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NBA dance team member returns home to inspire Zionsville youth

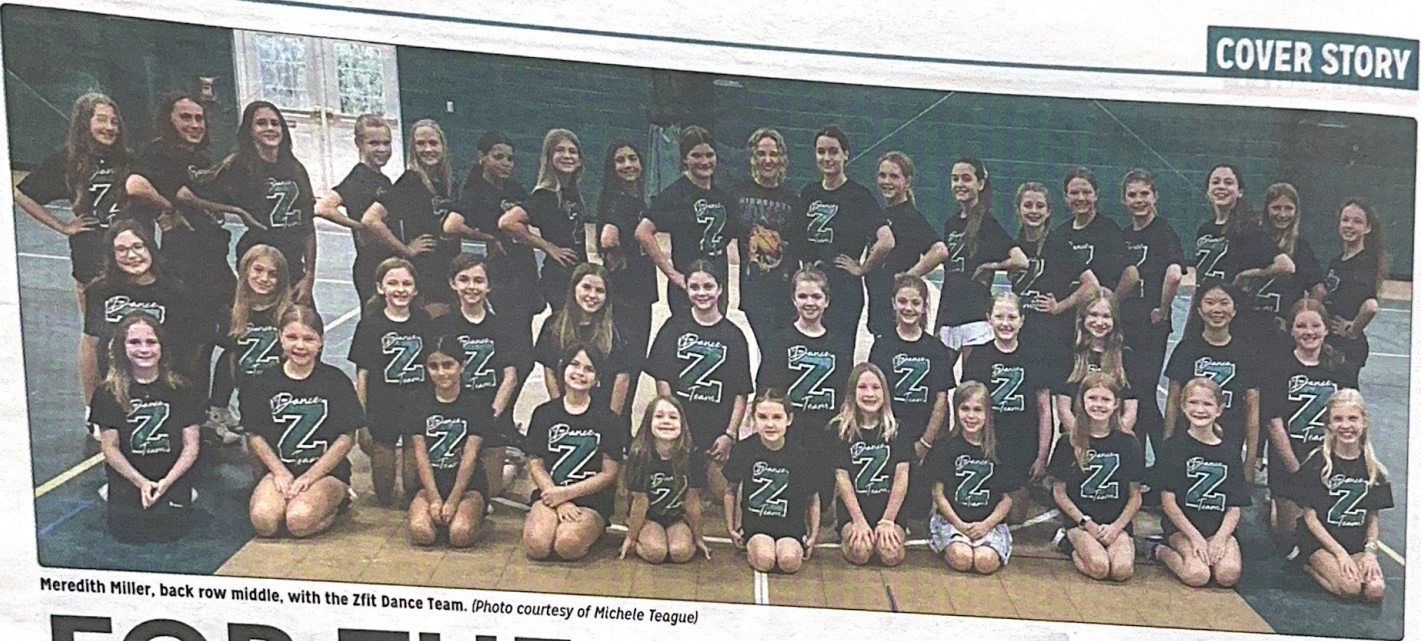
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Meredith Miller, back row middle, with the Zfit Dance Team. (Photo courtesy of Michele Teague)

FOR THE HEALTH OF IT

NBA dance team member returns home to inspire Zionsville youth

By Kiersten Riedford
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Meredith Miller, a nurse and member of the Timberwolves Dancers – the official dance team of the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves – visited Zionsville Middle School in late June to teach the Zionsville Dance Team Elite, Zfit dancers about mental health in dance.

Designed for girls in kindergarten through eighth grade, the Zfit program is geared to build dancers' hip-hop skills and confidence in a fun atmosphere, according to Michele Teague, head coach of Zfit.

Miller, 29, who has been with the Timberwolves Dancers for one year, spoke to the girls in the program about the importance of balance and encouraged them to not be discouraged. She stressed the importance of putting effort into dance.

A Zionsville Community High School graduate and former varsity dance team captain, Miller said returning to her hometown to talk to the dancers and choreograph a dance with them was an honor. She said she was able to teach lessons to the dancers that she wished she could have learned when she was younger.

Miller, an ICU nurse in Minnesota, said she

told the students that it is OK if they don't get selected for a team they tried out for. She said most of the time, dancers won't get an answer on why they didn't make it, but younger dancers tend to assume it is because they weren't good enough – which she said isn't always the case.

"It could have been your hair wasn't the color they wanted," Miller said. "(The judges) wanted somebody with a little bit different style or maybe they needed a male and not a female. Always keep your individuality and (don't think) your individuality isn't good enough."

Emilia Johnson, a 10-year-old dancer on the Zfit dance team, said she was excited to learn from Miller.

"I learned from Meredith that every 'no' you get in life makes you stronger for when you get a 'yes,'" Johnson said.

Miller said Teague's dance program sets the young dancers up for success. Dancers only meet in person once a week but have mandatory online practices they must complete.

Teague said the dancers earn their performance spots based on how well they practice at home, attend practices and participate in mentoring their peers.

"If they don't practice, that's going to show, and if they don't look like they're ready to perform, they aren't going to perform," Miller said. "That's not a punishment. That's if you didn't put in the work, you're not going to reap the benefit of being able to show off what you know. And I don't think that's harsh, I think that's right reality."

Miller said Teague shows the dancers reality in a "very loving way," which Miller said is not always the case in the world of dance.

"It cultivates this work ethic in them, but also this desire to keep getting better," Miller said. "That will apply to them for so many things of their life, as far as dance, but also their job or school, or whatever it is."

Miller said maintaining mental health can be a tough battle for young students, especially in the dance world. She said she remembers vividly what it was like when she was a young dancer and was delighted to have a chance to share her experiences with the Zfit team.

"I was excited to be an older voice that I felt like they would listen to because I'm not their mom or dad," Miller said. "And then also to just create a fun environment where they got to learn a really cool dance and

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Girls can register for Zfit by calling 317-748-4200. Pricing ranges based on the number of sessions dancers attend. Dancers can join throughout the year.

perform it and feel good about it (was) really awesome."

Miller said she left the practices with teary eyes because she was proud to see the girls' growth over the course of the week. She said she is grateful for the opportunity to speak into the dancers' lives.

"When they put their minds to things, they can do them," Miller said. "And that's something I think we have to be reminded of is that they can. They might not be able to right now, but they can."

ON THE COVER: Meredith Miller, a Zionsville Community High School graduate, is a member of the Timberwolves Dancers, the dance team for the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves. She recently returned to Zionsville to teach a Zfit dance team choreography. (Photo courtesy of Meredith Miller)