

# Oyler eighth-grader making a name for himself and his school

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(Photo: John Snodgrass for the Enquirer)

Cincinnati native Rayvon Griffith is one of the nation's top basketball players in the class of 2023. John Snodgrass, [jsnodgrass@enquirer.com](mailto:jsnodgrass@enquirer.com)

Basketball has always been a draw at Oyler School in Lower Price Hill but recently the interest in Madhatters games has grown. And it isn't the varsity team that's driving all the attention.

"It's pretty interesting to see the transition from people who didn't know Oyler at all to now; when you say 'Oyler,' they're like, 'Oh, that's where that one kid goes that played with LeBron's son,'" Oyler athletic director Chris O'Brien said. "And so, it is fun, for people to start recognizing not only Oyler but where it's at."

The kid O'Brien is referring to is Rayvon Griffith, a 6-foot-4, 14-year-old eighth-grader that became one of the breakout stars on his AAU basketball circuit this past summer playing alongside, arguably, the most famous eighth-grade athlete in the country – LeBron James Jr., the son of four-time NBA MVP and current Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James.

Griffith has played the last two summers with the North Coast Blue Chips, an AAU team that features some of the most promising basketball players in the class of 2023. But it was this past summer when Griffith really took off. Playing in gyms all around the country and [in front of current NBA stars and coaches](#) the Blue Chips were a dominant force on the hardwood. And while crowds came to see James Jr. and his famous dad, it was Griffith that many scouts left impressed with.

Being able to play any position, Griffith looks just as comfortable bringing the ball up the court as he does banging bodies in the paint. He can knock down a 3-pointer on one possession and drive to the hoop for a dunk on the next. It's that versatility that made him stand out while playing against some of the best competition in his age group and it's why [severalscoutingsites](#) rank him a top-10 player in his class nationally and the top player in Ohio's '23 class.

His diverse game comes from growing up in Oyler's system.

"He does everything I need him to do," Oyler junior high coach Steve Stanley said. "If I need him to go to the big man, he'll go to the big man. If I need him to post up, he'll post up. If I need him to be a point guard, he'll bring the ball up. He does everything. I don't just assign him to one. He does everything."

"We promote that we don't have positions we have situations," Thomas Blair, Oyler's youth coach said. "So what the situation allows us, that's what we try to expose. We don't just do that for Rayvon, we do it for all our players. If we have a small guard then Rayvon will post him up. If he's with a big man, we'll run him to death. And that's been since day one."

That base has helped Griffith become one of the most high-profile prospects in the country, traveling the United State with one of the most recognizable AAU teams in his age group. But away from the gym lights of cities like Las Vegas and Miami and back in Lower Price Hill, he's just Rayvon. The kid from the neighborhood.

Griffith has spent most of his life in Lower Price Hill and nearly all of that time he's been going to Oyler. The small K-12 public school on Hatmaker Street has fewer than 800 students total. The school's lone gym maxes out around 220 people. On game nights, it's not unusual for the school to have to turn away fans at the door because they've reached capacity. This season, the issue has become more pronounced, especially with junior high games.

An early-season game against rival Gamble Montessori was moved from Gamble to Western Hills High School to accommodate the expected crowd. O'Brien expects he'll need to do something similar later this season when the Gators come to Oyler.

"For us, are we going to be able to hold it at a place like Taft, which is closer to us or do we want to go back to West High because the other big thing is our community members are used to coming and walking to the game," O'Brien said. "Now we have to get them either up the hill or downtown. It's about what's going to be best for our families, our fans, and what's easier for the other school and their fans, too."

The school's connection to the community runs deep. As a community school, the bonds are made early and run deeper than basketball.

"Oyler has always been the school that I wanted to go to," Griffith said. "I've gone here as I've grown up. It's home. You can't leave home. We're building something around me, playing with the Blue Chips has been a good experience, seeing there are other players a lot better than me; I know I've got to keep working."

Griffith and his current teammates have been playing with each other since the first and second grade and the current attention Griffith's game has generated has resulted in more exposure for the school's program. It has helped his teammates receive offers to join other AAU teams and garnered more interest in varsity games. It has been a positive for the school as a whole but it has not changed Griffith's status inside its halls.

"Here in the building he's Rayvon and our job is to make sure he graduates with the goals he has in mind," Oyler principal Amy Randolph said. "For us, we try to focus on things inside the school building that he can be a leader at, things he can stay active in. This is a very challenging neighborhood to live in so we want to keep him, as much as we can, involved in showing that he can be a leader."

"If you aren't doing what you need to be doing in the community and with your school work you're sitting," Blair added. "You're here to get your education."

When he was younger, Griffith says he wanted to play football but after a friend passed away a few years ago, he said it changed his full focus to basketball.

"Now I feel like I'm going through this for him. I just keep working and working and it's starting to pay off."

Griffith comes from a large family, he has eight siblings. His two older brothers help him with his game on the weekends. An older sister is on Oyler's varsity basketball team and is set to graduate this coming spring. This past fall Griffith stepped out of his comfort zone on the hardwood and ran on Oyler's first-ever junior high cross country team. In his first race he placed eighth overall. Between his family and the school, he stays busy and focused.

"Growing up playing basketball, I had an attitude situation, and my boys they helped me control that on and off the court so I don't make the wrong decisions," Griffith said. "They just help me be a better person."

"His work ethic is incredible," Blair said. "When he started with me, like the first three years, he was injured. But he still continued to work even when he was injured. He has a drive to win. ... To see that development in him, to see that growth. For me it's phenomenal. Rayvon, he naturally wants to get everyone into the system and we do have a system here. It's amazing. I've experienced something close to this, but nothing to this stage."

It's a collaborative effort in the neighborhood. From the school to the community to students' homes, building a supportive foundation takes effort.

"Ms. Griffith is very involved with this as well," Randolph said. "It starts with mom. It starts at home. We can't say Oyler is the credit for Rayvon. It's a partnership. Home, family, coaches, teammates. It

truly is a village approach because that is how we are going to make him, and all our students, have their most success educationally, athletically – in everything they need to do."



Thomas Blair, Amy Rudolph, Rayvon Griffith and Steve Stanley pose at Oyler School. (Photo: John Snodgrass for the Enquirer)

On the court this season, Oyler is 8-0. Griffith is averaging over 30 points per game and more than seven rebounds. The Madhatters were league co-champions last season. Griffith and his teammates are looking to win the title outright this year.

"He's a leader," Stanley said of his standout player. "He always lifts guys up when they fall down. When they make mistakes he's always in there to help them out. That's what's great about him."