

Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum youths have summer of fun at CYS Sports and Fitness camps

FORT DRUM, N.Y. – A group of Fort Drum youths embarked on a whitewater rafting trip along the Black River on Aug. 19, as part of the Fort Drum Child and Youth Services' Sports and Fitness Adventure Camp.

They learned how to properly wear the safety equipment, basic paddling techniques, as well as the importance of working as a team.

"We need your cooperation and participation in today's event, which means paddling together," one of the guides instructed the kids. "The better you paddle together, the less you are going to have to paddle. But it's going to be a workout."

The voyage began quietly on calm waters as the children concentrated on working the paddles to the cadence of their guides. They roared with shock and laughter when their guide "surfed the rapid" – plunging the front end of the raft downward to give them all a face full of water.

"I was just scared at first because it felt like we were going to go underwater," said Aleena Gonzales, 10. "When I saw the wave going over their heads, and I was like, 'Is it going to come for me next?'"

It wasn't the first thrill of the summer for Aleena, who also attended the first iteration of the Adventure Camp in July.

"I really like whitewater rafting," she said. "It's tiring, but it's also really fun."

Fellow rafter Ace Gage said he asked his parents to sign him up for the Adventure Camp so he could try something new.

"It was like hitting speed bumps in the car, but you get splashed every time you hit one," he said. "It wasn't hard, but this was definitely a workout."

A summer of fun and adventure concludes this week for children participating in the 2025 CYS Sports and Fitness Summer Camps Program. From archery and golf, to pickleball, soccer and flag football, there were plenty of options to keep family members active before the new school year begins.

"We teach a lot of the fundamentals of the sport at each of the camps," said Ed Malinowski, CYS Sports and Fitness assistant director. "But a big part of it is trying to make it fun, and that's what I tell them on the very first day. At the end of each day, and at the end of the camp, my goal is that they enjoyed playing the sport so they want to keep playing."

Moving from one sport to the next, week after week, requires a versatile and knowledgeable team of camp coaches.

“They do a great job preparing well in advance to make sure we are on track to have a well-run program,” said Michael D’Augustino, CYS Sports and Fitness director. “Our team also does a great job bonding with our youth, which helps the overall effectiveness of the program and makes it a better experience for everyone.”

This was the first summer camp season for Madi Staples, who started working as a CYS sports specialist last year.

“I grew up playing sports, and for my degree in physical education they taught us every single sport you could think of and how to play it,” she said. “They wanted us to be proficient in coaching, playing and teaching.”

Staples said they begin each camp with a broad lesson plan – to include warmups, drills and games – and then adjust based on age groups and experience levels.

“The older kids don’t require as much guidance then the younger kids,” she said. “You can give them a drill and they’ll do it on their own.”

In addition to traditional sport camps like archery and soccer, new ones such as pickleball and wrestling were added this summer.

Josh Herzig, CYS Sports and Fitness assistant director, has been coaching wrestling for many years and was excited to bring the sport into the summer camp program.

“We did this once before, maybe six years ago,” he said. “One of the reasons why we brought it back was we had a huge following this year for our winter wrestling program. The parents were really pushing for this to happen, so a lot of the kids were here for the summer camp.”

Dan Hanifin, with 10th Combat Aviation Brigade, volunteered to help coach the wrestling camp.

“I used to coach before I joined the Army, so I figured I could help out here and do some volunteer coaching,” he said.

It also gave him a chance to see his son Jacob develop his own wrestling skills.

“This is the first time we’ve been in a spot where he’s old enough to participate, which is great,” he said. “He did the winter wrestling program, and that’s how we met Coach Josh and Coach Nick (Huff). That program was a lot of fun – it had just the right amount of instruction and intensity for that age group – and he wanted to keep doing it this summer.”

Stephanie Stoltz registered her sons, Vincent and Raymond in wrestling ... and golf, and gymnastics, and archery, and baseball.

“The camps are great, and they have really enjoyed the time playing sports,” she said. “It’s a good way to break up the summer days.”

Children also had the opportunity to join a fitness camp and gymnastics camp (see related story at www.dvidshub.net/news/545443/fort-drum-children-build-balance-confidence-with-cys-gymnastics).

D’Augustino said the summer sports camp program serves as a good introduction and learning opportunity for a variety of sports.

“Our mission is to serve the military community, and I think camps are a great way at meeting this goal,” he said. “Having a diverse offering of activities ensures we have something for everybody. In many of the camps we focus on the basics and teaching the skills to the youth. This will then hopefully blossom into them continuing the sports throughout the years.”

To learn more about the upcoming fall sports leagues, call (315) 772-6718, or visit <https://drum.armymwr.com/programs/youth-sports-and-fitness-program> and www.facebook.com/FortDrumYouthSports. The CYS Sports and Fitness Center is located in Bldg. 10790 on Chapel Drive.

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Photo Captions:

The 2025 Summer Camps Program with Fort Drum Youth Sports and Fitness provided families with opportunities for children to experience camaraderie and sportsmanship while learning or improving skills in a variety of camps. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

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