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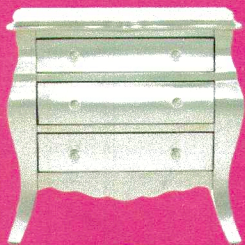
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COMMENTARY, PAGE 29A



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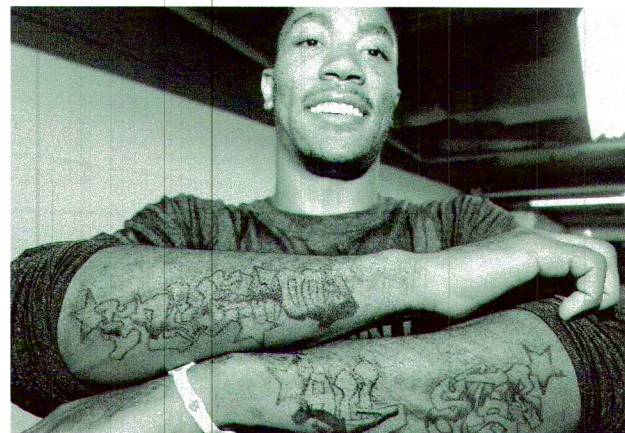
MURRAY PARK

CAN HEAVEN STILL BE FOUND ON A PLAYGROUND?

Can hoops help hope bloom?

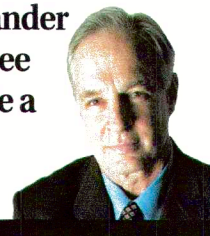


Players engage in a pickup game at Murray Park in Englewood. | JOHN J. KIM-SUN-TIMES



TOM CRUZE-SUN-TIMES

PART 1 Derrick Rose's legacy is everywhere in Englewood. But so are bullets, desperation and decay. In the first of a series, Rick Telander visits Rose's boyhood park to see whether sports can still provide a means of relief. | **PAGES 13-15**



CONJOINED TWINS' MOM: NO REGRETS

'I cry tears of joy' after going against the advice of doctors | **PAGE 11A**

MURRAY PARK

CAN HEAVEN STILL BE FOUND ON A PLAYGROUND?

PART 1



JOHN J. KIM-SUN-TIMES

Welcome to Englewood

By **RICK TELANDER**
rtelander@suntimes.com

What do you notice first?

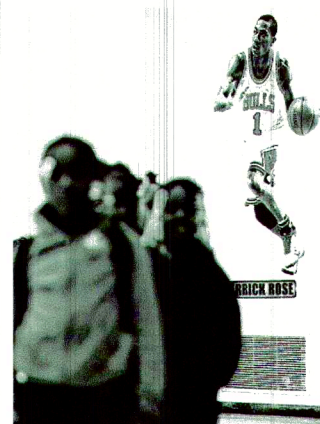
The boarded-up houses. They are everywhere, 3,500 of them. They sit like jack-o'-lanterns that have started to crumble in on themselves, faces with eye patches, scars, busted teeth, leprosy. The American dream of home ownership has died here in Englewood and West Englewood on the South Side, and like a plague that begins in the hovels of the downtrodden,

it is a disease that has seeped into the rest of the countryside, status be damned. Home foreclosure is being fought elsewhere. Bandages are being applied in desperation.

But here it has festered into something beyond the reach of medicine. Somehow the dream was stolen from the people of Englewood, replaced with ugliness and pain. If somebody could build a wall around Englewood and close it off from Planet Earth — well, it still

wouldn't change the facts.

Derrick Rose grew up in Englewood, in a house on South Paulina Street, and he played a lot of his outdoor basketball at Murray Park on 73rd and Wood. The 2011 NBA MVP can stack one forearm on top of the other and the parallel tattoos read "Englewood All Star." Rose has not forgotten where he grew up, and he helps the community, such as it is — roughly 20,000 people have fled Englewood in the last decade — in many ways. But he doesn't live here now. He couldn't. Thugs would get him. Or thieves. Or random gunfire from gang-bangers. Or



Derrick Rose attended Randolph Elementary, and his photo hangs in the gym. | JOHN J. KIM-SUN-TIMES

the depression that comes from seeing something deteriorate relentlessly into chaos. When Sun-Times sportswriter Sean Jensen visited Englewood last spring, friends of Rose's showed him around in Rose's fancy car. They were soon stopped and frisked by suspicious cops. Later the group had to drop to the floor of a diner as gunfire erupted on the street.

But this is the beginning of summer, the sun is high, and school has just let out. It must be possible that Murray Park still can serve as a beacon in

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MURRAY PARK

CAN HEAVEN STILL BE FOUND ON A PLAYGROUND?

PART 1

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

the shadows, a little oasis where the shooting and the decay pauses, where poverty takes a breather, where sport and physical activity offer those two most precious things: peace and hope.

As I drive south on Ashland Avenue past 35th Street and the area around U.S. Cellular Field, things change. I am now several miles from the Loop. There are fewer pedestrians, more empty manufacturing buildings. Englewood, and West Englewood, starts at Garfield Boulevard, which is the equivalent of 55th Street, and ends on the south at 75th Street. It is bordered on the east by the Dan Ryan Expy. and on the west by Western Avenue, and it is surrounded by the neighborhoods of New City, Canaryville, Jackson Park, Beverly View, West Lawn and Auburn-Gresham. Midway Airport is four miles to the west.

