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PAMPHLET FILE
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Neighborhoods

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Photography: Fran Ortiz

July 22, 1979

High Hopes On The Hill

By Ezekiel Green

■ The game started at 8 p.m. sharp; it was free, and the Potrero Hill Recreation Center, a big hangar of a building, was filled with people from the neighborhood.

It was the sixth game of the season, High Hopes versus Nike. The San Francisco Summer-Pro Basketball League was under way, and there were three pros on the floor, Robert Parrish and Wayne Cooper of the Warriors, and Alton Byrd, who was just drafted by the Celtics. Most of the players were non-pros, college stars, high school stars, young men who barely missed the pros, whose only chance to play with pros was in this league. Glenn Burke, who used to play centerfield for the Oakland A's, and who was once offered a basketball scholarship by John Wooden at UCLA, wore a

red jersey, and had the most muscles on the floor.

They played by pro rules, and the refs, an accountant and a Coors employee had professional aspirations, but their hopes had been recently dimmed by the NBA owners' decision to use two refs instead of three. The scorekeeper, the timekeeper, the kid working the camera and the kid doing the play by play (the equipment is supplied by Mission Media Arts and the game is aired on Sundays, 10 p.m., on Channel Six) all live in the neighborhood. O.J. Simpson was born and raised in this neighborhood, and there are pictures of him all over the

gym. This was his gym, and when he began making television commercials, he taped a TreeSweet ad in this building.

"It gave us a lot of free publicity," Jon Greenberg said.

Greenberg is the director of the league, and runs the rec center. He came to this building thirteen years ago. He came with his two degrees in recreation and his jock's strut — he once wanted to be a pro ref — he came with his chewing gum and his spirit and his gym shoes and his dark hair, which has begun graying, and his short-sleeved sport shirts. He came just at the time when black people weren't so sure they wanted to work with a white director, and the neighborhood is heavily black. Martin Luther King would be dead in two years, there

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“‘We don’t have problems with break-ins and vandalism. The key word here is trust,’ said Berg.”

would be what were called “riots” in just about every big city in America.

“It took a couple of years for them to accept me,” Greenberg said.

The kids call him Berg. Everyone here has a nickname. Steve Newman, who did the announcing at the beginning of the game, and who is majoring in broadcasting at Chico State, calls himself “Luscious.” He stood in street clothes on the sidelines, between the benches, and introduced me to his friends, Trent Terry, scorekeeper, and Maurice Love, timekeeper. Trent Terry’s sister, Julia, sat next to her brother. Luscious Newman described her as a “visiting celebrity,” though she grew up in the neighborhood, because she just returned from New York, where she worked as a model and actress. She had a part in the television movie, *Hollow Image*. She said she didn’t like New York, and would hang around her home town for awhile.

Luscious Newman pointed proudly around the gym. “It’s going to broadcast on Channel Six, you know. And Channel Seven and Channel Five are on the scene.”

He called himself “a young guy.” He’s nineteen. And said he’d been playing ball in this gym since he could eat a sandwich. The gym is part of this city’s rec program, and is open seven days a week. The kids working the game had played in their own leagues here, growing up, and had a kind of turf proprietorship. Luscious pointed the coaches out, Larry Gary, Nike, Gary Pond, High Hopes, and when Pond began spelling out his name for the newspaper, Luscious said, “Heh, we’ll get the spelling right.”

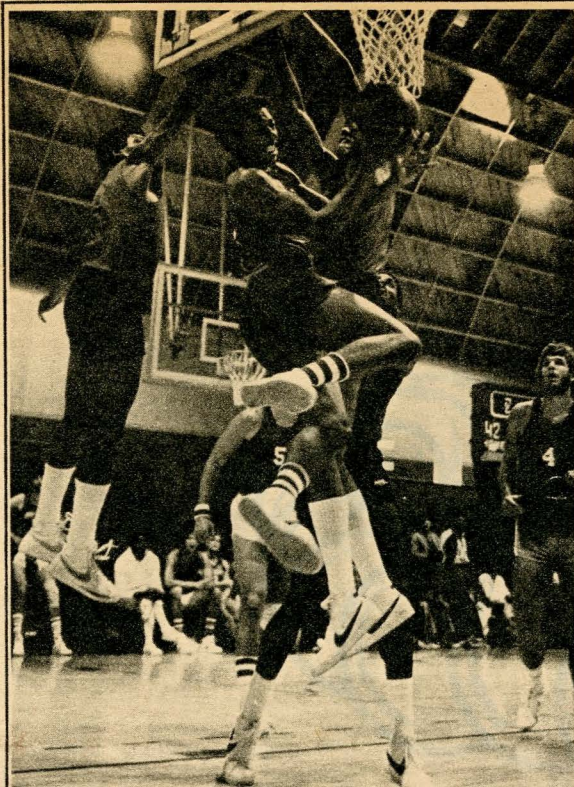
“Heh, do you want to know some of the underrated players on the floor?” Luscious said. “Mike Quick (who played for USF), Robert Taylor (who was a star at City College), Doug True, Allen Cotton . . .

