

Basketball blooms in desert with former NBA player

By Bob Baum

WHITERIVER, Ariz. (AP)—At Alchesay High School, in the heart of the Apache Indian Reservation near Arizona's eastern edge, the new assistant basketball coach towers over the youngsters he teaches.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has come to these sheer rock cliffs and scrub pine-covered hills to coach boys who are only vaguely aware that he once dominated the game, that he scored more points than anyone in NBA history.

They are boys whose future seems as bleak as the barren landscape on the four-hour drive from Phoenix, and they are boys who love basketball.

Abdul-Jabbar, who volunteered for the job for a five-month salary of \$1, said he hopes to use the game to show his players there is a way to escape the hopelessness that seems to surround them.

"If you go to any barrio or inner-city ghetto or even Appalachia, you find some of the same problems that you find here — lack of economic opportunity, unemployment, poverty," he said. "They have very negative impacts on kids."

"Hopefully, we will be able to change some of that and show them a way to get beyond those circumstances. If I can do it, coming from Harlem, the kids here can do it also. It's not impossible. It's not beyond there. I think by being here I am living proof that it can be done."

Behind most of the simple, often run-down houses across the reservation, there is a

Searches

(Continued from Page 4) matters are confidential. She said she was unfamiliar with the incident involving the pregnant Nigerian passenger.

The Customs Service investigation follows a separate U.S. Treasury Department investigation launched earlier this year into charges that Customs drug searches discriminate against Black travelers.

This targeting of Blacks has produced both criticisms from U.S. senators and a number of lawsuits.

Customs Service officials say persons traveling from major drug trafficking countries like Nigeria and Jamaica are legitimate targets for intensive searches.

Yet major drug dealers use "virtually every country in the world" and employ couriers of "diverse nationalities" according to the U.S. State Department's latest report on international drug trafficking.

Blacks comprise a small percentage of the 450 million people passing annually through the 301 U.S. air, sea and land entry ports manned by Customs personnel.

But black women comprised 45 percent of the 104 strip searches conducted by Customs at Chicago's O'Hare Airport last year according to records obtained by Sen. Richard Durbin, D-



KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR

makeshift backboard and basket.

Alchesay, named for an Apache chief who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, has a long history of basketball success. The gymnasium is a state-of-the-art jewel that contrasts sharply with its depressed surroundings.

Last year, the Falcons finished a surprising

Ill., who calls the targeting of black women "outrageous."

"We have hired an independent contractor to look at how passengers are selected and how passengers are processed to determine if we are treating passengers appropriately," Batts said.

She emphasized that Customs is not ignoring complaints of Black employees. A few years ago, Batts noted that their complaints resulted in Customs establishing diversity training for its supervisors.

However, Black employees question the effectiveness of that diversity training, developed in part by the same contractor

conducting the current Customs investigation.

White supervisors are accused of still sanctioning subordinates who target Blacks for searches and supervisors who participate in job discrimination. And black employees' charge that diversity training has not changed abusive attitudes in Atlanta and other cities.

The Customs unit in Atlanta that targets travelers for intensive searches is all White. Earlier this year a White inspector in Atlanta targeted a top Black customs special agent for an intensive search. Inspectors did not search the White subordinates traveling with this top black agent.

Dilemmas

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seemingly endlessly grasping for sex, cash and other creature comforts.

Some young Blacks react by drifting into social withdrawal. Others become true menaces to society and prey on their own communities. Many mainstream Black leaders have no answers to their plight.

The economic, social, political and generational schisms among many African-Americans are broad. Mainstream Black leaders, "gangsta" rappers, hip-hop icons and Black conservatives are in an intense hunt to find workable programs and strategies to deal with the crippling internal crisis of Blacks, young and old, rich and poor. Whoever can find them, still will not or cannot answer the question, "Who speaks for the Negro?"

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of "The Crisis in Black and Black."

second in the state in their first year at Class 3A.

"We play in the gravel. We play in the dirt," 16-year-old Tony Parker said. "We play everywhere."

Abdul-Jabbar first came to this part of the country in 1995 while researching the Buffalo Soldiers, the black cavalry of the old West, for his book "Black Profiles in Courage." He made friends, and when he suggested that he wanted to get into coaching, they suggested he serve as an assistant on the reservation.

Moved by Gen. Colin Powell's call for volunteerism, Abdul-Jabbar decided he wanted to move to the White Mountains for a winter, chronicling his fledgling coaching effort in a journal he hopes to turn into a book.

Head coach Raul Mendoza gave his approval. Mendoza said he wasn't worried about the retired superstar's run-ins with the law — Abdul-Jabbar paid a civil fine in Canada last spring after surrendering a small amount of marijuana to officers at the Toronto airport, and reached a settlement after being charged with attacking a man during a traffic dispute in Los Angeles.

"It won't concern me," Mendoza said. "We've all had problems. I think it's something that if we don't do it again, then we learn from it."

Abdul-Jabbar has been on the job for two months. A whistle dangling from his neck, he is an animated leader during practice, shouting encouragement and criticism.

"No, no, no," he said, waving his long arms to interrupt a particularly sloppy fast-break drill. "I yelled at you — no I didn't yell — I nagged at you yesterday that protecting

the basketball is the most important thing you will do on the court. The basketball is precious!"

The players stand dead still as this 7-foot, 2-inch man speaks.

"He's taught everybody to listen a lot better," Parker said, "to play at their own ability and not try to do too much. Everybody is listening right now."

Abdul-Jabbar even joined in the wind sprints, and did about as well as a 51-year-old could be expected to do.

"That was a near-death experience," he said. "I still can run pretty fast, but definitely not as long. I lasted about 35 seconds, and then they were ready to call the paramedics."

Alchesay serves the entire vast reservation. Some of the 700 students are bused as far as 60 miles. Abdul-Jabbar, who says he has Indian blood on both sides of his family, said the students remind him of the black youngsters he grew up with in New York City.

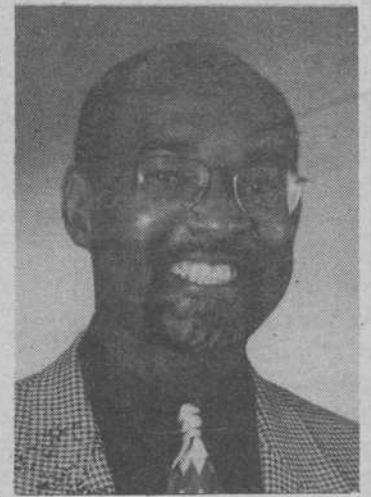
"A lot of Native Americans have a contempt for education because it comes from the dominant culture, and anyone seen embracing education is seen as selling out," Abdul-Jabbar said. "That does not have to be the case. Knowledge is power."

Abdul-Jabbar has rented a house in nearby Pinetop. He will stay through March.

"I'm not looking to get an NBA player out of all of this," he said. "I'm hoping that we get an accountant or a lawyer or a doctor or an engineer who understands from playing this season that he can succeed, and bring those skills back here to Whiteriver. If we can get that done, we've done a great job."

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