

CHICAGO

SUN-TIMES



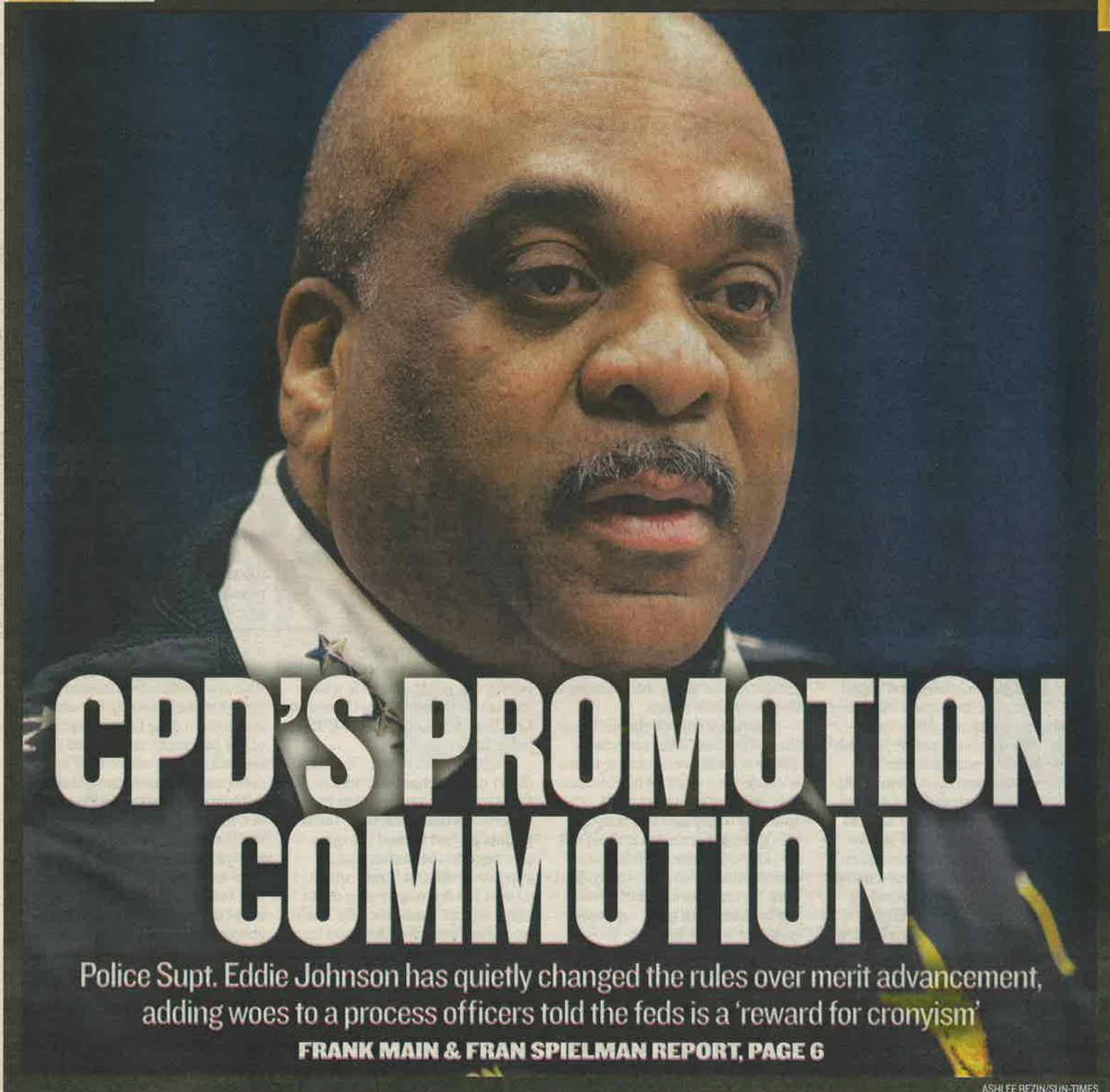
BULLS
DEAL
GIBSON,
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SPORTS



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2017 | \$1 CITY/BURBS \$2 ELSEWHERE | LATE SPORTS FINAL



52° 25° EGO



CPD'S PROMOTION COMMOTION

Police Supt. Eddie Johnson has quietly changed the rules over merit advancement, adding woes to a process officers told the feds is a 'reward for cronyism'

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A SEASON
UNDER THE GUN



ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES

HOOPS & HOPE AT ORR

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TRUMP TWEETS 'CHICAGO NEEDS HELP' AFTER 7 KILLED IN 1 DAY

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MISSING THE MARK: GIANGRECO SUSPENDED OVER TRUMP TWEET

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SPECIAL REPORT



FOURTH OF FIVE PARTS BY RICK TELANDER



Tyron Mosley, a 6-5 junior guard, is proud of his 3.4 grade-point average. ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES

A HOPE BASKETBALL LEADS TO BETTER THINGS

"Well, now rules are alright/If there's someone left to play the game."

