

8th Grade World Champion Crowned in San Diego At Inaugural IndiHoops Tournament

There are certain events that have become national monuments when it comes to youth sports. Events like the NFL's Punt, Pass, & Kick Contest & the McDonalds All-American Game have become institutions in America but they all pale in comparison to the Little League World Series. Every year, teams from all corners of the globe converge on Williamsport, Pennsylvania to crown a world champion. When Brian Hershman and John Egidio first imagined the IndiHoops 8th Grade World Championships, they hoped to one day be able to provide the basketball alternative to crown a world champion.

After their inaugural event, it seemed clear that they are on their way to achieving this goal. The 2016 IndiHoops 8th Grade World Championships proved to be a world class event that would usher players from their 8th grade AAU season into their upcoming high school journey for years to come. Even with the lofty long term goal, all would agree the inaugural tournament was a rousing success. With teams from as far as Florida, Minnesota, Utah, and Texas, all traveling to picturesque San Diego on an ideal weekend for a tournament that would send many kids off to high school the following week.

The weekend kicked off on Thursday with 2 teams separating from the pack early on as 43 Hoops & Thunderstruck were the only 2 teams to crack 70 points as both dominated their day 1 opponents. 43 Hoops dismantled Earl Watson Elite, 75 to 46 and Thunderstruck had its way with Seattle Rotary, 71 to 58.

The first day was capped off on Thursday night with a banquet dinner held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Players were not only provided with dinner but also received a special treat as IndiHoops was able to secure, special guest speaker, Schea Cotton. Cotton was the subject of a Sports Illustrated article while still in high school and the subject of an upcoming documentary. "Ya'll don't understand" Kevin Garnett told his teammates, "this dude was LeBron before LeBron". Schea's skill set and competitive nature garnered him an imperial reputation as a prodigious prep talent. Cotton spoke to the kids about his journey from being the #1 rated player in the nation to being held out of college scholarship at UCLA. Cotton took the

Prep (St. Thomas Moore) and JC route (LBCC) to a scholarship at Alabama. Although Cotton played ten seasons overseas he never reached the NBA summit many had set before him. His acclaimed film, *Manchild: The Schea Cotton Story* paints a mosaic of triumphs and pitfalls of one of the best talents of our times. Cotton's life lessons and Babe Ruth-like lore resonated for some participants of IWC when he spoke of dismantling Kobe Bryant at NBPA Camp.

On Friday, the action continued with 43 Hoops falling to Friends of Hoop from Seattle in a tightly contested match before falling 57 to 53. 43 Hoops then went on a tear winning its next 3 games including a re-match with Friends of Hoop to secure a place in the final. Thunderstruck meanwhile had a tougher time with its Friday opponents than it did with Thursday's but still earned wins against Hard Knox from Utah and the Friends of Hoop to advance to the championship.

The final 2 games of the tournament were streamed live online allowing family members who were unable to make the trip to still view the championship and third place games. The championship featured 43 Hoops from Minnesota against Thunderstruck from Florida. The third place game featured Friends of Hoop against a HardWork team from San Antonio whose name was well earned.

The third place game was a hotly contested affair as Friends of Hoop held the lead early but HardWork came out of for the second half with renewed energy opening up a lead and closing out a seven point win with free throws and stops.

The championship game was supposed to be an after-thought as Thunderstruck came into the game as a heavy favorite but 43 Hoops apparently didn't get memo. They jumped out to an early lead against Thunderstruck and continued to compete as Thunderstruck regained the lead heading into halftime. In the second half, the team from Florida showed they were not planning on making any long trip home without a first place trophy. Early on the second half, Thunderstruck went to a full court trap that 43 Hoops was powerless to break. Even when 43 Hoops was able to break the press, they were unable to connect on shots around the rim and the lead swelled to double digits. 43 Hoops continued to compete until the final buzzer; Thunderstruck however was just too much. The final score of 80 to

69 did not tell the tale of dominant Thunderstruck had been in the 2nd half with Tournament MVP Dudley Blackwell pouring in 21 points.

After the conclusion of the tournament, IndiHoops announced the All Tournament teams presented by Hardwood Insiders. Tourney MVP Dudley Blackwell of Thunderstruck was joined on the First Team by Nate Heise from 43 Hoops, Journee Phillips of HardWork, Mason Falsev of Hard Knox, and Maui Sze of Seattle Rotary. The Second Team featured Gervon Dexter of Thunderstruck, David Ijadimbola from 43 Hoops, Braelon Seals from HardWork, Peter Erickson from Friends of Hoop, and Marjon Beauchamp of the Portland Basketball Club. Finally the Third Team included Tony Dahl of 43 Hoops, Jared Franklin of Friends of Hoop, Andre Mulibea of Hard Knox, Derek Luna of HardWork and Jack Bailey from Coastal Elite. You can find a complete list of scores, results, and contact information at www.indiwc.com.