

PROTEST

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up when the game was three hours away from the hotel," said Cochran.

"LaRocque called me from San Diego," continued Chas Chocranel, "crying and carrying on, begging me to let Son stay on the team. I told him I'd make a final decision after Son got back."

Gordan and Cochran returned home the next day, a trip arranged by the Gordan family. Both families then began to work separately to resolve the matter writing letters to the principal, Dr. Coles, and speaking to school officials. LaDonna Gordan also held a

meeting in her home inviting Cochran and other parents from the team to discuss the matter.

In his letter to Dr. Coles dated Jan. 2, 1995, Chas Cochran described several incidents that during which he felt LaRocque made inappropriate comments. The first one discussed occurred right after the trip.

Said Cochran, "Mr. Coles on December 26th and 30th of 1994 we were told by two groups of parents that our son was failing two of his courses. The news was not as startling as how we found it out."

Reportedly, two separate families told him something to the effect that their children would

be getting more playing time, because the coach told them that Son Cochran would be academically ineligible by January, a charge LaRocque vehemently denies.

"I don't discuss other kid's business with other kid's parents," said LaRocque.

According to Cochran's letter and the Gordan family, however, LaDonna and Gary Gordon approached Cochran. They said they were told "their son's time would increase because our son would not be eligible for sports participation."

There were also allegations in the letter that LaRocque made a blatantly racist statement in a separate incident in front of players.

During a spring league game with Bonanza, he was quoted saying,

"Where did all these black kids (on Bonanza's team) come from. Don't worry, Bonanza won't have 'em when the season starts, because they'll all be ineligible."

In a separate letter to Superintendent Brian Cram dated Nov. 19, 1995, LaDonna Gordan also quoted him making that statement.

LaRocque counters that not only did he not make the statement, but the players misrepresented what he said.

Miscommunication to parents and misleading statements made to players were

two of the issues that came out of that January parent's meeting. Both topics were later discussed with Dr. Coles, and ultimately, LaRocque was given a reprimand.

"That was a slap on the wrist," said LaDonna Gordan. "If that had been a black man there would have been no question. He would have been fired."

Keenan's problems were just starting.

"He played a lot during his sophomore year in Varsity," said LaDonna, "but by the end of last season he wasn't playing at all."

"When I didn't get to play anymore was after the incident," confirmed Keenan.

Following the incident, the entire team went through a series of changes. Son Cochran quit the team. A caucasian, who asked not to be identified, was later removed from the team and more.

Near season's end there were only nine players left on the team, according to Otis Alexander.

Alexander, who was also cut this season, played for Durango during the postseason. He claims that he was moved up from the JV squad strictly to play during the postseason. He played long enough to letter for the team and was promptly cut this year by LaRocque.

"Last year (LaRocque) said, 'I know that you are better than

some of the players on this team, but I have to keep them here for particular reasons,' said Alexander. "This year he said, 'I have to take the best 12 out of the school, I feel you weren't among the best 12. It was like he was using me.'"

That was said Nov. 15.

Otis' mom, Janice, says that she went in to speak to the Athletic Director Larry McKay and Principal Coles on Nov. 19.

"I went over there and talked with the principal and the athletic director and they told me that I could talk to (LaRocque), and I didn't want to. I left and went to work. I met with them at like 6:00 that morning," said Janice.

According to Otis by 12:00 LaRocque heard about what happened and called him into his office.

"He said, 'I thought we had an understanding about this, and we talked about it. But then I heard from Mr. McKay that your

mom was at the school. If your mom wants to talk to me, then she can come in after 1:00 or after school.'

'He said,' Otis continued, 'You weren't one of the top 12, and I didn't want to pick you up. Coach Graham said to me that you didn't even start for JV for half of the season, why would I put you on Varsity.'

Otis commented that up until this year, he didn't have a problem with LaRocque, but now he believes the coach was just playing games with him. LaDonna Gordon would likely agree.

She summed up why she feels the need for a protest like this: "People like LaRocque shouldn't be allowed to work with kids. He plays games with their minds, and that's not right."

This ends part one of our two-part look at the Durango High School Mens Varsity Basketball Program.

GATES

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going on," said Gates. "The Las Vegas company is a separate company from the Kansas City company. We don't know what's going on back there. You really need to talk to George."

There's only one problem. George, Arzelia's brother, isn't talking. The Sentinel-Voice was unable to reach him for comment Tuesday. So far the only official word appears to be the "information line" set up to answer calls. This was a part of the recorded message heard by callers on Tuesday:

"Due to a business emergency the restaurant and lounge will be closed until further notice. If you need to speak with us, we welcome you to tell us your name and number and any detailed message. We're returning all phone calls, if you leave your telephone number. Again we want to let you know the restaurant will be closed this week."

"If you have catering or parties scheduled," the information line continued, "the catering director will call you personally. We'll contact you as soon as possible provided you leave your phone number and best time to reach you."



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