

Short Story

Zaire O'Neal

The Gyre, Eagle's Landing High School

Home

By Zaire O'Neal

I sat on the front porch of my one bedroom house rocking back and forward comfortably. I could hear the wooden porch screeching underneath me. My embroidery cloth sitting in my lap because my hands shake so bad. Some times I got to rest. Old age will do that to you. I heard the door across the way open and I saw little Isaiah and Jacob running out smiling and laughing. I smiled too; I love to see the kids play.

They run over and sit at my feet. "Hey Miss Z.,” Isaiah says smiling. I smiled and asked them how they were doing. Isaiah smiled and just nodded.

"Fine,” Jacob said looking at me with a frown. I look down at him from my seat and wonder.

"What's the matter Jacob?" I ask, looking at him.

"Nothing,” Isaiah answered for him, shouldering him with his arm.

"My momma say you crazy,” Jacob says looking me square in the face.

"She say you crazy cause you dream up silly stuff. She say you ain't from no Africa and your name ain't no Zaire!"

I looked at him for a long minute. He has good strong spirits. Isaiah told him to hush up and respect his elders.

"Well, she's right. I ain't from Africa,” I said passing them both a peppermint. My grandson brought them from the hotel he cleans. "But my name is Zaire.”

"How you get a name like that?" Jacob said fighting his wrapper. Isaiah popped peppermint into his mouth and helped Jacob with his.

"Well you want me to tell you the whole story?" I ask.

"Yes ma'am,” they say getting comfortable. Isaiah put his head on my knee. Jacob saw him and did the same. He was younger than Isaiah. He was still learning.

"Okay, let's see here,” I said, closing my eyes and remembering.

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I can immediately feel the dirt between my toes. The sun was spilling through the spaces between the logs in the cabin touching my face. I sit up and swat flies, wiping the sleep out of my tired eyes. I stood up and looked at my momma still asleep. I slipped into my work shoes with the soul rubbed out and straighten my once white rag dress. I moved the sheet I called a doorway and saw no one. I was always first up. I began to walk to the big house at the end of the plantation. Once at the back door, I opened it quietly. The cook nodded at me and I walked further. I walked into the sewing room just beside the big kitchen and saw Miss Mayetta.

"Child, you cut it closer and closer every time,” she said smiling at me. She took me to the corner and pulled the comb out of her apron pocket. She starts combing my long hair, not talking.

See, I have long brown hair past my shoulder and to my back. I asked momma why and she just used to say, "Baby, I couldn't fight everybody.” I never knew what she meant until she told me that when she lived in a longer plantation, her master Mr. Longer raped her. I wasn't surprised or hurt. Rape is everywhere now days. That's why my skin's brighter than everyone else's and my hair is longer.

"You got good hair, Zaire,” Aunt Mayetta said finishing my long plait. "Ain't no use in wasting it.” She kissed my cheek and I ran through the kitchen and the cook gave me a piece of blackjack and sent me out. She braids my hair once every two weeks with the Mistresses brush. I ran to the middle of the plantation and jumped in the long line of workers just waking up and getting bags for cotton. I stood in front of Moses, my momma's friend.

"Hey, Moses,” I say, smiling at him. Moses was so big and tall, he makes everybody look up at him.

"Hey, there little pretty,” he said smiling. He was my best friend since the plantation didn't really have any girls around my age. I got to the front of the line and the frown that I wore all day every day, made my face heavy. I grabbed my bag off the floor and saw a foot fall in it. It was the overseer, Bobby Joe. I didn't like him because he looked at me funny and call me strange names.

"You look pretty, Zaire,” he said with a toothy smile.

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I said thank you quietly and he took his foot off my bag when Moses stepped up and asked for his. I dragged it out into the fields of leaves with white spots and started picking. I saw the sun rise and fall that day. I hadn't met my quota so I had to work through my lunch. When I went back to turn in my bag, Bobby Joe stood there like he was waiting on me. He had a big rifle in his hand that he always carried. I dropped my bag on the pile and started to walk away quickly.

"Night Miss Zaire,” he commented. I didn't say anything back. I hated it when he called me that. Miss is a grown woman name.

I pushed my curtain aside and saw momma rolling on her covers. She was coughing and wheezing. I picked up her face up and looked at her face.

"Momma, what's wrong?" I asked looking scared. I hoped she wasn't sick. She grabbed my hand from her face and smiled weakly at me.

