

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Fifth Annual Allen Burke Foundation Basketball Tournament Starts Thursday

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ST. CROIX -- For the four days beginning Thursday, the Central High School Gymnasium will be bustling with activity, as the Allen Burke Foundation Basketball Tournament, in its fifth year, is upon us once more, bringing excellent sporting entertainment, an opportunity for the territory's youth to be seen by top rated mainland coaches, and a message that encourages unity among the youth, while discouraging violence.

The tournament was birthed in 2012 by J'Ada Burke, the sister of Allen Burke -- a young man who was killed through gun violence during the Christmas season in 2007 -- in an effort to create a lasting legacy for her brother, whose love for basketball was insatiable.

The tournament has since grown into a major annual affair in the territory, and is helmed by Alvin Burke Jr., the brother of Allen, as well as their mother, Jackie Thomas-Eastman.

Aside from the local teams, the weekend-long event sees pro athletes making their way from the mainland to the territory in a show of support. It also stands as a testament to how much the foundation has grown, according to Mr. Burke.

"Expect the same with a lot of enhancements. We're also starting a day earlier -- from Thursday all the way to Sunday," Mr. Burke told The Consortium. "We have teams coming from North Carolina, St. Thomas and the British Virgin Islands. We have some celebrity and former NBA hall of fame players coming in as well."

Also in attendance, Mr. Burke said, will be coaches from Division 1 and Division 2 schools to scan local talent.

There are eight teams in three divisions, Mr. Burke said. On Thursday, the games will start at 6:00 p.m. and run through 9:00 p.m.; Friday's games will run from 6:00 p.m. to about 11:00 p.m.; Saturday's games from 8:00 p.m. until they are over; and Sunday the championship game will be played.

Mr. Burke thanked the community and the multiple sponsors who've supported the effort every year, reminding that the foundation is a nonprofit, and "Everything goes back into the community, through the scholarships that we make available every year to the students."

And this year's tournament is especially important, Mr. Burke said, as the games start on September 15, which would have been Allen's birthday. "He would have been making 27 on September 15, so it's kind of nice to see where we've been and what we've had to go through, to where we are now," he said, noting the tragedy as heart-wrenching, but the foundation as a testament to turning an unfortunate situation into an impacting cause.