— "Born in Chicago" by Nick Gravenites

Orr coach Lou Adams was suspended for part of the 2014-15 season for using two players who should not have played because of academic ineligibility or a failed residency requirement. The team's Red-West conference record was dropped from 7-3 to 0-10, and the Spartans were dropped to the White division for the 2015-16 season.

"I did wrong," Adams said. "I told my kids, 'You do wrong, you pay the price.'"

But he has a beef with some of the rules that don't seem to account for the



realities of living in a dangerous and racially segregated city.

"Chicago ain't built on no rules!" he said with vehemence. "Like I'm not gonna feed kids? Hell, yeah. I'm not gonna give them rides home? I see a kid on Madison, I'm not gonna pick him up? So he can get shot and killed? See a kid walking on Roosevelt, he has to go 25 blocks?"

Adams snorts in disgust. "Who made the rules? Somebody who went to Harvard! No rules for me."

I mention that Chicago samaritan Arne Duncan went to Harvard. Adams knows Duncan, knows his good work.

"Arne's a good dude," Adams said. But the reality at Orr is that the normal rules of society barely apply to the students. Life for them is part-Kafkaesque absurdity, part "The Hurt Locker" foreboding.

I have learned, for instance, not to ask players where they live but rather where they stay. Family situations are so unstable that camping out on a couch at an aunt's or grandma's house, or with anybody who will have you, is not uncommon.

"We have a mobility rate of 67 percent," principal Shanele Andrews said of Orr students. That means two-thirds will have a different address at the end of the



Wheelchair-bound gun-violence victims coach Shawn Harrington (left) and Jermaine Winfield were guests at an event honoring Jonathan Mills, a former North Lawndale star who was gunned down. Mills' mother, Flora White, is at right of the banner. | RICK TELANDER/SUN-TIMES

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school year than when they started. Chicago is the most segregated large city in the country, and Orr is an example of resultant segregated schooling, being 87 percent black and 13 percent Hispanic. It also has a terrible poverty rate, with 97.2 percent of the students categorized as low-income and qualifying for free meals.

Yet the resilience of many of the students is remarkable. This would include members of the basketball team.

Only two players — star forward Raekwon Drake and guard Brian Hernandez — believe they have a chance at the NBA some day. But all feel basketball can lead to college and something better than what they have.

Guard Alex Flute, who just turned 18, said he'd "love to be an athletic trainer."

Junior Tyron Mosley, 6-5 and maybe 160 pounds of pure athletic grace, has a 3.4 grade-point average and said he's proud of his academic achievements. Having taken geometry and Algebra I and II, he's set for trigonometry next year.

"I like problem solving," he said. "I'd like to be an architect. I like weird buildings. There's one in Oak Park, a house that looks like a spaceship. I love that."

But Flute spoke for many when he said he wants to get out of Chicago, no matter what. He also wants to save his younger sister, a junior-high basketball star.

"I worry so much about her. I don't want her in this environment," he said. "I'd like to be someplace warm, not too big, not too small. Like Miami, but a smaller Miami."

But for now, there is basketball to play on the West Side. On this day, Orr is playing against North Lawndale, at the Collins High School gym at 1313 S. Sacramento. North Lawndale shares the court with Collins. As with most games, there are very few students in attendance and plenty of room in the stands. Danger looms always for young people, if not inside a gym, then somewhere in the surrounding night.

The game is a wild one, seesawing back and forth. The elusive 6-4 Drake, pursued by several Division-I colleges, dominated for Orr, but Emanuel O'Neal had a rocking breakaway dunk that energized the team late. Then guard Hernandez sank two final free throws to seal the 79-74 victory.

