports team in October 2018.

Hicks entered the VICC program in second grade, attending Westchester Elementary School then moving to North Kirkwood Middle before rising to Kirkwood High.

Adjusting to school in the county took a lot of work, Hicks said. “I had to learn to mature and understand there were a lot of people in my corner compared to my previous schools. There was more organization at Kirkwood and more structure.”

Not surprisingly, he was heavily involved in sports throughout his Kirkwood days. “My favorite memories include the spirit days and being part of the rivalry with Webster. That friendly competition made my years at Kirkwood a lot more fun.” He was named team captain in several different sports. “I learned to be a leader at Kirkwood schools.”

Aside from his sports success, Hicks relishes receiving the Humanitarian Award during his senior year.

It was also at Kirkwood High that Hicks found the link that would connect his sports interests to a career. He got involved in the school’s student-run broadcast program. “I was awarded an opportunity to get a great education and a jump start in my career,” he said. The broadcast program “really gave me insight into what I wanted to do with my life at an early age.”

After graduating from Kirkwood, Hicks attended Missouri Western State University in St. Joseph on a football scholarship. After one year, he transferred to St. Louis Community College at Meramec from 2011-12. He then went to Southern Illinois University–Carbondale, where he earned a degree in 2015 in journalism with a minor in radio-television and digital media and psychology.

During college, Hicks served as a morning news intern at KTVI-TV Fox 2, where he shadowed some of the station’s sports and news reporters.

Also during college, Hicks worked for UPS as a driver helper and a pre-loader and for Dents Express as a logistics coordinator.

Outside school and work, he volunteered as a mentor in the My Brother’s Keeper ministry. He returned to Kirkwood as head coach for the fourth-grade Pioneer Elite basketball team. Hicks led the team to a 19-6 record and helped develop the young players’ skills and helped teach them to play together and work as a team.

He also served as an assistant coach for the Seventh Grade Pioneers in the Kirkwood Youth Football League. There, he helped run practices and groomed the players to become better high school players.

Hicks’ first industry job was as sports director at WBBJ7 Eyewitness News in Jackson, Tennessee. There, he won the 2017 West Tennessee Sports Contributor of the Year Award from the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association.

In October 2018, he returned to St. Louis for the Channel 5 job.

Being in the VICC program at Kirkwood helped get Hicks on the right path toward his career. “Without this program, I wouldn’t have gained the knowledge needed in order to succeed in this world,” he said. “I learned to be around people I didn’t grow up with, how to interact with someone who doesn’t look like me, and most importantly, how to be me in a different crowd. All that helped me for the career field I’m in now.”

Now well on his way, Hicks’ career plans are to become the most successful journalist he can be. “One day, I hope to work at ESPN,” he said. “Until then, I’ll continue to tell stories of those without a platform or voice and let them know they can be heard as well.”

In his spare time, Hicks follows the St. Louis Cardinals and spends time with his 5-year-old German Shepherd, Ace. He also remains in contact with friends with whom he grew up in his city neighborhood.

Spotlight on Dani Taylor: A Leader Among Students



Fifth grader Dani Taylor is an outstanding participating VICC student at Mark Twain Elementary School in the Brentwood School District.

“She is a student who we can consistently look toward to provide leadership and help her peers,” said principal Carolyn R. Eastabrook. “She always models exemplary behavior, has a great sense of humor, gives full effort in all things, and has a great attitude.”

Dani is a lead facilitator and visionary in the outdoor play space at Mark Twain. She and a group of students developed a vision to create a play and learning area made of natural materials for students to explore using all of their senses.

Dani helps the younger students with projects, such as stepping stones, to enhance the aesthetics of the space. She is the recorder for the student group’s planning gatherings.

“Dani gives up her free time to be available to younger students and help them with their roles in any given projects,” Eastabrook said. “In addition, she has taken it upon herself to be a leader and look out for the young students who gather for the bus ride home. Daily, she goes to each of their classrooms and assists them out the door.”

“We are very thankful to have Dani as one of our leaders at Mark Twain,” Eastabrook said. “It is her all-around great leadership that makes her an outstanding candidate for recognition.”

Dani Taylor

MESSAGE

from the CEO



Like many of you I was recently shocked and saddened by the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, his daughter and seven others who were killed in a helicopter crash. Isn't it interesting that whether you are a Los Angeles

Lakers fan or not, we connect and our hearts go out to them and their families when a tragedy such as this occurs and lives are lost too soon.

Similarly when the St. Louis Blues won the Stanley Cup and the Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl, the cities of St. Louis and Kansas City rallied together in support of their teams. Sports are rather unique in their ability to unite us as a community and as a nation.

An article in the current issue of the ParentLink highlights Ahmad Hicks, who played sports while attending Kirkwood High School, which fostered his development as a leader and sportscaster. When tragedy hits, race, social economic status, political views and other issues that often divide us don't seem to matter. If sports can bring us all together, it is my hope that we can all grow in our ability to listen and learn from one another in other areas as well.

