

The Prayerful Young Man Can Also Nail a Jumper

By BEN STRAUSS

A bevy of college scouts and curious fans flocked to the University of Illinois at Chicago Pavilion on Saturday for Jabari Parker's first game of the season.

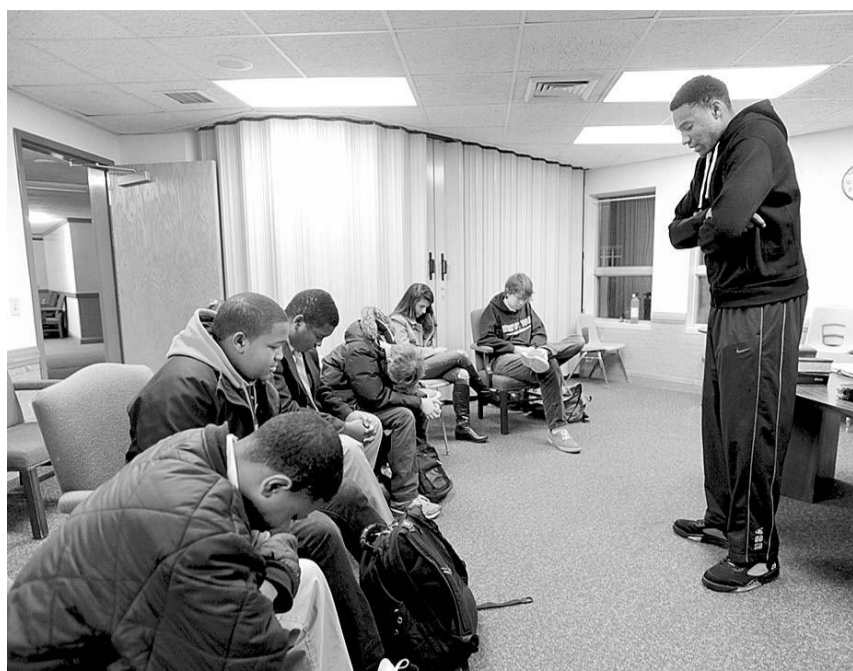
The Simeon star is considered by many to be the nation's top high school basketball player, and leading the country's No. 1-ranked team, the 6-foot-8 junior had his full arsenal on display. Having already flashed his crisp post moves and slick ball handling, he spotted up on the wing in the second quarter, a defender in his face. He head-faked once, and again, then elevated to nail a jumper that left the crowd — and his defender — in awe as Simeon rolled to a 69-51 win over Hillcrest.

There also is a side to Jabari that does not attract the spotlight: The Mormon, who attends religious classes in the predawn hours three days a week.

Early on a recent Monday, the 16-year-old with a 3.7 G.P.A. was at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hyde Park, offering an opening prayer for six classmates and two teachers.

"Dear father in heaven, please bless us this morning," Jabari said. The class then opened the Old Testament to Leviticus.

Jabari's is a life of dichotomies. He is an inner-city black teenager of a faith that is nearly 90 percent white. He is also a high school basketball star, with two state championships, yet he defines himself in nonbasketball



PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL BEATY/CHICAGO NEWS COOPERATIVE



Jabari Parker leading a pre-dawn prayer class. His basketball skills have attracted college scouts.

terms.

Jabari merges Mormon-taught humility with an athlete's lottery-pick potential. "Basketball is not who I am; it's what I do," he said, explaining that he once hoped to become an animal rights activist.

In keeping with Mormon custom, Jabari does not smoke or drink and he shuns caffeine. He has a self-imposed curfew on road trips. "Jabari disciplined himself at a very young age," said his mother, Lola.

The Parker family's roots can be traced to a chance encounter at a mall in Salt Lake City in 1982. That is where Lola, born in Tonga in the South Pacific and raised a Mormon in Utah, met her future husband and Jabari's father, Sonny, then playing for the Golden State Warriors of the N.B.A.

Jabari has been raised in South Shore, where his parents settled after marrying, and he seamlessly blends his parents' disparate worlds.

"He has my DNA on the court," Parker said. "But he gets his personality from his mother."

Parker runs a youth foundation that has trained top-flight players, including Anthony Davis, now at Kentucky, and Wayne Blackshear, at Louisville, both former McDonald's All-Americans. He knows elite talent and recognized his son's gift early.

Jabari made his school's eighth-grade team as a fourth-grader, but because Chicago Public Schools could not yet insure him, he did not suit up until the

fifth grade. Early on, he actively sought to emulate the old-time Hall-of-Famers Bob Cousy, Bob McAdoo and Earl Monroe.

Parker recalled Jabari in elementary school getting whistled for traveling after executing a spin move copied from a Monroe video. "Jabari looks at the ref and asks, 'Don't you know about Earl the Pearl?'" his father said with a chuckle.

"He's the best player I've ever

Jabari Parker is a basketball star with a life outside the gym.

coached," said Simeon's coach, Robert Smith. Four years ago, Smith had Derrick Rose on his team.

Simeon, located in the Chatham neighborhood, features a college-like schedule with stops in North Carolina, West Virginia and Massachusetts. Jabari's picture is splashed across nearly every recruiting Web site, an ESPN documentary is in the works, and blue chip programs like North Carolina, Kentucky and Duke are knocking on his door.

Lola Parker tried to explain her son to Coach Mike Krzyzewski of Duke on a recruiting visit last spring.

"I told him he's never had a Jabari Parker," she said. "He

asked 'Oh, really?' and I told him, 'You should do your homework.'"

Jabari's teacher at the seminary class, Jenny Spendlove, said Jabari somehow managed to separate himself from the hype. "I don't know how the highlight of every conversation isn't basketball," Ms. Spendlove said. "When he's here, basketball doesn't come up. We have to ask."