The coaches hustle the Orr players off the



Orr players and coaches get fired up during a timeout in a game last month against North Lawndale. | ASHLEE REZIN/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

floor after the handshakes, and then, at the end of a far hallway, the Spartans finally let loose, celebrating loudly with Adams and the assistant coaches, all in a circular, whooping dance.

These games mean a lot. Orr is 9-1, and if this is to be Adams' last year as coach, as he has said it might be, then he wants to go out hard and strong.

A few weeks earlier, I had attended a game in this same gym between North Lawndale and North Chicago, a part of a multischool weekend of games in what was billed as the Seventh Annual High School Hall of Fame Classic.

At halftime of the game, the seventh of the day, North Lawndale coach Lewis Thorpe took the microphone at midcourt and made an announcement.

"We'd like to take this moment to retire the No. 4 jersey of Jonathan Mills," he said. "He was a special individual."

Mills, 26, had starred at North Lawndale from 2006 to '10, leading his team to the 2008 Class 2A title. He then played in college at Southern Mississippi, where he made the 2012 Conference USA all-defensive team.



Two Orr players, guard Brian Hernandez (above) and forward Raekwon Drake (below), have NBA dreams.



After playing professionally in Canada, Mills was preparing himself to play pro ball in China.

Wearing his basketball trunks en route to a workout at this gym last July, he was killed on the sidewalk in midday by a man who walked up and repeatedly shot him.

As helpers hold the large banner with Mills' photo on it, two other men, both in wheelchairs, roll into the ceremonial arc for group photos. One is Marshall High School assistant coach Shawn Harrington, who was shot and paralyzed three years ago, but the other man I did not recognize.

"Another tragic story," Harrington told me, shaking his head. "Shot in the back."

The man is Jermaine Winfield, a former North Lawndale all-city power forward who played with Mills. Winfield was a looming presence who in 2009 literally took a bullet for his friend Mills, getting shot

in the thigh while trying to grab Mills out of an argument on the street after a game. "I would have done the same for any of my teammates," Winfield said at the time.

But that wasn't the bullet that severed his spine, making him a paraplegic. That came when he was shot in the neck, knee and hand in the summer of 2011 by a gunman "shooting at someone else."

On either side of the banner stood Mills' mother and father. After the ceremony, I gently ask his mom, Flora White, if such public outpourings of respect and honor give her hope

for the end of the nonstop violence. "It doesn't give me hope," she said, tears in her eyes. "We've been to a lot of these."

You can become injured to anything, even the insanity and vulgarity of sudden, undeserved death. Some of us do. Parents never do.

Psychologists will talk about the destructive post-traumatic stress syndrome that must affect so many Chicago children and young adults, a fearsome condition that is characterized by nightmares, anxiety, guilt, shame, fear, hair-trigger anger, drug usage and other antisocial behaviors.

But it's not post-anything if the carnage never ends.

Coach Adams smiled ruefully as he gave an example of the banality of Chicago ghetto life: "I was recruiting a kid and he got killed, and I went to the funeral. But when I looked in the

coffin, I didn't recognize him. The kid in the coffin had braids. 'Wait a minute!' I said. Then I realized it was another ballplayer, not mine. I was at the wrong funeral."

How many protests and marches have been held, how many shrines with crosses and teddy bears have been built trying to end our city's gunfire? How many wrong hands

MORE ONLINE
To read Parts 1 through 3, go to chicago.suntimes.com.

and beaten-down charities? It all seems endless, doesn't it?

But what can we expect when, as North Lawndale coach Thorpe put it, "These kids don't care if they live or die."

Then on Jan. 5, a video goes viral of four young black people — two male, two female — torturing a white boy on the West Side, and all hell breaks loose. Again. President Barack Obama called the event "terrible." The alleged kidnappers are called "animals" and much worse on social media.

Before that day's practice, I show the front page of the Sun-Times to Adams, with its mugshot photos of the arrested four above the headline, "HATE-CRIME HORROR." Adams shakes his head in near despair. A couple players come over and study the page.

One of them thinks he might know one of the guys. They return to their warmup drills.

As Obama had noted in a recent TV interview, violence is down across the nation in big cities. Then he added, "Chicago is the strange exception."

Coming Sunday: Day 5. A place where playgrounds have little to do with play.

Orr has a terrible poverty rate, with 97.2 percent of the students categorized as low-income and qualifying for free meals. Yet the resilience of many of the students is remarkable.