

CHICAGO

SUN-TIMES

HISPANIC CPS
SCHOOLS' BUDGETS
CUT TWICE THE RATE
OF WHITE ONES

LAUREN FITZPATRICK REPORTS, PAGE 4

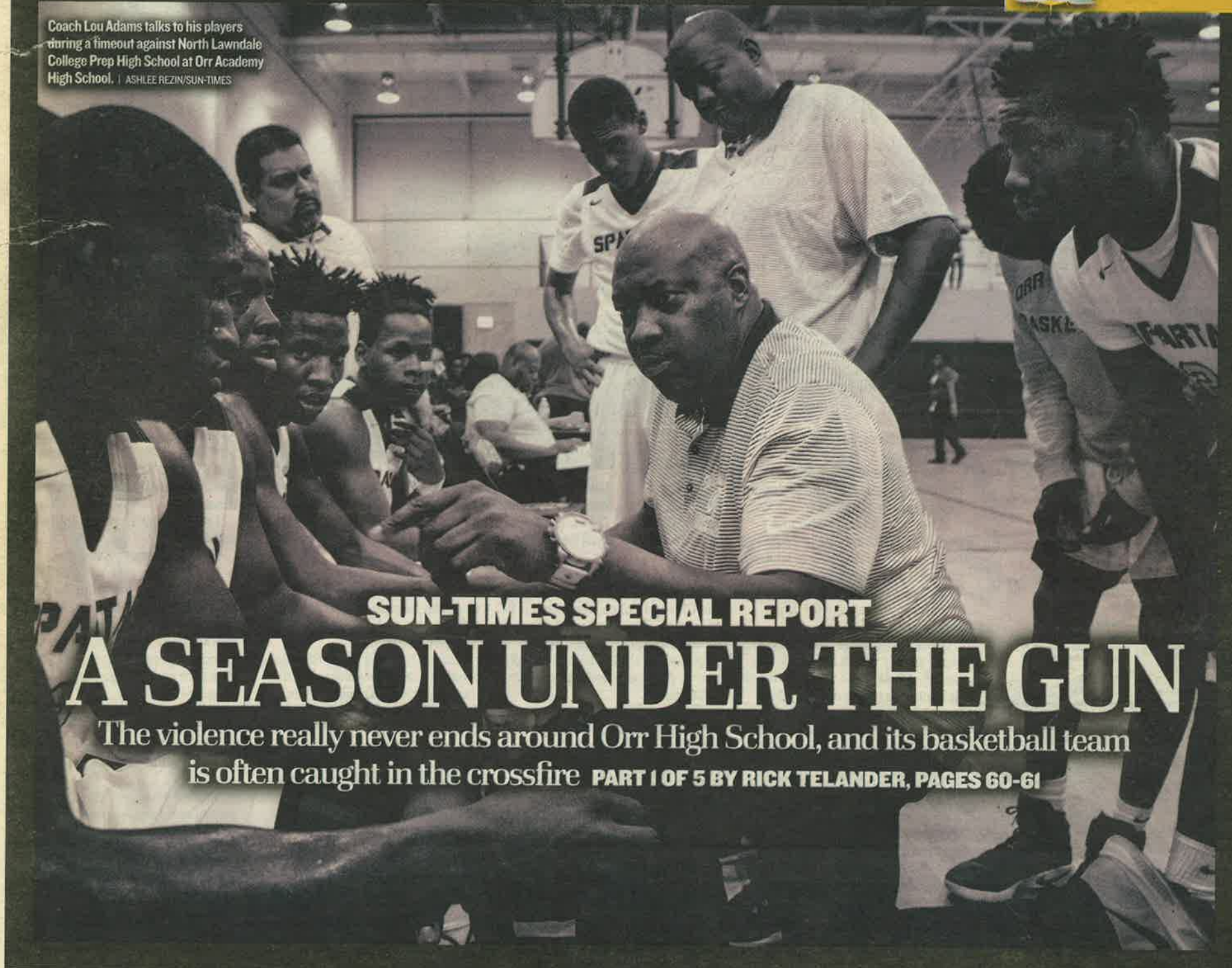


TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2017 | \$1 CITY/BURBS \$2 ELSEWHERE | LATE SPORTS FINAL