"You're my beautiful child, Zaire. You're beautiful just like the homeland in Africa. That's why I call you Zaire.”

I cry and look at her getting sicker. She started coughing again and then she stopped everything. I cry louder and look at her. Then I lay next to her and hold her close until I fall asleep.

"Nigger, why ain't you picking fields?" I hear the master yell. I wake up and rub my eyes. I felt my momma next to me and start crying all over again.

"You hear me girl?" he asks.

I don't say anything, just hold my momma closer and then I feel him pull my hair. I let go of her and scream in pain. He drags me by my plait all the way to the end of the plantation. He throws my face in the ground and then he did what I knew was coming for missing a day of picking. He beat me. The overseer stood there watching with a plain face as I kicked and screamed but I wasn't stupid enough to move. I cried and he whipped harder. Then when he stopped he yelled some more and left with the overseer. I tried to sit up on my knees but I hurt too much. Then I saw Moses come and try to help me. He slid his arms under me while I winced in pain. He carried me all the way to the sewing room and I knew

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Aunt Mayetta would fix me up.

The next night Moses and two other people buried momma.

"My name is African,

Jacob,” I said looking at him. He looked at me with pleading eyes for some strange reason.

"Dinner's ready!” Isaiah's momma yelled from across the street. She waved at me, "Ya'll come wash your hands and get ready to eat.”

They got up and said thank you for the peppermints. They started walking and Jacob turned back to me.

"What's your last name Miss Z.?" he asked.

I smiled and looked at him as Isaiah called his name from the porch. "You know, I don't know.”

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Judge's Comments:

*** I remember being impressed with this story when I first looked at the Gyre as a whole. Zaire's storytelling is natural and mature. She has a unique, consistent voice. And She's got gift for native-sounding, memorable dialogue. A fine story!**

Sports Column

“Bowers Knows Best On the Injured Reserve”

Rachel Bowers

The Odyssey, Clarke Central High School



Rachel Bowers

Bowers Knows Best

On the injured reserve

The ground underneath me crumbled. I fought back tears that were on the brink of dropping from my eyes. A knot the size of a tennis ball was wedged in my throat. I kept swallowing and swallowing, but it wouldn't go away. As I sat on that sea foam green patient's bed, the plans I had for my last semester of high school came to a screeching halt.

From that point on, everything moved in slow motion. I hopped down and hobbled out of the doctor's office. My MRI was scheduled along with numerous other doctors appointments where they told me what I already knew ad nauseam.

My red and white jerseys remain neatly folded in the coach's office. My newly broken-in cleats are gathering dust, sitting in my closet until this summer. And my keeper gloves won't be torn apart from diving across the dirt to save a shot.

According to the radiology report, I sustained an "acute complete tear of the proximal anterior cruciate ligament" and sprained my medial cruciate ligament in my left knee. The vein which runs with the ACL through my knee burst, causing my lower leg to swell to the size of the Michelin Man.

Surgery was outpatient; I went home the same day. It was a short, 60 minute procedure using three small cameras and two small incisions to thread the cadaver graft through my knee. I try not to think about it when my eyes come across the cleats lying on my bedroom floor untouched, but it's hard not to.

Reality hit me hard, and for the next six months I won't play the sport that I love. Soccer has been my life since I was five, and has ruled my schedule the last three and a half years. There's something about competing, playing my heart out and bonding with teammates that makes me want to continue to work and grow as a player. I will tremendously miss playing my senior season.

I find myself reminiscing about past soccer seasons and wishing I could play in my senior year at Clarke Central High School. I won't have any memories as an active player like last year when Beca and I would randomly wrestle while everyone else was stretching or when I fell down the Pines in front of the whole track team. And what I'll miss the most is when I had to keep my composure in the goal when two games went to penalty kicks to determine an outright winner.

I try not to think about it when my eyes come across the cleats lying on my bedroom floor untouched, but it's hard not to. I have to be resilient in a time when the opposite is expected.

My knee is broken and I'm physically out, but my heart is still with this team and pumps red and gold blood.

Sports

November 2006



Rachel Bowers

Bowers Knows Best

It's time for the pros to take a T.O.

