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A Goodbye to a Group Home and Curfews

By GRANT GLICKSON

IT is unlikely that Amos Zereoue, the career rushing and scoring leader of Long Island from Mepham High School in Bellmore, shed any tears when he packed up his belongings and moved out of his house last week to attend West Virginia University in Morgantown.

"I'll never come back here again," he said.

It is not that Mr. Zereoue is ungrateful. It is just that the place that he has called home for many of his teen-age years, the Hope for Youth Home in Bellmore, is one of five that have served troubled adolescents for 26 years.

"We are all going our separate ways," Mr. Zereoue (pronounced zero-WAY) said of two of the six other teen-agers with whom he has shared the two-story stone house for four years. "I'm going to miss having fun with the guys. But as far as the whole program goes I'm not going to miss it at all. Right now I'm real frustrated by all these ridiculous rules that I have to follow."

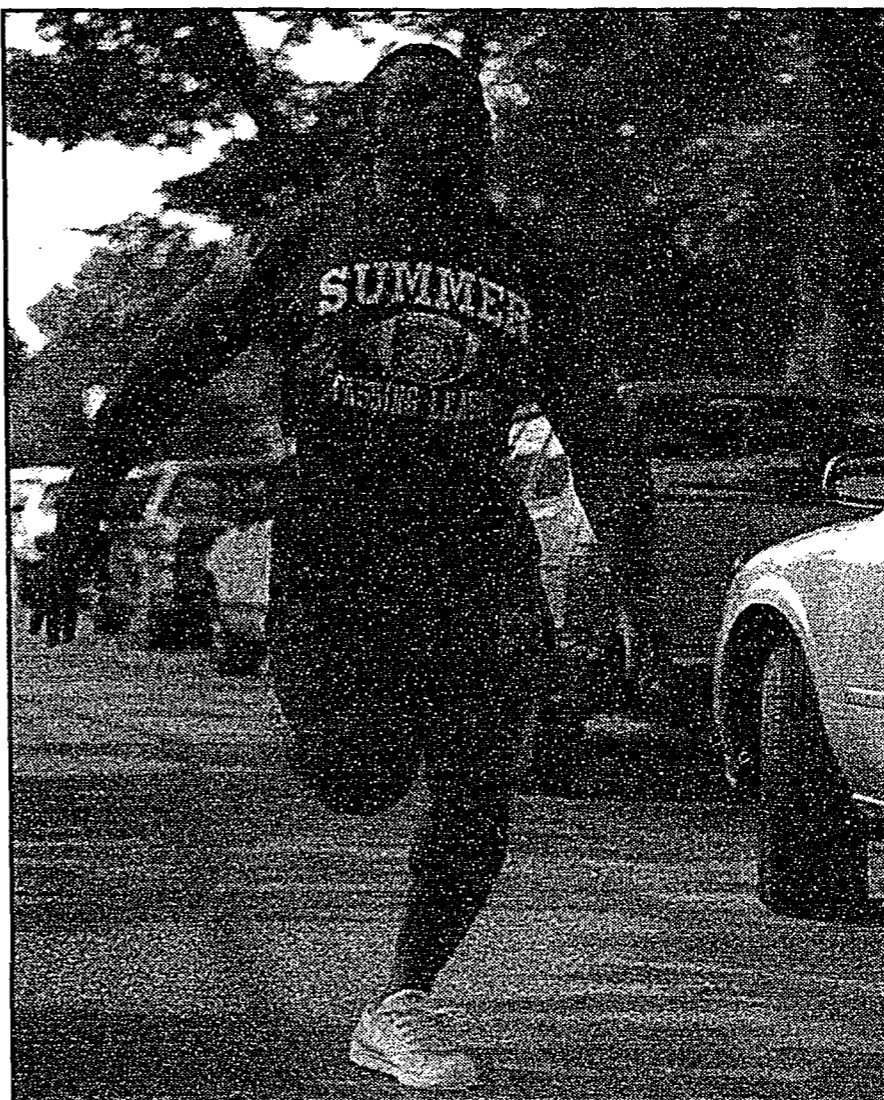
Mr. Zereoue, 18, the first player to be honored twice with the Thorp award, which is given to the best football player in Nassau, was placed in the home in 1991 by his father, Bonde Jean Claude, after the young man had cut and failed classes and stayed out all night and drank a number of times.

"Sometimes you have to do things that you don't want to do to get where you want to be," Mr. Zereoue said. "I had to live in this place to get where I wanted to be."