It is hard to pick up a newspaper or read something online and not recognize that our country is deeply divided. It is time to demonstrate a commitment to unity. Our differences should never lead us to reducing others by our words or by our actions. We need to set a high expectation and example for our children. We can be strong without being rude. Humility is not a weakness.

Similarly, sports can inspire all of us to not only do well in the game, but also to achieve at the highest level in the classroom. Sports represent the epitome of hard work and dedication. To reach the pinnacle of their sport, even the most gifted athletes must give it their all. Similarly, to achieve at the highest level in the classroom, we must expect our children and our students to give 100%.

Kobe Bryant said, "Everything negative — pressure, challenges — is an opportunity for me to rise." Similarly, Michael Jordan said, "You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them." Let's all expect great things from our kids and ourselves, not only in our athletic endeavors, but also in our relationships, in the classroom and ultimately throughout our lives.

DID YOU KNOW?

That VICC sponsors a Parent Advisory Committee that meets two to three times a year? Members are nominated by participating school districts. To get nominated, contact your district contact person. See Page 30 of the Voluntary Transfer Program Handbook 2019-20 or call VICC at 721-8422.

Each district also sponsors a parent advisory group for parents of voluntary transfer students. Contact your school principal or VICC district contact person.

Versatile Clayton fourth-grader runs business while considering career options

Fourth-grader Skylar Wilson may not have her career path mapped out yet, but she certainly has plenty of options to consider.

Skylar, a VICC student at Meramec Elementary School in Clayton, already has a hair care business, but her interests also extend to music (piano, voice and violin), soccer, math and scouting. But this "girlpreneur" does know she wants to go to college somewhere in New York

"I don't know where her entrepreneurial spirit is going to take her," said her mother, Leslie Christian-Wilson, herself an entrepreneur, VICC program graduate and PTO co-president at Meramec Elementary. Christian-Wilson joined the Ladue School District in the first wave of transfer students in 1982, graduating from Ladue Horton Watkins High School in 1986. Skylar's father, Alvin John (AJ) Wilson Jr., was a Brentwood High School VICC graduate in 1986. Her uncle, Joshua Patton, attended Clayton schools through the VICC program, graduating in 1994.

Skylar Wilson started kindergarten as a resident student in the Clayton School District. When the family moved to St. Louis city during her second-grade year, she was able to stay in the Clayton District through the VICC program, effective August 2016.

She's an amazing little girl," said Meramec School counselor Anthony Henderson. "She's a great kid. She is a good student and a good friend. She's an empathetic, caring kid." Skylar's social life is full, with friends both at school and in her city neighborhood, where she walks neighbors' dogs.

Skylar also counts among her friends two favorite teachers, Tracy McKenna and Megan Hutson, her former kindergarten teacher whom she visits nearly every day.

Henderson noted that Skylar has been active in Girls on the Run as well as in Black History performances in the past. Her interest in performing may have been spurred by the success of one of her uncles, Sterling K. Brown, who is an Emmy Award-winning star of the TV show "This is Us."

This year, Skylar's attention has turned to Skylarlicious Naturals for Kids — The Unicorn Bath and Body Collection, an addition to her line of natural hair care products for kids. The new line launched last fall, when Skylar was one of several girls who presented at the Second Annual All Girls Resource Fair and Expo, held Sept. 7 at the Center of Clayton.



Skylar Wilson

The Skylarlicious Naturals line includes scents, bath bombs, smiling style cream moisturizer, leave-in detangler, shampoo and conditioner. Leslie Christian-Wilson, a natural hair stylist herself, created Skylarlicious Naturals for Skylar as a result of countless mother-daughter battles over painful hairstyling sessions. "I wanted to create products that would make doing our children's hair a bonding experience, not a war zone," Christian-Wilson said. Now, hair time with Skylar's long, thick and curly African-American and Native-American hair is fun time.

Skylar and her mom do pop-up events about once a month to benefit charitable causes, and Skylar sells her products in her mom's hair salon and boutique, Diversity Gallery, located in the historic Ville Neighborhood just north of the Central West End.

Skylar has received some media attention, with a feature in the St. Louis American (http://www.stlamerican.com/business/business_news/year-old-entrepreneur-sells-skylarlicious-naturals-her-secret-for-manageable/article_d4f1620c-1c81-11ea-a727-17fe404efc74.html) and an appearance on Show Me St. Louis on KSDK Channel 5, both in December.

Whether Skylar heads for New York for a career in math (her current favorite subject), music, theatre, cosmetology or something else, she is bound to use her entrepreneurial spirit to succeed.

For more about Skylar's hair care products, visit www.skylarlicious.com, on Instagram @imskylarlicious, and on Facebook at Skylarlicious Naturals.



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