Sniffing cocaine out of nasal spray bottles on the sidelines, grinding cleats into other players' faces, beating wives and overdosing on sleeping pills. This conduct is not, in any sense of the word, professional.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "professional" is defined as "exhibiting a courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace." An "athlete" is defined as "a person who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports, or games requiring physical strength, agility, or stamina." Put the two together and you get one of the highest paying professions around.

The American culture is infatuated with professional athletes and fans pay top dollar to see these athletes compete year in and year out. These athletes who get paid millions upon millions every season receive a paycheck to do a job no one else is skilled enough to do. They are professionals after all.

While Lawrence Taylor is considered to be the greatest NFL defensive player of all time, snorting cocaine out of a nasal spray bottle on the sidelines during a game is not an image the New York Giants franchise wanted to have in their fans' heads. Taylor's defensive production was out of this world with 20.5 sacks as a linebacker in 1986, but in the same breath, he frequently employed prostitutes for the opposing team's running back. Famous or infamous, Taylor will forever be etched in the NFL Hall of Fame and will be remembered for ending Washington Redskins' quarterback Joe Theismann's career by fracturing his leg in 1985.

Never have I thought it was a grand idea to stomp on an opposing team member's face, chest or anywhere else on that person's body. Tennessee Titans' defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth, standing at a staggering 6'6" and 320 pounds, displayed his anger and frustration on Oct. 1, 2006 by trampling on Dallas Cowboys' center Andre Gurode's face. Shortly after Cowboys' running back Julius Jones scored on a five yard touchdown run, Haynesworth's anger got out of control which caused him to cleat Gurode's face. If I had a dollar for every time I got angry and wanted to walk on someone's face, I wouldn't have to work for the rest of my life. Just because he is agitated and infuriated because his team was scored on doesn't mean he should make someone's face look like it was repeatedly beat with a meat cleaver.

New York City is not the friendliest place on earth. It isn't a spectacular decision to try to take on an entire stadium full of hot-headed, pissed off baseball fans by blurring out obscenities to them. Former Atlanta Braves relief pitcher John Rocker attempted this in 1999 after New York Mets fans allegedly chucked batteries his way during his strut back to the bullpen.

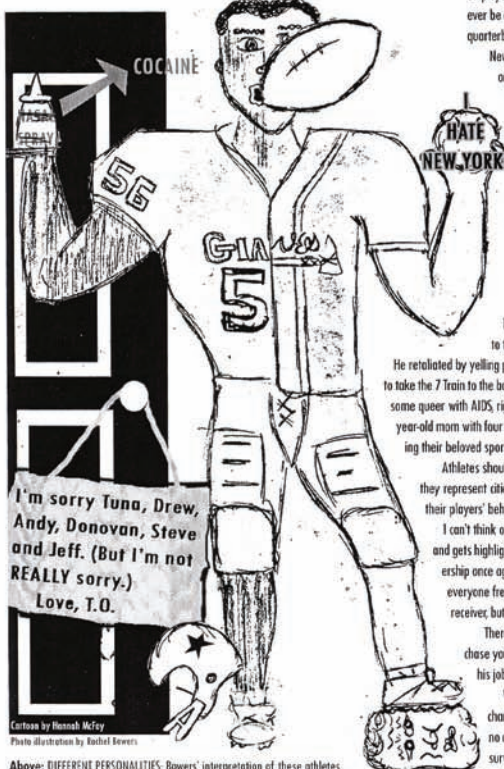
He retaliated by yelling profanities of the fans and later, in a Sports Illustrated interview saying, "Imagine having to take the 7 Train to the ballpark, looking like you're riding through Beirut, next to some kid with purple hair; next to some queer with AIDS; right next to some dude who just got out of jail for the fourth time; right next to some 20-year-old mom with four kids. It's depressing." Please, let's piss off a city with 8.2 million people by not only insulting their beloved sports teams, but the make-up of their diverse city. I wonder who would win in that fight.

Athletes should stand up to those fans who are overly rambunctious and who throw beer on them, but they represent cities, states, fans, coaches, and owners who would rather not have all of America angry at their players' behavior (cough, Terrell Owens, cough).

I can't think of another humanly possible way for T.O. to put himself in the news. He catches footballs and gets highlight reels on Sportscenter. He bad-mouths his present quarterback, coaching staff, and ownership once again, and FOX Sports shows clips of him doing crunches in his driveway. He overdoses and everyone freaks out and says he tried to kill himself. Don't get me wrong, T.O. is an outstanding wide receiver, but his actions off the field and in the locker room completely negate his talent for me.