Until two months ago Mr. Zereoue was expecting to attend the Fork Union Military Academy in Virginia. He had given up scholarship opportunities at Pittsburgh, Maryland, North Carolina State and Wisconsin because he was unable to satisfy the National Collegiate Athletic Association requirement of a minimum score of 700 on the Scholastic Assessment Test.

Mr. Zereoue had a 2.8 grade point average, sufficient to satisfy the 2.0 required for eligibility for college sports. But he only had scores of 630, 650 and 680 on the Scholastic Assessment Test, which he took three times, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association requires a minimum score of 700.

When Mr. Zereoue, who has a learning disability, sought a higher score in May he reached 1,020. As a



Alan Zale for The New York Times
Amos Zereoue, who will be attending West Virginia University, running last month on Little Neck Ave. in Bellmore.

L.I.'s all-time, all-star halfback finds his bearings.

by that many points."

On the football field, Mr. Zereoue does the teaching. The 5-foot-9-inch 193-pound halfback rushed for 5,360 career yards and scored 59 touchdowns and 379 points, all Long Island records. He ranks second on the career state rushing list, falling 234 yards shy of the record 5,594 set in 1982 by Walter Moseley of Ellenville.

"Jim Brown was probably the greatest back to have ever played the game," Mr. Zereoue's high school coach, Kevin McElroy, said of the former National Football League star who graduated from Manhasset nearly 50 years ago. "But even he did not accomplish more than Amos did on the football field at the high school level. Amos is definitely going out as a legend."

With two senior running backs penciled in the Mountaineers' starting backfield, Mr. Zereoue said he expected to sit out this season.

"It will give me a chance to concentrate on my school work and get some help in whatever classes that I need," Mr. Zereoue said. "I'm getting a chance to make it. In football anything could happen. But if you have a degree that's something nobody could take away from you."

Like most teen-agers, Mr. Zereoue is looking forward to the freedom that comes with attending college. But Mr. Zereoue will not become homesick too often. For Mr. Zereoue, home had weekly therapy, 9 P.M. curfews on weekdays and 11 on weekends.

"The one thing that I learned from being here is that if you're going to make it you have to do it on your own," he said. "When I get to school it's going to be all business. There are some smart kids who could go out and party and come back the next day and still get A's. But I can't do that, because if I do I'll be looking at an early exit."

"If I'm going to come back home I'm going to know that I didn't make it. But I tried hard. I don't want to go out and have fun and kick myself later on."

special-education student, Mr. Zereoue had the option of taking the test with a private proctor with no time restraints, but decided to take the timed test.

"I was all set to go to prep school either way," he said. "I didn't know that West Virginia was still there. Then I got the call from them and they told me that they wanted me to come down for a visit."

Mr. Zereoue credits his tutor, Rebecca Claster. "She showed me a few tricks, like not answering questions and eliminating answers," he said. "So I just went in there with confidence. I had a feeling that I would get 700, but I never thought that I would

score so high. A lot of it was luck. I did the process of elimination. I guessed."

Ms. Claster, who works for the Princeton Review and is a teacher in the Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District, said she was mildly surprised when Mr. Zereoue improved his score.

"Kids who take the S.A.T. course go up 200 points all the time," she said. "This test was also graded on a curve, which could account for as many as 130 points. Amos worked very hard to get that score. The only thing that surprised me is that when a kid takes the test that many times their score usually doesn't improve

It's Neighbor vs. Neighbor in Battle of Hoops

By VIVIEN KELLERMAN

RESIDENTS of the Town of Smithtown are at odds over what may have started as hoop dreams but have become hoop nightmares. With 2,000 curbside basketball hoops lining the roads of the 53.6-square-mile municipality and many complaints, officials are not sure how to handle the problem.

For months residents have appealed to the Town Board to do something about curbside games that they say disrupt neighborhood peace. Some residents have complained about noise, danger to motorists, interference with street sweeping and snow removal and damage to lawns and mailboxes. Residents have said that the players use foul language and behave rudely.

Hoop owners say their neighbors have forgotten what it is like to have children or have focused on the hoops, even as other activities like skating, bicycle riding and street hockey continue.

Arnold and Sherry Rovner have lived in the same house in Nesconset for 27 years. Mr. Rovner said that until people across the street erected a curbside hoop a little more than a year ago his street had been peaceful. But no longer.

Mr. Rovner said he did not object if one or two people played, but he said that dozens participated and that when he asked them not to trample his lawn, they talked back to him.

"I can't even park in front of my own house," Mr. Rovner said. "The

kids come over and ask me to move my car so they can play. When I refuse they curse at me."

