

Decatur, Illinois • Thursday, November 18, 1999 CENTRAL ILLINOIS A5

Jackson lists goals for ending dispute over school expulsions

Activist requests review panel and admissions by school board.

Editor's note: The Rev. Jesse Jackson accepted an invitation to meet Wednesday morning with members of the Herald & Review's editorial board to discuss the expulsion controversy. His comments were not published in the Herald & Review by the Decatur School District and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, and prior to announced plans to enroll the expelled students in an alternative school.

By KEN DICKSON
Herald Staff Writer

DECATUR — The Rev. Jesse Jackson was among three things before he will end his crusade on behalf of six students expelled from Decatur high schools for the rest of the school year.

It was a 12-member panel to individually review each student's performance in an alternative school with the possibility of recommending the home school as early as January. He also wants the school board to acknowledge that two years is too long for expulsion and that it should shorten the time the students alternative schooling before expelling them.

Jackson, founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, shared his demands Wednesday during a meeting with the Herald & Review's editorial board. The Rev. James Meeks, vice president of Rainbow/PUSH, and four others accompanied him.

After expelling the students Oct. 1 and 4 for two years for their alleged involvement in a gang, the school board will play a game at Eisenhower High School, the school board agreed Nov. 8 to shorten the expulsion to one year. At the same time, Gov. George H. Ryan allowed the students to enroll in alternative schools immediately.

Jackson said earlier Wednesday he would endorse sending the students to alternative schools if the blue-ribbon panel was formed and could assess the students' progress between now and the first of the year.

He said the Decatur School District, the Illinois State Board of Education and the Rainbow/PUSH should be represented on the panel.

The Decatur school board on Tuesday rejected the panel and proposed submissions by Illinois State Superintendent of Education Gloria C. McGhee, superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education, and Rainbow/PUSH.

Jackson announced plans to enroll the students today in an alternative school.

Jackson said the decision was based

on concern the alternative school could cease to be available if the students held out any longer.

In a separate interview on Wednesday, Decatur Superintendent Jim Arndt said the school camp doesn't seem to realize that the clock is ticking on the students to enroll in an alternative program.

He said the two seniors could still graduate in June if they enroll in an alternative program by January and that the school would if they wanted to traditional classroom. He explained that courses need for graduation are often offered only in fall or only in spring.

Arndt said that most of the senior students have been referred to Safe School, an alternative school run by the Macom-Platt Regional Office of Education. He said the school has offered these expelled students "because of their individual records and the severity of the offense."

During his meeting with the editorial board, Jackson identified a gap in trust between the community and its students.

He said 17 percent of Decatur's students are African-American, yet about 50 percent of the district's students and their parents are black.

Becky is the one that the people have the power, and only they can protect the children," he said. "So there is a power imbalance. We need to bridge that gap."

Jackson said he wants the school board to understand the problem when they sons were harassed and the expulsions happened Oct. 1 and 4. "They were notified, but they were not communicated with," Jackson said. "They were not given their option were."

Meeks said if the school board is protecting itself from backlash for changing the time of inactivity football games.

Many years ago, the school district opted for a 5 p.m. football game to accommodate various school games. In an effort to get families to attend the games this year, the district moved the time back to 7:30 p.m.

"I think the fight at night is a blow at the school board's insistence at putting the games back at night," Meeks said.

"The court's judgment may have a lot to do with protection of the students from that decision."

"Or a combination of them," Jackson said.

T-TOWN: Colleges express interest

Continued from A1

levels — Division I, II and III. "The best part is, a lot of programs don't even recruit girls," he said. Ken Jackson, president of the school camp doesn't seem to realize that the clock is ticking on the students to enroll in an alternative program.

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"I like it," Becky says of the recruiting process. "It's kind of complimenting me." And it provides more opportunities to visit other campuses and see what's out there.

For Leon, he is reliving the recruiting process. In his senior year of 1971, he was recruited by more than 15 colleges, including Eastern Illinois, Southern Illinois, New Orleans, Northeastern, Central and Florida Atlantic. "You could take as many visits as you wanted, so I did," he recalls. "I didn't want to make any mistakes."

Finally, he chose Millikin, which remains a favorite for his children.