There is a time and place for everything. Wait, let me try that again. There is never a time to chase your quarterback up and down the sidelines with your trap wide open telling him how to do his job. He throws the football. T.O. should open his hands, not his mouth, and catch the football.

While we ridicule these athletes and judge them for their mistakes and mishaps, every chance we get we line up to watch them excel at their craft because when it comes down to it no one plays the game like they play it. I would never be able to hit a baseball off John Rocker survive a Lawrence Taylor tackle, or go toe-to-toe with T.O., but they all should let their actions speak for themselves.



Cartoon by Hannah McFay

Photo illustration by Rachel Bowers

Above: DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES. Bowers' interpretation of these athletes is illustrated in a caricature. Lawrence Taylor, Albert Haynesworth, John Rocker and Terrell Owens are combined to be one.

ODYSSEY NEWSMAGAZINE

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Judge's Comments:

* Ms. Bowers columns on her personal injury stuck out from the other entries because of its insight and subtle asides, which gave it a touching humanity. Her other column displayed her anger about the situation with spoiled athletes, and since she is one, her voice carries extra weight. Nice tempo to her writing, and not many wasted words. The top three were close, but Ms. Bowers wins because her columns lead like she was talking to me, not at me.

Sports Game Coverage

“Team Passion, Defense Shine in Tough 1-0 Loss”

Asa Beal

The Southerner, Grady High School

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s p o r t s

THE SOUTHERNER March 17, 2006

Team passion, defense shine in tough 1-0 loss

BY ASA BEAL

Pitted against the fourth-ranked Lovett Lions, the Knights played a game that revealed their highest level of talent, spirit and teamwork. After 80 minutes of intense play, the scoreboard showed: Lovett 1, Grady 0. What the scoreboard didn't show was that Grady dominated the entire game.

The team knew this game would be no walk in the park. This was the first of seven games in which the Knights would face a foe ranked in the top 10 in the state.

“Lovett was ranked fourth in the state,” head coach Nikolai Curtis said. “We knew they were tough.”

After a late first-half goal by Lovett, the Knights controlled the action for the rest of the game. The second half was marked by the Knights' stifling defense and precise ball movement on offense.

“I've never seen a team get dominated like Lovett did during the second half,” Coach Curtis said.

These feelings were shared by players who saw the loss as a positive experience.

“The second half was phenomenal,” junior midfielder Matt Altland said.

The team's positive attitude

bodes well for the rest of the season. The team has focused on their quality of play not the game's outcome. Coach Curtis stressed the importance of this quality in his team.

“If we dwell on the game, it won't be a good season,” Coach Curtis said.

While Grady learned from this game and is proud of the effort, they are by no means satisfied with the result.

“I was disappointed we lost but happy we played well,” freshman forward Jordan Jarrett said.

The one goal that Lovett scored resulted from a brief but costly defensive miscommunication. This left one of the Lions unmarked for seconds, which was enough for them to score what Coach Curtis, described as “a pretty lucky goal.”

Coach Curtis was pleased that his entire team responded to the magnitude of the game with a strong performance. The level of passion and hustle they displayed, especially in the second half, was the key to hanging with a quality team like Lovett.

“We possessed the ball really well,” senior defender Woody Morgan said. “I was impressed with the level of intensity and heart the guys showed.”

This game taught the Knights many lessons. One was the



ASA BEAL

THE LIONS SWEEP TONIGHT: Freshman Will Burney takes on Lovett freshman Eddie Nam as sophomore Hamp Watson (right) and junior Alex Orlansky (left) look on. Nam had the only goal of the night which completed the sweep after the Lady Lions beat Grady 3-0.

importance of stalwart defense, which the Knights played the whole game. They applied pressure on Lovett and all but shut them down until the final horn. The team also learned the value of playing with determination and spirit, no matter what the score.

“If we forget about our size and play with pure heart we can win,”

Coach Curtis said.

Reflecting on the game, Coach Curtis reiterated what he has stressed all year, team unity and passion for the game.

“We could have beat that team; our guys have the talent,” he said. “We just have to trust each other.”

After the game the Knights kept

the team's tradition as they picked their heads up, lined up along the sideline and jogged the width of the field, together, as a team. The Knights hope the loss will be a stepping stone to a successful season.

