

SPORTS

Catholic sports league facing racial tensions

CHICAGO (AP) — The Rev. Michael Pfleger believes the controversy over adding his predominantly black parish to a mostly white athletic league reaches back more than 30 years, to when St. Sabina changed from an Irish-American stronghold.

"I've gotten phone calls from people who said they (blacks) ran us out of St. Sabina and they're not going to run us out of St. Whatever now," Pfleger said.

The long wrangle over St. Sabina joining the Southside Catholic Conference athletic league came to a head last Thursday when conference members voted on a tentative agreement.

The controversy erupted in May when the intramural league, made up of 21 parishes from the city and its suburbs, voted to deny St. Sabina membership.

League officials said some members were worried about the safety of players, coaches and parents when they traveled to St. Sabina for games. St. Sabina officials countered racism was behind the vote.

Conference members

voted in June to admit St. Sabina, but some coaches threatened to forfeit games played there. Pfleger responded by withdrawing St. Sabina from the league.

The back-and-forth has caught the attention of Chicago's Cardinal Francis George, who has stepped in to support St. Sabina.

Mary Pattillo, an associate professor of sociology and African-American studies at Northwestern University, said the St. Sabina debate illustrates segregation patterns and "a racist fear of going into black neighborhoods."

Graffiti recently spray painted on one of the league's churches read: "It's realism, not racism." And some agree that parents' safety fears aren't unfounded.

The police district that includes St. Sabina had the fifth-highest number of violent and property crimes of the city's 25 districts during the first six months of this year, police statistics show. But crime in the district is down more than 8 percent from the same time last year, police say.

Some families who were part of the St. Sabina exodus during the 1960s eventually settled in parishes that now are part of the athletic league, said Sister Anita Baird, director of the Office for Racial Justice in the Archdiocese of Chicago. She said she has gotten about half a dozen letters from people that mentioned their parents leaving St. Sabina's neighborhood.

"A lot of the people are still living with the hurt and the pain and the disappointment ... that surrounded changing communities in the '50s and the '60s," she said.

The compromise agreement up for a vote sets policies for dealing with intentional forfeitures, possible racial taunts and safety concerns.

"I don't believe anybody's concerns have gone away, but I think we are attempting to address everyone's concerns and worries in a manner that would be fair and equitable to all," league chairman Hank Lenzen said.

The league sponsors tackle football, basketball, soccer, volleyball and golf for 5,000



AWARD ON PAR

Tiger Woods Foundation Directors' Board Member Deane Buchanan, center, and golf chairman Jerry Lindsay, right, presents longtime local entrepreneur Louis Conner, with the first-place award during the golf tournament of last week's Urban Chamber of Commerce gaming conference.

Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

students in grades five through eight. A girl's basketball game at St. Sabina on opening day, Aug. 25, would be the first test of the agreement.

Julia Kennedy and her sister Kathleen Heenan, whose family moved from the St. Sabina neighborhood in the late 1960s when they were young girls, welcome St.

Sabina to the league.

"This is Chicago, we should play with everybody," said Kennedy, whose two young sons play soccer for St. Christina School, a league school.

But St. Christina parents who don't agree shouldn't be labeled as racists, she said. "They're concerned about their children; they're good

people," she added.

Heenan, Kennedy's older sister, said people shouldn't be forced to go to games at St. Sabina.

"Those with open hearts will ... come back and report it was good," Heenan said. After that, she said, more people will follow.

"You can't demand change in people's hearts."

Kobe Bryant, wife not buying house

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Kobe Bryant and his wife have decided not to buy a \$13.5 million home in an exclusive gated community in Orange County.

The Los Angeles Lakers guard's offer has fallen out of escrow because of "business issues and privacy concerns," a spokeswoman said Tuesday.

"Kobe and his wife decided to walk away," said Alyson Sadofsky of SFX Basketball Group, Bryant's marketing and management company.

The 16,000-square-foot Coto de Caza home sits on 9.5 acres and includes waterslides, man-made caves and a replica of a pirate ship. The house, which has 10 bed-

room suites, featured a theater, game room and two four-car garages.

Former NFL quarterback Jim Everett and San Jose Sharks hockey forward Teemu Selanne also live in the neighborhood.

"This is a community where people really just want to stay to themselves," said Barry Klein, who lives in nearby Los Ranchos Estates.

"Jim Everett rides by on a horse and people don't run up to him and ask him for autographs."

Bryant, 22, makes \$11.8 million a season and is in the second year of a \$70.8 million, six-year contract extension with the NBA champion Lakers.

Shoeless Joe's bat auctioned

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — The bat that "Shoeless" Joe Jackson used throughout his major league career fetched \$577,610 in an Internet auction in what is believed to be the highest ever paid for a bat.

The winning bid was submitted by Rob Mitchell, who owns a marketing company in Pottstown, Pa. For now, he plans to display the bat, named "Black Betsy," in his company's offices.

"I was shocked for what the bat went for," Mitchell said. "I think the bat's worth

somewhere between \$1.7 million and \$4 million. I think if it's not the best, it's in the top five best buys ever recorded in the memorabilia industry - baseball or any other sport."

The 10-day eBay auction attracted only two bidders - one of whom did not enter until the final five minutes.

A few other people had put down the \$25,000 deposit required for making a bid on the bat but never placed an offer, said Kevin Hammond, chief executive of consignment company Real Legends

Inc.

Before the auction began, Hammond suggested that Black Betsy could challenge the record \$3.05 million a collector paid for Mark McGwire's 70th home run ball from the 1998 season. But he said he was not disappointed with the final price, \$525,100, plus a 10 percent buyer's premium.

The seller was Lester Erwin of Easley, S.C., who kept the bat on a bookcase for decades after inheriting it from Jackson's widow in 1959.

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