

Basketball's missing ingredient

by Evan X Hyde

When semi-pro basketball began in 1992, amateur officials insisted on a Premier League curtain raiser for giving up the Friday night City Center rights to the semi-pro league.

What this did was "box out" the junior players who had always played the curtain raiser, for as long as I had been watching basketball.

In the mid and late 1950's, junior teams like S.J.C. Externos, S.J.C. Internos and Fireball packed the Holy Redeemer Parish Hall **before** the senior teams took the court.

There is a special excitement when a spectacular junior team starts to excite fans. At St. Ignatius in 1970 the Old Parr junior team, with Harry Cadle, Eric Gladden, Evondale Coburn and Mark Neal was so good they went up later and won the senior, under the leadership of the late, great Wilton Cumberbatch.

In the late 1970's at Bird's Isle, Greg Moss, the late Everard August, Frankie Bob Rivers and the late "Thin Man" August were all on the HRCH consecutive junior champions. They were challenged by Urban Weir and one of my personal favorites, Mark "Power" Paulino, but HRCU ruled.

Then came Paco Neal, Alfred Banks and Zeke Innis and they ruled the juniors with an excitement you had to be at Bird's Isle to believe.

Around 1986, 1987, Bart Arnold, Yellowman Godoy and Mockis Thompson emerged from the Rocky Road area, along with Mango and Blondie Robinson, and their fans were as intense as any senior fans. I think the incomparable Rupert "Jamaal" Latchman was also on that team. He later became dedicated to religion.

The thing is that the junior games packed the stadium. So when the senior teams ran out for the big game, all the fans were in place and you could feel the tingle and tension. There is no feeling like watching your team emerge from the lockerroom for a big game. The high is out of this world.

The missing ingredient nowadays is the juniors. Trust me