“If we play like that,” Morgan said. “We will be able to compete with any team in the state.” □

Judge's Comments:

*** Mr. Beal did what all good game stories do when there wasn't much action to write about, he let the participants talk. A soccer game ending in a 1-0 result may have plenty of drama, but in writing a game story, not much for a writer to say. So he talked to many people involved and wrote a tidy, solid story about a spat he knows something about, which is obvious in his observations about the game. Nicely done.**

Sports News Story

"When Getting Spirited Crosses the Line"

Rahel Bowers
Odyssey, Clarke Central High School

When getting spirited crosses the line

Story and Layout
Rahel Bowers
Sports Editor

At several basketball games, fans have yelled and screamed their way into trouble.

The vibration from the crowd noise could be felt outside the gym doors. A sea of red and gold flooded over the bleachers. Everyone's eyes were fixed on a leather basketball being passed around the court with a Gladiator symbol gleaming at the center of the shimmering floor. The Lady Gladiators were on their way to another victory, but the action in the student section became the center of attention.

On Jan. 19, 2007, Clarke Central High School tipped off a sub-region match against Winder-Barrow High School. According to CCHS Athletic Director Jon Ward, "realistic occurrences" were made about CCHS student fans saying inappropriate comments to a female Winder-Barrow player. She struggled to set the basketball free when it got stuck between the backboard and the rim. According to eyewitness reports, the CCHS student section "booned" and called her names, causing the player to retaliate. Harsh words were exchanged, and CCHS students were eventually confronted by the player's brother.

"One of the Winder-Barrow High School players I was yelling at, her brother came all the way to our side and started yelling at us telling us he's going to punch us right in the mouth. It was made a big deal because my voice is loud and distinctive. And that's why Dr. Essom was so upset. It was nothing out of the ordinary," said senior Jerel Rowan.

Principal Dr. Maxine Essom became puzzled with the situation when a Winder-Barrow fan made his way into the CCHS student section. "Our kids were kind of looking up at this guy and I suddenly realize something didn't look right," said Essom. "I go charging off to get the guy to speak to (a Winder-Barrow administrator) to say, 'This is inappropriate, only to be stopped by some of our own folks to say, Dr. Essom, you've just been had because our kids were saying very disrespectful things to one of their players.'"

After discovering where the root of the problem began, Essom redirected her aggression from the Winder-Barrow fan to the CCHS student section and its actions. "I was mad that we would be that disrespectful... and I was mad that I had been lied to. I'm going off to support our kids, and they've lied to me," said Essom.

With so many things taking place in the stands, players could not help but notice what was occurring. Junior basketball player Veronica Boldt was smiling on the court

at the incident, but was not completely sidetracked by the activity in the bleachers. "It started when the Winder-Barrow player got the ball stuck between the rim and the backboard and our fans started 'booning' her. It didn't distract me. I thought it was funny," said Boldt.

While Boldt thought the incident was "funny," Essom finds fan conduct such as that unnecessary and disrespectful. "It is completely disrespectful for fans to scold players and to yell negative things," said Essom. "Fans are there to energize their team not to denigrate somebody else. If they're yelling things that are disrespectful, there's just no reason for that."

Junior basketball player Brandy Mims thinks while having the fans on your side is a good thing, she also believes it is somewhat of a struggle to stay focused. "If you can have the fans on your side, it brings up your intensity level and makes you play better. You have to try and stay focused, but this one dude comes to every game and yells (distinctively). You have to try to block it out," said Mims.

Even though Essom looks down upon fans acting inappropriately, and will not allow CCHS students to do so, she still wants to see the student section energized and excited to watch the game they are attending. "The thing we want from fans is a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm, a lot of cheering for your team, anything that motivates. I think crowds don't realize how much they really push the team," said Essom.

Rowan, who has been attending all home athletic events and cheering like a fanatic since his freshman year, falls on though the game was a regular experience. "I think I've always yelled at other team's players. It's just me," said Rowan. "I would like to think it affects the other team's players. Having loud fans is part of home court advantage. I don't think it does anything to our players just because we don't say anything to them. We cheer them on."

Ward agreed with Rowan about home court advantage and said, "There's a point of being a good spectator and even trying to get under your opponents' skin a little to try to give your team that home field or home court advantage," but he also pointed out a line between acting appropriately and being offensive toward opposing teams' players and fans. "You cross a line when it becomes inappropriate and unsportsmanlike. We've been guilty of that here at Clarke Central and opposing fans have been guilty of that as well," said Ward.

