



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **Denver Youth to Receive Books, Mentorship, and Literacy Support Through Helen Darling's Reading Is My Game Campaign**

DENVER, CO (June 2026) — At a time when America is facing a growing literacy crisis, retired WNBA legend, educator, and newly announced Read Across America National Ambassador **Helen Darling** is bringing her message that "Reading Is My Game" to Denver youth through two literacy activations designed to put books directly into children's hands and inspire a lifelong love of reading. Hosted in partnership with **Scholars Unlimited** on June 30 and the **YMCA Swansea** on July 2, the events will serve hundreds of Denver students through free book distributions, literacy activities, and mentorship from current and former professional athletes.

The need for literacy-focused programs has never been greater. According to national assessment data, nearly two-thirds of American fourth graders are not reading proficiently, while students from low-income households continue to face the largest achievement gaps. In Colorado, fewer than half of students meet grade-level expectations in English Language Arts, with proficiency rates significantly lower among economically disadvantaged students.

Through her new **Reading Is My Game** campaign, Darling hopes to change that trajectory one child at a time. *"Basketball was my profession, but reading built my future,"* said **Helen Darling**. *"Before there was a championship, a scholarship, or a professional career, there was a young girl learning to read and believe in herself. Every child deserves access to books, encouragement, and role models who show them that literacy creates opportunities. Reading Is My Game is about helping young people understand that reading isn't just something you do in school—it's a tool that can change your life."*

Students participating in the events will receive free books to help build their home libraries while taking part in Darling's signature **Literature Layup** program, which combines literacy instruction, vocabulary development, movement, and athlete mentorship.

For **Abenicio Rael, Executive Director of Scholars Unlimited**, the partnership represents an important investment in Denver's youth and a powerful opportunity to shine a spotlight on literacy. *"We are incredibly grateful to Helen Darling, Read Across America, and the current and former WNBA and NBA players who are lending their voices to this effort,"* said **Abenicio Rael**. *"Programs like Scholars Unlimited exist because we know that too many children face barriers to academic success, including limited access to books and enrichment opportunities outside of school. When respected athletes use their platforms to champion reading, it sends a powerful message to young people and helps bring attention to an issue that affects communities across Colorado and throughout the country."*

The Denver activations will feature appearances by Denver sports legends **Fat Lever, Calvin Natt, Eddie Hughes, Michael Taylor**, Denver Nuggets announcer **Kyle Speller**, and Denver Nuggets mascot **Rocky** (June 30 pending confirmation).

The events also serve as the Denver kickoff of Darling's national **30 for 30 Campaign**, celebrating the WNBA's 30th season and her former jersey number 30 by bringing literacy resources and inspiration to 30 communities nationwide.

"Our goal is simple," Darling added. "Put books in children's hands, connect them with people who believe in them, and remind them that their future is worth investing in."

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Event Details

June 30, 2026

Scholars Unlimited at Roberts Elementary School
2100 N. Alcorn Way
Denver, CO 80238
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

July 2, 2026

YMCA Swansea
Denver, Colorado
10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

About Scholars Unlimited

Scholars Unlimited provides high-quality out-of-school-time academic enrichment opportunities that help students strengthen literacy skills, build confidence, and achieve academic success.

About Reading Is My Game

Reading Is My Game is a national literacy initiative led by retired WNBA legend Helen Darling in partnership with Read Across America. Through school visits, community activations, athlete ambassadors, book giveaways, and interactive literacy experiences, the initiative helps students build confidence as readers while developing the skills needed to succeed in school and life.