65° 44° GIGABYTE

Coach Lou Adams talks to his players during a timeout against North Lawndale College Prep High School at Orr Academy High School. | ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES



SUN-TIMES SPECIAL REPORT

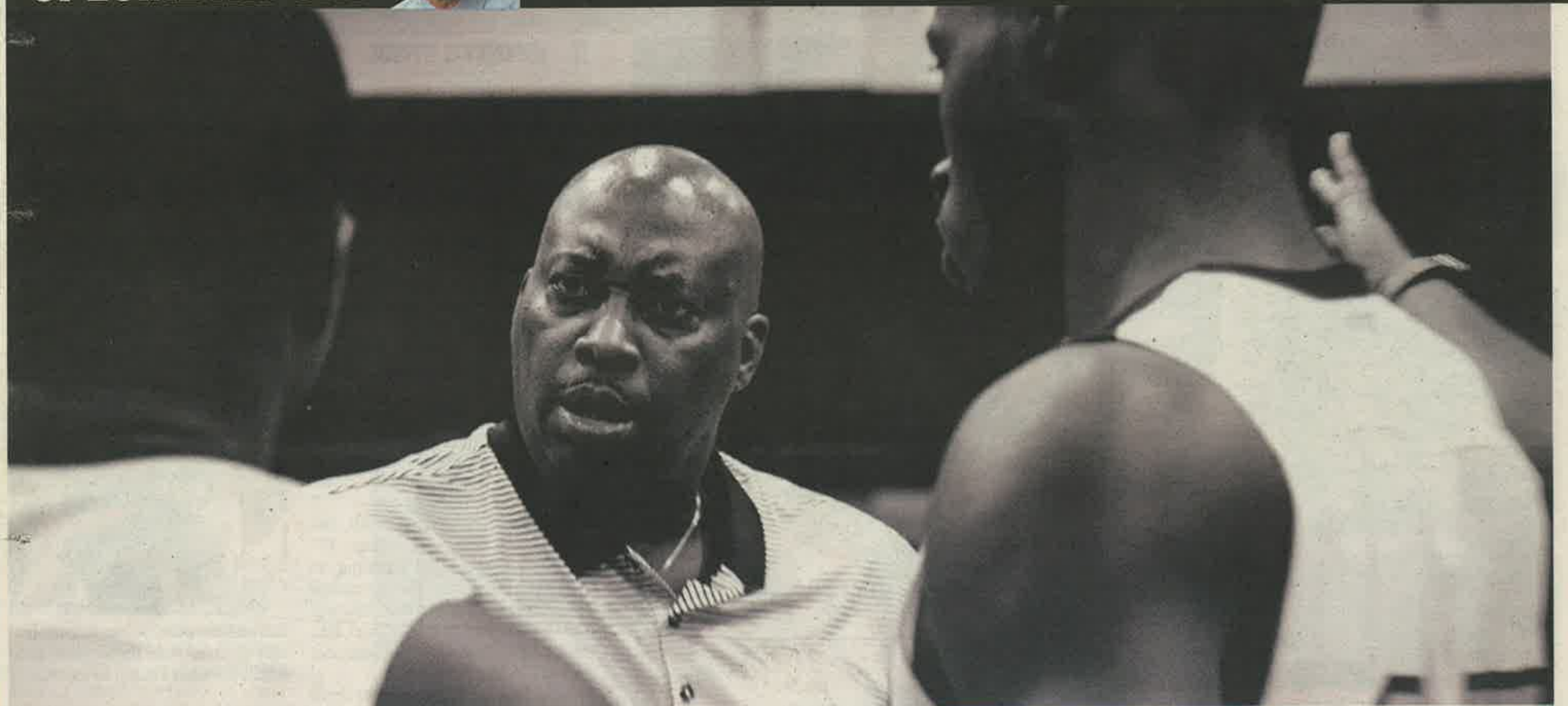
A SEASON UNDER THE GUN

The violence really never ends around Orr High School, and its basketball team is often caught in the crossfire **PART 1 OF 5 BY RICK TELANDER, PAGES 60-61**

SPECIAL REPORT



FIRST OF FIVE PARTS BY RICK TELANDER



Lou Adams, Orr's boys basketball coach and assistant dean of students, talks to his players during a timeout in a victory against Westinghouse last month. "I got a year in me [here], if that," he says. | ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES

AT ORR, BASKETBALL AND THE BLEEDING OF A U.S. CITY

"I was born in Chicago/In nineteen-and-forty-one.

