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## 82 Schools Win the Lottery, Wizards-Style

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The cries were deafening, as high-pitched as teen-idol screams. Students waved hand-lettered posters: TUBMAN FOR GILBERT and GILBERT SCORES FOR SIMON.

They had come to the [Verizon Center](#), these 1,200 students, teachers and principals from 240 schools all over the [Washington](#) metro area, for a shot at winning cash from Wizards' superstar [Gilbert Arenas](#). For each of this season's 41 home games, Arenas has pledged to continue last year's tradition of giving \$100 for every point he scores in a game -- and he scores a game average 28.4 points -- to a D.C.-area school.

That works out to an average of almost \$3,000 to [82 different schools](#) because Wizards owner [Abe Pollin](#) matches the payout for all 41 away games. Last year, Arenas -- who was the third-leading scorer in the [National Basketball Association](#) -- and Pollin donated almost \$215,000 in the inaugural season of the "Gilbert Arenas Scores for Schools" program.

It's a hefty bag of cash, especially for such schools as Southeast's Simon Elementary, where "we need computers," math resource teacher Jennifer Johnson said amid the din. "And we need resource books for teachers. And we need a lab for computers. And we need to go on more field trips. And teacher supplies. We just don't have the resources." In general, money for such necessities, she added, "comes out of our pockets."

So there was Johnson yesterday, watching Arenas pull school names from a gold basket and regularly screaming the number assigned to her school: "36! *Gilbert!* THIR-TY SIX!"

The idea for the program came before the start of last year's season, when Arenas was brainstorming charity ideas with the Wizards' senior director for community relations, Sashia Jones.

The session, Jones said, was classic Arenas: He wanted this charity idea to be "something nobody else had ever done," and he wanted it "big" and primed to "impact children."

As the Scores for Schools idea bloomed, they decided that Arenas would take responsibility for all 41 home games, and team owner Pollin would finance the point-scoring donations from all of Arenas's 41 away games.

"What inspired you to start shooting for money?" Arenas was asked yesterday afternoon by a quiet boy who had printed his question in pencil on lined notebook paper.

"Because," the 6-foot-4 ball player answered gently, leaning forward toward the boy, who was about half of Arenas's height, "I always dreamed of a player doing it for my school."

The idea that needy public schools from Washington, D.C., would be competing for funds with schools from affluent areas, such as raffle-winner [Chevy Chase Elementary](#), isn't one that Arenas finds troubling. "No matter what

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neighborhood you come from, every school needs help," he said. The 82 schools chosen were picked from those that registered.

And of course, given that the Wizards' community relations team is also behind the program, the likelihood is that parents from richer schools and neighborhoods may be more able to afford Wizards tickets than parents from a more struggling neighborhood.

As the raffle wound down, the only thing at the forefront of Johnson's mind was watching Arenas's hand pluck the final few names.

"If your school hasn't been picked," the announcer urged, "stand up and make some noise!" Johnson started to shake her head, but rallied, and as Arenas's fingers fished for the final school, she yelled, one last time: "THIR! TY! SIX!"

"One hundred eighteen," read the announcer. "E.L. Haynes Public Charter School."

Johnson felt defeated. Simon had not been called. Johnson's silver hoop earrings stopped bouncing jubilantly against her neck. The five fourth- and fifth-graders next to her sat silently in their seats.

Arenas, though, wouldn't let the afternoon end. A mischievous glint crossed his face. For every school that hadn't yet left the building, he declared unexpectedly, he would give a \$1,000 consolation prize. Johnson was stunned.

"WE GET A THOUSAND DOLLARS!" hollered a boy to Johnson's left. "WE GET A THOUSAND DOLLARS! WE GET A THOUSAND DOLLARS!" He was jumping up and down, clapping on Johnson's arm. The girl to her right shrieked.

Johnson exhaled as the reality of a whopping \$1,000 sunk in: "We'll take it."

She looked elated. Arenas looked satisfied. His unexpected largesse had just cost him \$62,000, and he left the Verizon Center the way he came in, giving high-fives and handshakes to each of the kids who lined his path.

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