Not only was Ward taken aback by the discourteous cheering, he was also upset that fans turned the focus away from the athletes who were competing on the court. "It's somewhat disturbing anytime spectators take away from the venue of competition because the crowd is there to watch the contest," said Ward. "When fans, in this case students, misrepresent themselves and behave in a way that's inappropriate, it takes away from those (athletes) that have dedicated themselves... to have opportunities to compete and then have these other things kind of taking precedent over what they're trying to do on the court."

Some parents were bothered by CCHS students' actions, but were pleased with how the situation was handled by the CCHS administration. "I think Dr. Essom handled the situation well. Everything got calmed down. I just hate that these kids respond to each other like that. It's supposed to be fun, competitive, but fun. It got a little bit out of control and I like how Dr. Essom handled it," said Angela Walter, mother of senior football player Larrinque Walter, who attended the

game against Winder-Barrow.

A little over a week after the home game against Winder-Barrow, the CCHS basketball teams and numerous fans traveled over county lines on Jan. 27, 2007 to Orange County High School. The Lady Gladiators and Gladiators were to face the Warriors in what some believe has become an extremely heated rivalry since the two teams began playing in 1998. "It can get really heated sometimes, and some people can make bad decisions. You always need rivalries in high school though. People come to the games because of rivalries," said senior football player Nick Wegmann, who attended the basketball game against OCHS.

Rowan was amidst the red and gold T-shirts and letterman jackets in the stands, and heard Essom when she came down in the stands to tell the student section to keep the cheers respectful while feeling like she directed it to him personally. "She pointed at me said, 'I'm pretty much talking to you,'" said Rowan.

While the CCHS student section had been spoken to by Essom to prevent anything from occurring, that did not stop the CCHS student section from taking over where CCHS left off during the game against Winder-Barrow just eight days earlier. According to Essom, OCHS student fans were "not respectful of (CCHS) players," and would yell at them as they dribbled along the OCHS sideline. "I don't know what they said to our (players) I know they weren't yelling. 'Hey, you're a really good basketball player!'" said Essom.

Senior basketball player Josh Hurst stood on the free throw line with sounds from OCHS megaphones blaring in his ears while he was trying to sink the shot. "I don't really listen. I just laugh it off and show them that they're wrong. It's a part of the game at the collegiate level and in the NBA, so you have to be used to it," said Hurst. Many people's ears perked up when the OCHS student section began chanting, "SAT Scores" towards the entire CCHS fan section repeatedly. Wegmann thought what the OCHS student section was chanting was to turn the focus from the basketball game to

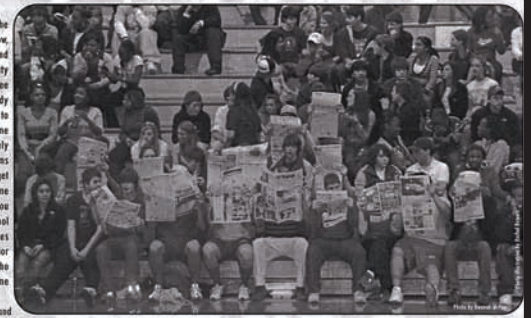
"When fans, in this case students, misrepresent themselves and behave in a way that's inappropriate, it takes away from those (athletes) that have dedicated themselves..."

-- Jon Ward, Athletic Director

academics. "Our SAT scores are better, and they've always thought they have been better than us. They had to take their mind off losing, so they have to yell about something other than sports," said Wegmann.

According to Essom, she eventually was introduced to an assistant principal by a parent and the OCHS student section became calm after the individual went and stood in front of them to ensure they remained respectful.

Even though Ward was not at the OCHS match up, he was in agreement that the home team should take the first step, not the visiting principal. "When you go to someone else's venue to play, you're there to support, but the lead is to be taken by the home school. When someone comes (to CCHS) it's our responsibility not only to



Above: NBAE/SCHE/NSCII Competition heats up at the courts. Above: How fans get it during the Winder Sports page only on Feb. 9, 2007.

Judge's Comments:

* This truly stood out among entries. The author found the story (overzealous fans) behind the story (a boys basket ball game). Extremely well-written, well-researched engaging.