Well, my father told me, 'Son/You'd better get a gun.'"

— "Born in Chicago" by Nick Gravenites

How long would you last? As a teen, maybe early 20s, a young man of color, here on the West Side?

That is, stay out of jail. Avoid violence. Learn. Have a future. Remain alive.

Who knows? Who knows at all?

I ask myself those questions often as I visit Orr Academy High School, which sits like a low, beige box on



the southwest corner of Chicago Avenue and Pulaski Road.

To place the school, it is helpful to think of it as 40 blocks west of State Street and eight blocks north of Madison Street. On clear days outside Orr, the John Hancock Center looms to the east like a not-too-distant monolith in a foreign world.

A grand Chicago is there where the sky meets the water; the place

where the sun rises. But if you talk to policemen or teachers from the West Side, you will find that they know adolescents from those neighborhoods who have never been downtown, never seen the lake.

It's a fitting metaphor — this self-imposed, narrow encampment — for the killings that have shocked the world yet harm almost no one in the white community, in the suburbs, or in Chicago's famous and well-protected tourist and shopping areas.

And if you want a Ground Zero in Chicago's world of violence, especially as it influences and affects a public educational institution, you can't go wrong with Orr. Though



Orr Academy High School, located at Chicago and Pulaski. | ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES

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it has only about 400 students these days, the school is surrounded by the decay and danger that showcase the bleeding of an American city to much of the civilized world.

Lou Adams is the Orr boys basketball coach and also the assistant dean of students. That means he's a campus peacekeeper and glorified security agent. Over 6 feet tall, solidly built, with a shaved head, Adams is a no-nonsense, imposing force at the school.

On this early December afternoon just before the start of the hoops season, Adams excuses himself for a moment to break up a budding skirmish near the front door. Two girls are going at it, with a lot of screaming, and gawkers are all around. Adams puts his arm around one of the girls, drags her away, soothes her, and the rest of the tumult swirls outside, onto the sidewalk, where police and Safe Passage workers patrol now that the school day is over.

"What was that?" I ask.

"Nothing," Adams says dismissively.

But girls' vendettas can be as bad as boys'. One is reminded of the 14-year-old girl who shot and killed 14-year-old Endia Martin and wounded a 16-year-old girl in 2014 on the South Side. The feud was over a boyfriend.

After another disturbance by a girl at the end of another school day, Adams will admit, with a sigh, when it comes to vehement and emotional confrontations, "Girls are worse."

Why?

"Because of social media."

Almost anything — from a robbery to a taunt on Facebook — can trigger a murderous reprisal by somebody with a gun in certain parts of Chicago. Two weeks earlier, a 16-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl were charged in the South Side shooting death of 15-year-old Javon Wilson over a pair of pants and some gym shoes. Wilson was the grandson of U.S. Rep. Danny Davis, who called the slaying "a manifestation of the tremendous urban crisis we are facing in Chicago."

Over Thanksgiving weekend, 58 people were shot and eight killed in Chicago, mostly on the South and West sides. Included were a 37-year-old man shot to death in the 3800 block of West Adams Street, just two blocks from an Orr player's home, and a 30-year-old man killed on West Harrison Street, about a half-mile from there. Also, in nearby Homan Square, police shot and killed a gunman who had just shot and killed one man and

At the end of practice, Adams is tired. He is always on his cellphone, texting students and parents, letting people know about detention, suspensions, mistakes, disturbances, dangers.

wounded another.

The violence really never ends around Orr. It just ebbs and flows, like a tide, immutable to the weak forces of a larger community that (a) doesn't know how to stop it; (b) doesn't care how to stop it; or (c) has distracting problems of its own. The dilemma of this moral and criminal crisis, which former Education Secretary Arne Duncan, now back in his hometown, calls "unconscionable," is that most of us can say, "Well, it doesn't touch me."

But even if the human carnage doesn't touch you, the secondary effect — like the

growing, how long can that hold out when no less than President Donald Trump tweets he'll "send in the Feds!" unless the "horrible carnage" ends.

But soldiers on the corners won't save the kids who have been traumatized. And they're legion.

