

# Local team shooting for the stars

By W.G. Ramirez  
Sentinel-Voice

The emergence of Chicago's Farragut Academy product Kevin Gamett, the fifth player taken in the 1995 NBA Draft, is sure to motivate more prep all-stars across the country.

With the 22nd annual Nike National Prep Basketball Championships and adidas' The Big Time taking place throughout this week, top high school players have been strutting their stuff for college coaches.

Some may even have the pros in mind.

Players such as: Tim Thomas, of Paterson, New Jersey; Kobe Bryant, of Lower Merion, Pennsylvania; Michael Bibby, of Phoenix; and, Ronnie Fields, of Chicago, all have big dreams of furthering their career on the court. And probably will.

For a pair of local entries in the Nike tourney — the Las Vegas Stars and Heat — "the exposure thing" hasn't come easy. Yet.

However, a certain 6-8 senior named Ra'oof Sadat could change things for everybody by the week's end.

"It's a great deal for all of our players," said Stars coach Al La Rocque, who coaches Sadat at Durango High School.

"A lot of coaches come to see Ra'oof, he's been highly recruited but only one school can get him... What happens is, Ra'oof brings coaches in and then other coaches see other players and that's why we really like to have a player of his caliber."

It was that caliber that led La Rocque's Trailblazers past Green Valley and Rancho in last

year's state tournament, en route to the Nevada crown.

"It's good having Ra'oof on the team because he brings out the coaches and then we can also show up and play as well as he does," said Bishop Gorman's David Sawyer.

"I know that these guys are just as talented as me," said Sadat. "This is good exposure for them and some players haven't had the opportunities to go to certain camps and be recognized and I think this a great thing for a team."

Sadat's soft-spoken nature is not apparent underneath the basket, where he usually gets the best of anyone that attempts to post him up. Though, his performance has been quiet through the first five days of the tourney.

Aaron Henderson, of

Cheyenne, has actually been the story for Las Vegas. The prolific scorer led the Stars with 19 points Wednesday night, in the opening round of the elimination tournament.

The Stars toppled Albany, New York 88-84 to advance to the second round Friday against Bloomington (IN) AAU.

"I try to do more than scoring," said Henderson. "It's fun getting college exposure and meeting new people while representing Vegas."

One thing La Rocque stressed about his summer team, is that they "don't even discuss winning and losing."

Instead, there are three goals set at the start of the summer circuit.

"Our number one goal is to present a product that will allow the kids to get some exposure," La Rocque said. "That's why we try to play tough man-to-man defense and as a reward for playing tough defense, we give the youngsters offensive freedom."

The Stars don't have a real offensive structure in which to run a lot of plays, however, the freedom gives the players a shot at displaying their skills for any

college coaches in attendance.

"Our number two goal is to represent our city and our Nike league to the best of our capability. And number three we want it to be a fun experience for the youngsters."

Prior to this week's tournament, the Stars spent a week in California for Nike's Great Western Shootout, where they finished third.

"A lot of people said it was the championship game, when we got beat 82-79 in the semi-finals (to eventual champion Oregon)," said La Rocque.

"That game motivated us a lot, it let us know that we can play with anyone," said Henderson.

Nike Oregon is also participating in this week's Nike tourney.

"We're really fun to watch," La Rocque said. "The kids really play hard in the Las Vegas tradition. ... This is probably a more emotional group than we've had. The kids are really excited about playing, they're excited about each other."

"We think we have a real special team this year and we hope we live up to those expectations."

According to Sadat, Sawyer

and Henderson, much of the excitement stems from a Cimarron-Memorial duo — Steve Marks and Ike Olekaibe.

"It's the Cimarron brothers," said Sadat. "It's that Cimarron Spartan-type of mentality. They just jump out and they get crazy and they just get us going. Once they start acting crazy, that makes us act crazy."

During the regular season, Durango, Cimarron, Cheyenne and Gorman created quite a rivalry, and none of the players have forgotten about it.

"There is a lot of trash talking going on, on the road," said Sawyer. "But it's all good and fun."

Another thing the Stars have learned, is about each other's tendencies. Something that may come in handy next season.

"Ra'oof likes to slash and take far out jumpshots and David likes to try and pound and dunk on you," said Henderson. "There is gonna be a real battle next year."

According to Sawyer, "Aaron often spots up in the corner and it's money every time. Ra'oof, he's a slasher and he likes to pound inside on smaller guys like me. But that's not gonna happen during the season."

## Dog Catchers put family back into team sports



By Victor S. Ingram  
Sentinel-Voice

Omar Harris Womack got an astounding base hit.

The 7-year-old youth recently played in a mid-season T-Ball baseball game and bar-b-que sponsored by the Dog Catchers, a group that strives to provide youths with sports teams based on fun competition.

Henry "Hen Hen" Thoms organized the group several years ago and now participates in youth football, basketball, and baseball.

This particular evening's event placed two dogcatcher teams — The Dog Catchers, ages 7 and up, and Little Puppies, ages 5-7 — against each other in an exhibition.

The older youths clobbered their younger, less-experienced sister team. At last count the score was 24-4 in favor of the Dog Catchers. Nonetheless, fun is the emphasis.

"They learn how to love each other all over again and get along with each other," says Thoms.

Parents and other family members participate as volunteer coaches, team boosters, or any place their services are required.

"The Dog Catchers is based on a family organization," says Thoms.

Hen Hen denounces the term "volunteer" and prefers to call his valued help family. Family is indeed the attitude gathered from the festivities.

Some family members keep busy by preparing the evening's bar-b-que for over 100 persons,

while others provide the cheering section — the essential encouragement — for the smaller members of the extended family. Family coaches instruct youngsters on the proper hitting and fielding techniques.

Family coach Matthew Young enjoys the time he spends providing for the development of youths. Some weeks Young expects to practice 3-4 times with his Little Puppies squad.

"It's something I do for the community," says Young, who jumped at the opportunity to help when approached by Thoms. "We didn't have programs like this when I was a kid."

Four-year-old Keenan Sanders echoes Young's appreciation for the Dog Catchers. Sanders, the youngest member of the Dog Catchers, has a unique strategy to approaching T-Ball. "I hit the ball and I run," he says.

Five-year-old Jarren Shelton likes to be in the action as well, stating "If I couldn't play, I'd be sitting in the dugout and be mad."

Family mother Jackie Sanders glows when she talks about the Dog Catchers. The mother of three devotes nearly 3-4 days per week to the kids. Sanders comes fully-equipped by keeping a T-Ball stand in her car for those unanticipated emergencies.

"I help the coaches and see to it that they get the things that they need," she says. "I like children so that's all the satisfaction I need. A lot of these kids would not have anything else to do except hang out."

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