Sports Photo

“For Varsity Boys, The Court is Now in Session”

Paul Lorene

The Oracle, North Springs High School



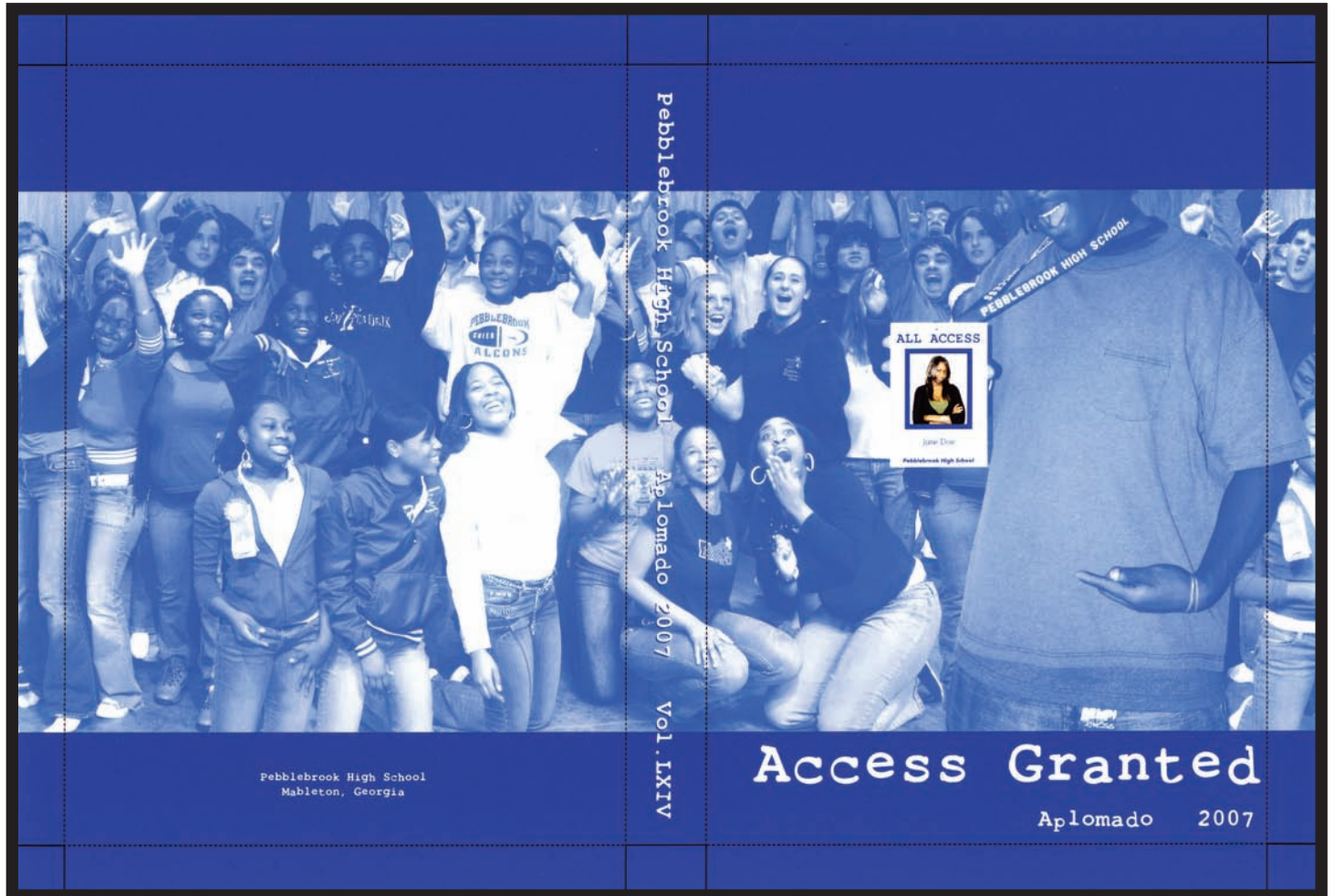
Judge's Comments:

*** A clear winner that rose to the top quickly. The photojournalist moved away from the action and saw a moment developing. A moment that showed the energy and strain of athletics, that gave the reader a glimpse into the intensity of an athlete's routine.**

Yearbook Cover Design

Daniel Ostria

Aplomado Access Granted,
Pebblebrook High School



Judge's Comments:

- * Very creative and works with theme "access granted"
- * Clean simple cover
- * Nice use of Color
- * Love it/very fun!