

The Blessed Culture and Sports Festival (BCSF) 2015

Michael Balcomb
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The Blessed Culture and Sports Festival (BCSF) 2015 kicked off on Wednesday, August 5 at the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York. One hundred and fifty participants attended the opening ceremony, which was complete with musical performances and inspirational speeches. The anticipation continued to build as hundreds more people arrived from all over the country in the next few days.

In its eleventh year, BCSF has been through many transitions. Part of its success, perhaps, has been its ability to adapt and innovate, always looking to make the program better from year to year. This year was no different. Many of the activities and events were brand new this year, and added an exciting twist to the games. The expansion of the program into not just sports, but visual and performing arts, has been a popular area of growth. The first full day of this five-day event featured an Art Blitz, a cultural spin on the traditional game night evening program that has been popular in past years of BCSF. Participants decorated the parking lot and sidewalks with chalk art featuring beautiful designs and messages of support.





The “village”, an outdoor area of tents and cookout bases, grew as well as more participants arrived. Tents sprawled across the meadow full of families, young adults and regional teams. This year, several of the regions, including New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Maryland and Ohio, pitched in to support their sports teams by providing and cooking food for their players throughout the course of the event.



The village of tents where participants camp out for the events has become not just a place to stay, but a real part of the whole experience. “It’s a representation of what we’re trying to develop as a culture, as blessed families. Families living side by side in these tents, it’s a real tribe!” said one staff member.



In the evening, the campers enjoyed the first-ever outdoor open mic at BCSF, which was a huge success. The cultural activities, including the musical programs and art, have enhanced the festival in a positive way. While the sports activities allow for healthy competition, the cultural additions allow participants to unite in mutual appreciation and expression, creating an ideal balance that BCSF staff say added a more positive energy to the festival as a whole.



On the third day, numbers continued to climb. Halfway through the festival, registration already exceeded expectations with 600 people present and 200 more over the weekend. A Film Festival and “Dance Mania” were also exciting new additions this year. The film festival on the third day featured short films, animations, visual effects, music videos and music created by young Unificationists. Dance Mania hosted classes in hip hop and ballroom, and presented performances in a mix of styles including ballroom, social dances, hip hop, EDM and house music.



As for the sports, the energy on the field was high. Competition was fierce and players and spectators alike were anxious for the playoffs, semifinals and of course the big day of final games on Sunday. Other competitions wrapped up, including the badminton tournament that crowned the winners Josh Paghubasan and Gideon Raucci. Toyomichi Hagiwara and Jeremy Kitchens came in second, and Kahael Lange and Yong-Sung Masuda in third.



Families including young children arrived on Saturday, ready for the Family Day events, an arts fair, and semifinals for many of the sports competitions. With the addition of Family Day, Saturday was jam packed with all sorts of kid-friendly options. Games, two bouncy houses, a dunk tank, face painting and a barbecue thrilled kids young and old. Forty families registered for the family day this year, and organizers expect the numbers to rise in years to come as they see it as an avenue for growth.





The Village, which was built up slowly from a few tents, came together on Saturday with food, art and craft vendors who set up tables all along the road. The spirit was high on and off the field as spectators enjoyed the games and browsed the many vendors' tables. Many of the artists sold out most of their inventory.





Another exciting event was the Mudder's Trail, a slippery and messy three-mile run through most of True Mother and Father's trails at the seminary. Participants had to tackle three major obstacles, including a 200-yard run through the lily pad covered marsh and mud, a heavy-tractor tire flip, and the formidable warped wall. It was encouraging to see teamwork evolve as participants helped each other up the wall. Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA, also ran the course and made it up and over the wall. The runners finished with the support of spectators cheering from the sidelines.





Another first: a four-sided rock-climbing wall towered over the field. It was built with the help of professional rock-climber, James Galvan, who set the climbing routes. The climbing wall was open to participants and spectators throughout the day as a fun activity during down time or between sports and events.



The popular Battle of the Bands closed the night on Saturday and brought everyone together again for exciting musical showcases. Four bands competed for the grand prize of 20 hours of recording time in the Manhattan Center Studio. The rap duo, Snow Legacy, grabbed the coveted first prize slot.

The many events and activities led to a diverse gathering of artists, athletes and participants and spectators of all ages. “There’s so much going on, there’s something that fits for every person,” said Shizuka Pehling, co-district coordinator for District 8. “Every year brings new developments. It has been exciting to see new programs and events evolve to support the community that it serves.”



First time participant Richard Curry noted, “It’s a very new experience, but the energy is such a wonderful energy. I feel like, honestly, it’s heavenly. You have this impression that everyone is really trying hard and they’re working in teams, and whether you win or lose, you’re just creating competition, which is what we were created to do, to really strive to be our best.”



Yuka Nishimura, a vendor at the Village also commented on the positive spirit: “It’s been really good so far. I mean, we’ve got the whole Village going on, everything is calm, Family Day is happening, but there was no major electricity issues, there were no major accidents, and there were no lost kids. Also, for the sports, there were no serious injuries.” She noted that vendors were even able to leave out their goods overnight without fear of anything getting stolen or damaged. “It’s good this year. It’s a very positive, bright atmosphere. It’s also a lot more creative this year,” she said.



With the fifth day consisting of final competitions and closing ceremonies, the excitement continued to grow. During the closing ceremony, a beautiful moment wowed the crowd when representatives from each district read thank you notes from members of other districts. These notes highlighted team spirit, good sportsmanship and acts of kindness displayed in other teams.

Dr. Balcomb gave a message at the closing ceremony, tying the sports festival to True Parents' vision.

“My message for you is that I’d like each of you to leave here determined to set upon your peace road,” he said. “It’s not a physical thing per se, but every time you’re kind to someone, or you share with them a vision of hope instead of obstacles and difficulties, you are on peace road, and every time that you choose to love instead of hate, to give instead of just receive, you are on peace road. This is really just the beginning, I know True Mother is so proud of this group. Above all, keep the momentum. What you gained here, what you did here was great. One week from now, one month from now, please say that you carried something on, you did something to bring God’s vision of peace into the light.”