"Post-traumatic stress is the right phrase," says Duncan, the former CEO of Chicago Public Schools who now serves as managing partner of Emerson Collective, a philanthropic social-justice group established by Steve Jobs' widow, Laurene



Sophomore Rayvond Turner, who has recovered at least physically from an ankle injury caused by a ricocheting bullet, gets fired up during a game against North Lawndale. | ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES

report of an AR-57 on a still night — does. According to a 2013 analysis, murders cost Chicago \$2.5 billion per year, about \$2,500 per household. Nobody thinks of the cost of prosecution, police, ambulances, medical staff, body bags and the like when a gang member is gunned down.

Nor do they think of the businesses that are harmed, the shopping that doesn't occur, the people — black, white, brown — who flee the city for another town, another state. Nor do most of us think of that vague thing: reputation. Travel to another country and tell someone you're from Chicago. Once, they'd pretend to have a machine gun and imitate Al Capone. Then Michael Jordan blessedly changed that. Now it's back to folks asking how dangerous the city is.

Though Chicago's tourism rate is still

Powell Jobs. "These kids are living in a war zone — the rate of death is higher than for our soldiers. They are children who've never been able to get out of survival mode."

On this day, Adams doesn't care about any of that. The team's first game is tomorrow, at the UIC Pavilion against a very good Miller Grove High School team from suburban Atlanta. The players change in the folded-up gym bleachers directly from school clothes into their rag-tag practice uniforms, which are basically anything they want to wear. Not one T-shirt or pair of shorts is the same.

"Let's go!" Adams roars, and drills begin.

One player, Rayvond Turner, is not officially back with the sophomore team, though he could be. He was shot in the lower ankle not long ago, and though the injury has mostly healed — bullet fragments are still within — his mind hasn't.

"The bullet ricocheted off the sidewalk and hit him between the two bones near his foot," explains sophomore coach Carlos Enriquez. "He's got a lot of anger. A lot of things he's working through."

Another player, 6-4 varsity anchor Dannie

Smith, whom Adams called "the most skilled player on the team," has his own issues. A month ago, his two closest friends, twins Edwin and Edward Bryant, former pals from Lincoln Park High School, where all three attended before transferring, were shot and killed in a drive-by near Old Town. Fifty-eight people were shot that weekend and 17 died.

Smith doesn't say much, nor does he show much emotion, but something is surely broken inside him. I asked him about the brothers' deaths, saying I was sorry for his loss.

"They were my two best friends," he says. "Edwin played football, and Edward was taller and played basketball. They both enrolled at Marshall after we all left Lincoln Park. Edward and I were always talking about playing each other this year, how much fun that was going to be."

He falls silent. I ask him how he's doing with it all.

"I'm OK," he says.

At the end of practice, Adams is tired. He is always on his cellphone, texting students and parents, letting people know about detention, suspensions, mistakes, disturbances, dangers.

"Man, I'd love to be able to just coach," he says wearily. "But I have to go to kids' homes. A lot are wards of the state. Some have real problems. But we have Orr grads around the country in college, at Northwestern, at DePaul. Believe me, it's the kid — it's not the school. It's the kid — it ain't the teacher."

In that regard, the coach echoes a bit of Trump's get-yourself-right-or-get-out-of-the-way harshness. But Adams, 49, should know. He grew up in Tunica, Mississippi, with no dad, an outhouse and little hope. Before he came north in 1990, Tunica County was the poorest county in the poorest state in the U.S. The Rev. Jesse Jackson called Tunica "America's Ethiopia."

"Man, I wanted out," says Adams. And now some of the frustration and soul-sapping angst of doing what he does in the big city is getting to him, as well. His son, Lou Adams Jr., is playing ball at Wyoming and doing nicely. But in April 2015, a good friend of his — former Marshall star Tim Triplett, 20 — was gunned down on the West Side, and the pain never goes away completely. "He was really upset," Lou Sr. said of his son back then.

The coach has a startling out plan: to work as a chef. "I'm a licensed chef already," he says with vigor. "I cooked for 1,000 people at a race-car event in North Carolina. I got a year in me, if that. I'm ready to move on. I did my job here."

But first, the season must begin.

Coming Wednesday: Day 2. Orr sits in the center of the storm.