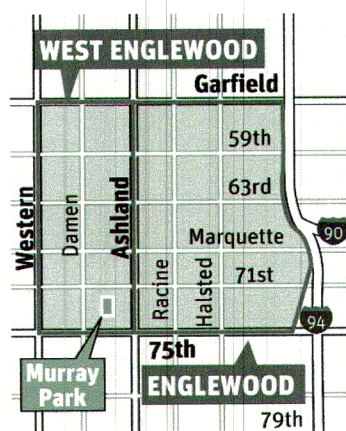
What is worse than Englewood? The West Side has its share of crime, as do pockets on the North. And like so many other neighborhoods, Englewood was once a well-ordered working-class community with mainly single-family homes and brownstones, a place now so homogenized with poverty-level, unemployed African Americans — and the criminals that flourish in their midst — all of whom are trapped behind invisible borders.

At the least, it is a place of exile, an island, with streets and cement circling it instead of the sea.

My goal is to hang out at Murray Park this summer, to use it as home base and spring out from the park to see how Rose made it from here, how his legacy captures the area's imagination, how Englewood children — our fellow Americans and our future — can yet make it out themselves. And whether sports can help.

I have no real plan. I just want to observe. I see a storefront on 63rd near Marshfield with a banner reading, "CEASE FIRE — The Campaign to STOP the Shooting."

I park my car and look around. Across 63rd there are men who appear to be homeless,



sitting in the distance, under the raised train tracks. There is another group near some weeds, half-heartedly washing an old car. A man in a wheelchair pushes himself toward the homeless men.

I walk into the office and am greeted by a tall, well-built man in a Nike T-shirt. His name is Charles Jones and he is an "outreach worker" for CeaseFire. I ask him what CeaseFire does.

"Our goal is to stop all shooting," he says. "We know we can't, but that's our goal."

There are desks and computers in the small space, and a map of Englewood on the back wall. The neighborhood is marked off in sections, and Jones points to several of them. "We particularly want to reduce the shootings in these hot spots: 725, 726 and 735."

Murray Park appears to be in section 735.

"Murray is in 735," Jones says. "That area's a hot spot, for now."

So how does any civilian go about stopping gang feuds and robberies and stray bullets?

"We have what we call 'Interrupters,'" Jones replies. "They walk the beat. Our method is not to put guys in jail. We try to stop stuff before it happens. We approach the guys on the corner directly, and we'll ask them, 'What's the beef?' And before it escalates, we'll try to bring them in here and do mediation."

They'll actually sit here — two guys who are ready to kill each other?

"Yes."

At this time I have no idea a feature documentary about CeaseFire, called "The Interrupt-



ABOVE
Derrick Rose's boyhood home sits next to one of the many boarded-up houses that blight Englewood. | JOHN J. KIM-SUN-TIMES



LEFT
Rose's friends Tim Flowers, Marco Sams and Arsenio Williams are pulled over while driving one of Rose's sports cars in May. The license plate has been altered for privacy reasons. | AL PODGORSKI-SUN-TIMES

SPORTS? I SEE THEM AS A POSITIVE AND A NEGATIVE. THEY ARE A WAY TO GET OUT, BUT DO THE PLAYERS THINK THEY'RE GOING TO BE THE NEXT DERRICK ROSE? THAT'S PRESSURE. BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT GOING TO BE THAT."

CHARLES JONES, an outreach worker for CeaseFire, an organization that attempts to prevent inner-city violence

ers," is coming out in mid-August. The film, directed by Steve James of "Hoop Dreams" fame, and co-produced by him and noted urban author Alex Kotlowitz (*There Are No Children Here*), will get rave reviews. Both men's work has had an influence on me, in my attempts to understand what goes on in cities and with the unlucky and the oppressed. I find it fitting that, of course, they got here before I did.

Indeed, Englewood is an easy mark for any socially curious risk-taker. Just four days earlier, a clerk at Max's Food Mart on West Garfield was shot to death for no apparent reason. He was the second store employee murdered there in the last decade. Why? For what? There are no suspects in custody. And, of course, nobody talks because



nobody wants to be a “snitch.”

“People don’t view the police as their helper,” Jones says, trying to explain the “no snitch” code. “If there’s a murder, then police will be beefing up their presence, and they will be treating everybody the same. Everyone is not a criminal, so that doesn’t work. We understand how gangs work. The cops don’t. They went out and arrested 120 Maniac Latin Disciples yesterday? I don’t think that’s good. And as far as snitching goes, we lose credibility if we snitch. But we are taught to use our moral judgment.”

I find out later from police officers on the beat that cops are not always thrilled with CeaseFire, either. The mediating is a nice idea, they say. But thugs need to be arrested, not psycho-analyzed.

It’s hot and clear today, and I

want to get to the park. How do sports figure into CeaseFire’s program? I ask Jones before parting.

“Sports?” he says. “I see them as a positive and a negative. They are a way to get out, but do the players think they’re going to be the next Derrick Rose? That’s pressure. Because they’re not going to be that. It’s not going to happen. They don’t have his talent. Everybody thinks it’s cool to rap, cool to play basketball, but — I ask you — is that a life skill?”

■ ■ ■

I leave, but before I can get to Murray Park, I see a temporary basket in an alley just west of Ashland near 69th Street, with three boys playing “21.” I can’t help it. I stop and watch for a few minutes, enthralled. Is there anywhere you can’t play basketball? There’s a fourth kid hang-



Clockwise from top left: Jacob, Larry, Devon and Tavaris find a spot to play “21” in an Englewood alley. | RICK TELANDER-SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

PART 2 | MONDAY

Murray Park regulars find newcomer Rick Telander to be a curious figure.

ing around, a little guy with his own ball. He can never get a shot off with all the commotion on the court. There’s always a little kid — or 10 — hanging around the big guys on a court. That’s hoops. Larry, Tavaris, Jacob and Devon are their names. They’ve never been to Murray Park, but they’re all Derrick Rose fans.

Their reticence makes it pretty clear they’re not sure what I’m doing here. I’m not really sure myself. I’m on a sports journey, I tell them, all summer long. And one of these days I’m going to make it to Murray Park.