An oft-taught tenet of the Mormon Church is to be "in the world, but not of the world." It fits Jabari. He meditates daily, in an effort to keep his head clear, he said. Smith said that at a recent pep rally, Jabari sat by himself reading a book.

That singularity also manifests itself on the court. "Sometimes it looks like he's playing by himself," Smith said.

Jabari acknowledged that he could not be the same person on the court and in seminary, but said that his goal remained the same in both: "There is good to be done, and I try to find it."

As the accolades and adulation mount — along with the stakes and scrutiny — Jabari said he relied on his religious faith to buttress his confidence. He recalls the Genesis account of Abraham's willingness to obey God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac, a sacrifice cut short by divine intervention.

"It shows how strong his faith is, that he's willing to do anything," Jabari said of Abraham. "I use that as an example in life and in basketball."

Death of Youths on the Street Prompts a Life on the Roof

From Preceding Page

flict resolution, no jobs," Mr. Brooks said. "All of that breeds hopelessness, which in turn causes what we're seeing — murder."

The police later said Dale's death was a drive-by shooting in the 6200 block of South St. Lawrence Avenue, as he walked home around 4 p.m. The shooting occurred about 10 blocks from Mr. Brooks's rooftop camp.

William Thompson, a pipe fitter who lives on South St. Lawrence, heard shots and rushed outside. The boy was lying on the sidewalk. "He had two bullet holes on his side here and here, and another on his chest," Mr. Thompson said, his finger drawing across his chest from the left side to the right. "He was struggling for his life; then he died."

Mr. Thompson said he was contemplating selling his building and moving to the suburbs. "I can't stop thinking about that kid," he said. "I was up all night."

Mr. Brooks was also shaken. Before the shooting, representatives of four street gangs from around his church had agreed to ride the construction lift to his tent and surrender as many as 20 guns. A fragile peace was in the works, brokered by Mr. Brooks and an aide, Udra Colbert, 44, a former gang leader and former prison inmate.

"All it takes is one knucklehead kid to set everything back," Mr. Brooks said. "Now they're probably going to feel I'm up here on a roof, and I'm bringing a lot of attention and still stuff is happening. I understand their feeling."

Mr. Brooks dispatched Mr. Colbert and an assistant pastor to the hospital to see what the Fisher family needed. At first the boy's mother, Romana Fisher, resisted having him come off the roof. But the preacher persisted.

"I can always go back to the roof," he recalled telling himself. "But I can never replace this moment, to help somebody hurting, somebody in need."

Dressed like an outdoorsman in his parka and ski pants, 12 days' worth of beard growth on his face, Mr. Brooks walked into the hospital around 6:40 p.m.

Down in the morgue, Mrs. Fisher had just identified her son's body. Minister and mother stood hugging in the barren corridor. The mother told him she re-

cently had pulled her son out of his Hyde Park high school because gangs were after him.

"I was looking for an alternative school to send him," she said, sobbing into Mr. Brooks's chest.

Upstairs, Mrs. Fisher introduced Mr. Brooks to her adult daughter. "You did her boyfriend's funeral last year," Mrs. Fisher said.

Mr. Brooks followed the mother home, where she stood in the middle of her son's bedroom. "He was a good, humble kid," she said softly.

Mr. Brooks wrote down a telephone number and a name, Cassandra Pharrow.

"Call her," he told Mrs. Fisher. "She can help you get through this."

Mrs. Pharrow belongs to Mr. Brooks's church. Two years ago, he officiated at the funeral of her 29-year-old son, Jason Cole, a college graduate shot in the head

Violence and grief stalk a South Side neighborhood.

while hanging out with friends in a south suburb.

Now Mrs. Pharrow counsels other mothers of murdered children sent to her by Mr. Brooks, at least eight of them so far.

"When mothers say, 'I feel like I'm going crazy,' I understand," Mrs. Pharrow said. "I felt like I was going crazy. But I tell them you're not going crazy, that it's O.K. to be angry, to wonder why God did this."

On the wall of Dale's bedroom hung a T-shirt with a picture of a smiling teenager on the front. Airbrushed on the bottom was Tu Tu, the teenager's nickname. Across the top was scrawled RIP — rest in peace.

Tu Tu was one of Dale's best friends. His real name was Carlton Archer. He was 17 when he was shot to death on Nov. 11, about a block from where Dale was gunned down on Saturday.

Mr. Brooks stared at the T-shirt.

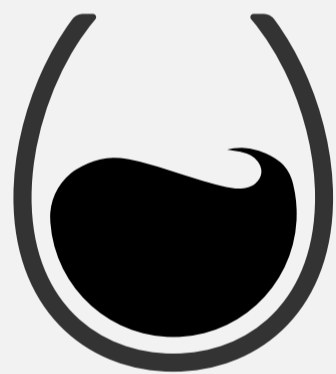
"I did his funeral," he said. "That's the funeral where they did the shooting outside. That's the funeral that made me go up on the roof."

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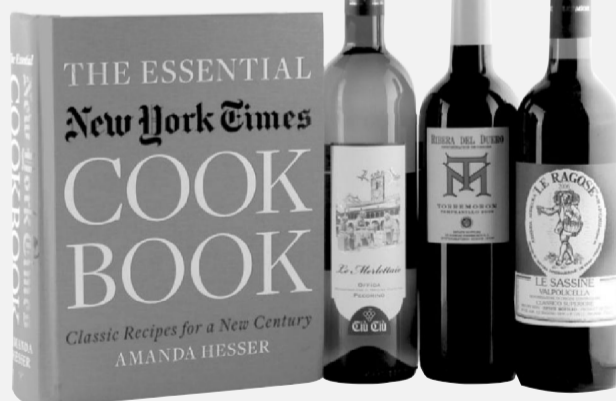
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