Mr. Rovner said the players could use a town park a few blocks away. He added that if parents wanted their children to stay close to home, they should put the hoop in their driveways or in the backs of their houses, as he did when his son was growing up.

At issue, curbside games and complaints of lack of quiet.

Last year, Mr. Rovner said, called the police, who told him to try to resolve the problem with the O'Brien family. Mrs. O'Brien said the police did not get in touch with her.

Kathryn O'Brien, whose husband, George, installed the hoop last year before he died, lives across the street with her 16-year-old twins, Sean and Jennifer.

"These are just kids who've grown up on the block," Mrs. O'Brien said, denying that the children had damaged the Rovners' property or that they played at all hours of the day and night. She said that this year her

son had a party and that she doubted that her soon played at the hoop for much more than four hours a day.

Mrs. O'Brien said that the courts at the park were always filled and that she liked knowing that Sean was playing in front of his house. "A petition supporting the basketball hoop was circulated among the neighbors," she said. "Every single person on this block and the next signed it."

In Kings Park, where two families put up hoops across the street from each other to create a basketball court, another family has also asked the town to intervene. Councilman, Eugene Cannataro said that since the controversy had been publicized, other residents had asked the town to act.

Two resolutions introduced by Mr. Cannataro to ban curbside hoops if neighbors opposed them were withdrawn when it became clear that the board was too divided to adopt them.

Mr. Cannataro, who said that the hoops were a danger and that someone would be killed, said he opposed all forms of playing in the street.

"We have 23 parks in Smithtown, as well as high school basketball courts," he said. "We didn't build the streets of Smithtown for recreation for the kids to play in."

The police said a review of their computer records showed that hoop owners had never been given summonses.

Councilwoman Jane Conway opposed the resolutions, saying they were too narrow because they dealt with individual poles and individual complaints. "The town is not an en-

forcing or policing agency," she said. "We make laws for the common good."

Ms. Conway said she did not believe that the problem was widespread and added that when the Town Board took up the issue almost everyone favored keeping the hoops.

The issue needs to be studied, she said, adding that she would prefer that the people settle the issue themselves. "If you start passing laws to try to resolve neighborhood disputes, it won't work," she said.

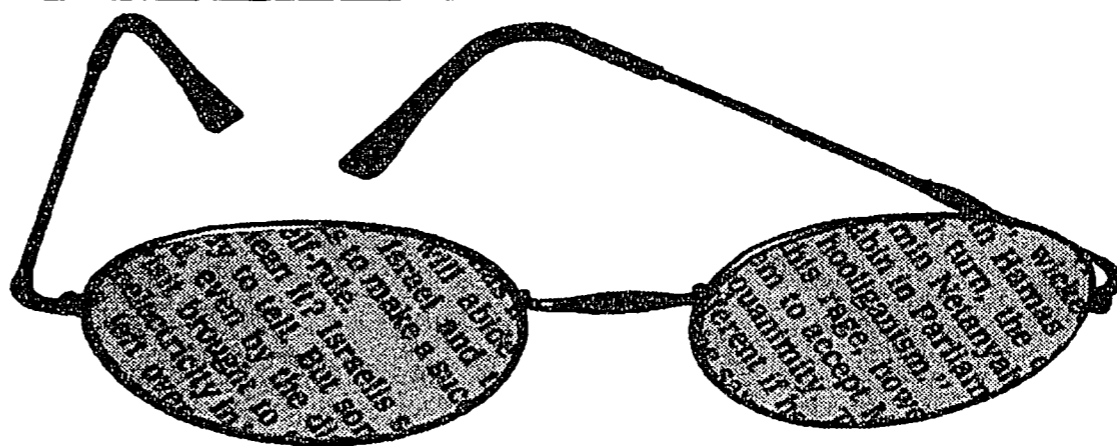
The board turned over the problem to the Highway Department, saying the hoops interfered with the rights-of-way.

The deputy highway superintendent, Anthony DiPerna, said Superintendent James Dowling had long had a policy of allowing the hoops and had supported the right of children to play in their neighborhoods.

In response to the complaints Mr. Dowling at first sent letters to the homeowners telling them that they would have to move back the poles, but he has changed his mind.

Mr. DiPerna said that Mr. Dowling was asking the neighbors to find a way to cooperate, but that if they did not he might move the poles back eight feet and modify the curbs for safety and to make sure that the hoops do not harm highway equipment.

"Mr. Dowling said that he would treat each situation on a case-by-case basis," Mr. DiPerna said. "With 2,000 hoops in the town, we don't want to treat them all the same."



SEE FARTHER.

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The New York Times