“This is the second year of the league. There are eight teams. Each team pays \$275 to get in.”

During the second quarter, Berg came over to the sidelines to tell Coach Pond about a league like this in Irvine. “Bill Walton plays in it, everyone plays in it down there. We’re proposing an all-star game, Southern California versus Northern California.”

Pond wanted to know how the players would be chosen. “Each coach would pick a player,” Berg said.

Luscious whispered that Berg had done a lot for this gym, and when Berg was done talking to the coach, Luscious pointed at the director and said, “This guy eats a lot of



pickles.”

“That’s right,” Berg said. “I like the kosher ones, with lots of garlic.”

Berg watched the game for a few minutes. He said it was a good opportunity for some of the players to get a chance to run with the pros, to see if they could keep up. He said scouts come to the games, assistant coaches from the NBA, scouts from the Philippines, scouts from the European League. Some of the players had tried out with pro teams and didn’t make it. Alton Byrd, who is listed at five-foot-ten, but who looks shorter next to seven-foot-two Parish, who’s listed at seven feet, went to Columbia, and the Celtics grabbed him up in the tenth round. Byrd threw wonderful passes all over the floor, mostly to Mike Quick, who shot like silk, and several times Berg imitated the easy graceful shooting style of Quick by letting his hand flop casually from his wrist, as if he were shooting feathers instead of a big round brown ball.

During halftime, Berg gave me a tour of

the gym. He said it was one of the better rec buildings in the city. “It’s run by two women, myself, and two CETA employees. We have team leagues on Saturday, trips every Thursday, movies every Friday.” He said there were two girl softball teams.

Disco music played at the half. Berg explained all the pictures on the walls, pictures of the kids on trips, to Disneyland, to baseball games, fishing, playing golf, to Hawaii. I asked him how he could afford all these trips. “I go out and hustle,” he said.

He got the kids to play at a Warriors halftime, boys versus girls. He takes the kids into San Quentin, to play with the prisoners, “Because I believe it’s most important what they see with their eyes and touch with their hands. Not the stuff on television.”

He took me into his office and showed the display case full of trophies. “The kids are very respectful of this place,” he said. “We don’t have problems with break-ins and vandalism. We have programs for everybody. The key

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Neighborhoods *continued*

"The game was a big upset. High Hopes were too much for Nike."

word here is trust. I never say no to the kids. It's meaningful work because I watch them grow. I get the kids jobs, I help with personal problems."

A young kid came in and asked if he could use the phone, to ask his mother if he could stay and watch the second half. Berg said it was okay.

The kid said he'd be right back, he'd have to go get "The Cave Man."

Berg said he couldn't wait to see what "The Cave Man" looked like.

The second half started. I sat in the stands next to Markus Steinbeck and Jerome James who were doing the play by play. The crowd was very lively, and whenever the language turned salty, the announcers - turned around and reminded their friends, politely, that the game was being televised.

The game was a big upset. High Hopes, with Quick and Byrd in the backcourt, were too much for Nike and the two tall, thin pros, Cooper and Parrish. Cooper fouled out with six minutes, forty-five seconds to go. A couple of minutes later High Hopes had the game on ice, and some of the crowd — a couple of hundred people were there — left the stands.

The buzzer sounded, like a giant wet duck, and the crowd filed out.

Music came on the record player. Kids ran onto the floor and shot baskets with yellow tennis balls. Girls chased boys over the tan court. Two boys swept up the pop bottles with wide black brooms. Glenn Burke changed into his street clothes. He was asked if he was done with baseball. "For the time being," Burke said.

One young man couldn't understand how Nike could get beat. "What happened to that tall dude?" he wanted to know. He was told that Cooper had fouled out.

The record players were packed up. The records carried away. Somebody wanted to borrow my pen for a Parrish autograph. The coaches set up the next practice. Kids in coats and caps played basketball until closing time. They imitated the drives and dunks they had just witnessed with their own eyes in their own gym, and they felt good. □