Stephanie is completely open to Millikin. She is saving money and environs herself playing basketball and majoring in English education. "I want to teach English in high school," she said.

Andrea, 16, is weighing more options.

He has recently made an unofficial visit to Illinois-Chicago, where coaches Jimmy Collins and Dick Nagy have been recruiting him.

Andy has known Millikin Coach Tim Little since he was a Teutopolis scoring machine who then rewrote the Millikin University scoring records, during his career in the early 1970s. He averaged 35 points per game in the 1972-74 season, set highest in the nation, and scored 40 or more points 22 times in his Millikin career. Little is 29 years old and matches the university's best ever.

He played basketball and it was in those years when his children were born, where his children were born, where 11-month-old Stephanie took her first steps on a basketball court, and where his wife, Becky, learned to speak French now at Altamont High School.

Becky is smitten with the school and its chocolate cake she foists on visitors. Interestingly, she attended arch-rival Effingham St. Anthony High School, where she was a three-time All-American. She was recruited by the St. Anthony vs. St. Anthony game, one of the parents of the expelled students, did not understand the problem when their sons were harassed and the expulsions happened Oct. 1 and 4. "They were notified, but they were not communicated with," Jackson said. "They were not given their option were."

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He said the former Millikin teammate. But the concern that he'll somehow be compared to him is not a concern at all.

"That's the only objection," Andy said.

"I know I'm not the same kind of player as my dad, but I feel like people would be comparing me to him."

The recruiting ground rules were laid down, early, regarding the parents and the children.

"We think it's a great education," Leon said. "Basketball is fine, but time is money for quickly. We have to make sure that when a major injury occurs, it's quickly diagnosed by Dr. Robert Gurtler, the orthopedic surgeon who serves as one of the University of Illinois' athletic trainers."

"At first I thought it was tendinitis or growing pains," Andy said, whose right knee began aching after his freshman season. "I thought it was just a sprain at first, but after only a few minutes in Dr. Gurtler's office, the problem was pinpointed."

"I said I could have osteochondritis desiccans," Andy said. And that's what it was.

Sometimes called "dead spot" on the bone, Dr. Gurtler informed the Gobczynski that Andy had a serious condition, but one that could be treated.

"It's been a year and a half since August of 1997, the FDA had approved a breakthrough procedure that resulted in three surgeries. Basically, the "dead" portion of

the bone was removed, a bone graft was taken from Andy's hip and placed in the area where a bone had been removed from Andy and grafted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) were used to help seal and heal the repaired area.

After missing the sophomore season and the first eight games of his junior year before returning to action. Now, Crawford says the knee is stronger than ever.

"I was apprehensive when he did return," Crawford said. "But come to find out, the (repaired) knee is in better shape than the other one."

Andy averaged just 8.9 points last season but played limited minutes in some early games. Crawford often used him in the post, but he had trouble shooting. "Teutopolis regulars break his hands," he said.

"This season, Crawford said, he'll try to use Andy in a way that plays more to his strengths."

"He has a lot of athletic skills that even Stephane told me he didn't have," Crawford said. "He can handle the ball in the open court; he can shoot it if he can take it open. He can shoot it if he can't. What you say that word to Leon, he just laughs."

Stephanie, on the other hand, has been injury-free. She is one of just two returners for the Gobczynski team. In the summer, Teutopolis won the Class A team camp at the University of Illinois and Koester is quietly optimistic about that.

Stephanie Gobczynski is one reason why.

"Last year she was a rebounder and scored on some put-backs. This year, we'll go to her more inside. When I put her in offensively this season, it was like turning on a light switch."

"I think she's a much better player down the road," Koester said. "She's deceptively strong, but when she is exposed to a college weight program, she could be really good."

As the high school seasons begins, a celebrated basketball team will help carry Teutopolis' banner. And with the Gobczynski's with the great father Leon chronicling the action on the radio station WHHQ, mother Becky cheering nervously from the stands.

Miller from across, a visitor can spot the towering steeple from the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. Down below, tucked among the trees, trees, quiet streets and driveways, are those basketball hoops that draw coach Gray's attention nearly 30 years ago.

"It should be a heck of a year," said Koester. "It's been a year and a half, ever in a community where basketball is at least the second most popular religion in town."

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