

SPORTS

Black, white kids in Chicago hoop together

CHICAGO (AP) - The boys of the Southside Catholic Conference played their first games since a racial controversy erupted earlier this year, despite lingering tensions that persist among parents.

On the court, there was no hint of the controversy that preceded the games surrounding the admittance of a predominantly black school into the mostly white league.

But in the bleachers Saturday, parents, administrators and some players said a few basketball games won't fix the attitudes that nearly kept St. Sabina parish from joining the league.

"The issues that brought it on in the first place still need to be resolved," said Renee Jordan, a St. Sabina mother who almost held her son off the fifth-grade team because of the bickering.

The racial tensions date back to the 1960s, when "white flight" to the suburbs started transforming St. Sabina from an Irish-American parish to a black one.

When St. Sabina petitioned for inclusion in the 21-parish intramural league this year, its pastor, the Rev. Michael Pfleger, said he got angry calls saying blacks "ran us out of St. Sabina."

Conference members in May voted to deny the school entry, saying they feared for the safety of players, coaches and families who would travel to St. Sabina's largely middle-class neighborhood.

The conference reversed that vote in June, but some coaches said they would forfeit



St. Sabina academy fans line the far walls while several seats remain empty for the visiting St. Barnabas team during St. Sabina's first Southside Catholic Conference home games Dec. 1 in Chicago. Conference members in May voted to deny St. Sabina entry into the conference, saying they feared for the safety of players, coaches and families who would travel to St. Sabina's middle class neighborhood. The conference reversed that vote in June.

games at St. Sabina and the school waffled on whether it wanted to be part of a league without a no-forfeits rule.

The school eventually opted to play and about 300 people, mostly black, watched the games Saturday.

Jordan said she only let her son play after talking to him and learning that he was nei-

ther intimidated nor angry.

When game time came, his excitement told her she had made the right decision. "I could have dropped him off last night and he would have been just fine sitting here until it started," Jordan said.

Conference chairman Michael Phelan said the situation around the league remains tense,

but he's not sure what more the conference can do.

"What we are is a parochial athletic league," he said. "What we can do is play the games. We can't solve society's problems. We might be able to do something, but we sure as hell can't solve the problems."

Saturday's games were exactly as Margie Harrington envisioned they would be. They were high-energy, low-scoring contests - typical of games played by youngsters from grades five to eight.

"I was for it from the beginning," said the white mother from visiting squad St. Alexander. "If kids want to play, why deny your kids?"

The fifth-graders started the action with a 20-15 win, and St. Sabina went on to take three out of four.

"It feels good. I'm just happy to be able to play," said Jordan's 11-year-old son, Jordan Sodipo, after winning the first game.

"Everything was good," he said. "The players showed sportsmanship."

Now St. Sabina hopes to turn sportsmanship into fellowship.

"I would like to see the kids come together with more than just the basketball," St. Sabina athletic director Chris Mallette said. "It's one thing to say, 'I play with black people,' or, 'I know black people at work.' It's another to actually have a relationship."

The league has about 5,000 students in grades five through eight who play basketball and golf, among other sports.

Tyson skips fisticuffs with Mercer to challenge Lewis

NEW YORK (AP) - Mike Tyson called off his January fight against Ray Mercer so he can challenge heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis in April.

"This is a business, and I'm sure Ray understands why I need to take Lennox out now," Tyson said in statement Friday.

"Lennox made me an offer than I could not refuse, and it is time to give the people what they want."

Shelly Finkel, Tyson's adviser, said, "It was worthwhile to go directly to Lewis."

As the No. 1 contender, Tyson is in position for the WBC's mandatory challenge against Lewis, who regained the WBC and IBF titles by knocking out Hasim Rahman in the fourth round of a rematch Nov. 17 at Las Vegas.

On Tuesday, Lewis sued in U.S. District Court in New York to have Tyson drop the Mercer fight or have the WBC remove him from the mandatory challenger's position.

"The heavyweight championship is my destiny, and I need my belts on my waist



MIKE TYSON



LENNOX LEWIS

again," Tyson said. "So keep taking those acting lessons, Lennox, because your next role will be playing Cinderella, and I am going to break your little glass chin."

Lewis' only two losses were on one-punch knockouts - by Oliver McCall in 1994, and by Rahman last April 22.

Tyson stopped Brian Nielsen after six rounds Oct. 13 at Copenhagen, his first fight since Andrew Golota quit after two rounds Oct. 20, 2000.

The Jan. 19 Mercer fight was to have been telecast by

Showtime, which had no comment about the cancellation.

The cancellation indicates that Showtime, which has a deal with Tyson, and HBO, which has a contract with Lewis, are close to agreeing on what would be a major pay-per-view fight.

They have had many meetings.

"I'm hopeful," Finkel said. "It's not done yet."

The career clocking is running down for both Tyson and Lewis. Tyson will be 36 on June 30. Lewis, of Britain, turned 36 on Sept. 2.

Courtesy

OLDSMOBILE • ISUZU • KIA • MAZDA
5800 W. Sahara • 338-5900

(One Block East of Jones)

- **New In Town**
- **Divorced**
- **Bankruptcy**
- **Charge Offs**
- **Repos**



Lawrence Ennis

NO PROBLEM! 338-5900

CALL ME TO MAKE BUYING A CAR AND RE-ESTABLISHING YOUR CREDIT EASY!

99% Approval Rate on 2nd Chance Programs

Over 600 cars to choose from