

# Basketball is back on late, late show

## Program once ridiculed by GOP gets new life from housing authority

By Andy Holtmann

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Officials at the Las Vegas Housing Authority and Department of Parks and Recreation are joining forces to bring late night basketball back to the Las Vegas Valley.

The effort, designed to keep kids off the streets during the late hours of the night by giving them something to do, was approved by the housing authority May 19.

The authority awarded \$37,095 to the parks department to implement the program, which is scheduled to start June 23 and run through the remainder of summer.

Parks department recreational leader Gerald Davis called the program an organized effort that will help youths focus on doing something positive rather than causing trouble. The program is aimed at kids who have had troubled pasts or who live in dangerous neighborhoods.

"It would take those kids off the street at a time when they would normally be hanging out causing trouble," Davis said. "This would alleviate some of the problems that kids get into during the summertime."

Opponents of late night programs say that there is no proof that these programs really work. President Clinton's crime bill, foiled by Congress, listed late night basketball programs as a crime fighting effort worthy of federal grant money.

Republicans who voted against the bill, however, said that too much money was being spent on these types of social programs and not enough on the punishment of criminals.

"What keeps (the kids) from mugging people on their way to the games or on their way home," asked Rep. Terry Everett, R-Ala., during discussion of the program in congressional hearings. "What's wrong with curfews?"

But those who support late night sporting events say that the programs involve much more than sports. The kids who are involved have to attend workshops and counseling sessions. The Las Vegas program will have these elements as well.

Youths who want to play ball must also attend a series of workshops that deal with issues of teen problems, crime awareness, and gang prevention. Focus will also be placed on employment opportunities and career development.

"It provides the kids with an organized basketball program that teaches responsibility and awareness through workshops," said Davis. "If they don't participate in the workshops, they can't play in the games."

During the season, 12 players will be selected as "all stars" and sent to a national competition Aug. 9-13 in Chicago. The players would be picked based on performance on the court and in the workshops.

At the national competition, they would compete with other late night teams from around the country to be national champs. A conference on issues of public housing and workshops for "at-risk" youths sponsored by NARMC (National Association of Resident Management Corp.) will also be held in which the selected team must attend.

"The national games give the selected youths a chance to get

out of Las Vegas and see a new city," Davis said. "A lot of them have grown up in public housing and have never been out of this city."

The age group is between 14 and 19, but Davis said they might allow players as old as 25. Games would run from about 9 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Anywhere between 20-24 teams are currently being created. All of the uniforms and equipment would be provided to the youths who participate. The housing authority has placed registration forms for the kids who want to play at all of the public housing facilities and several community centers throughout town.

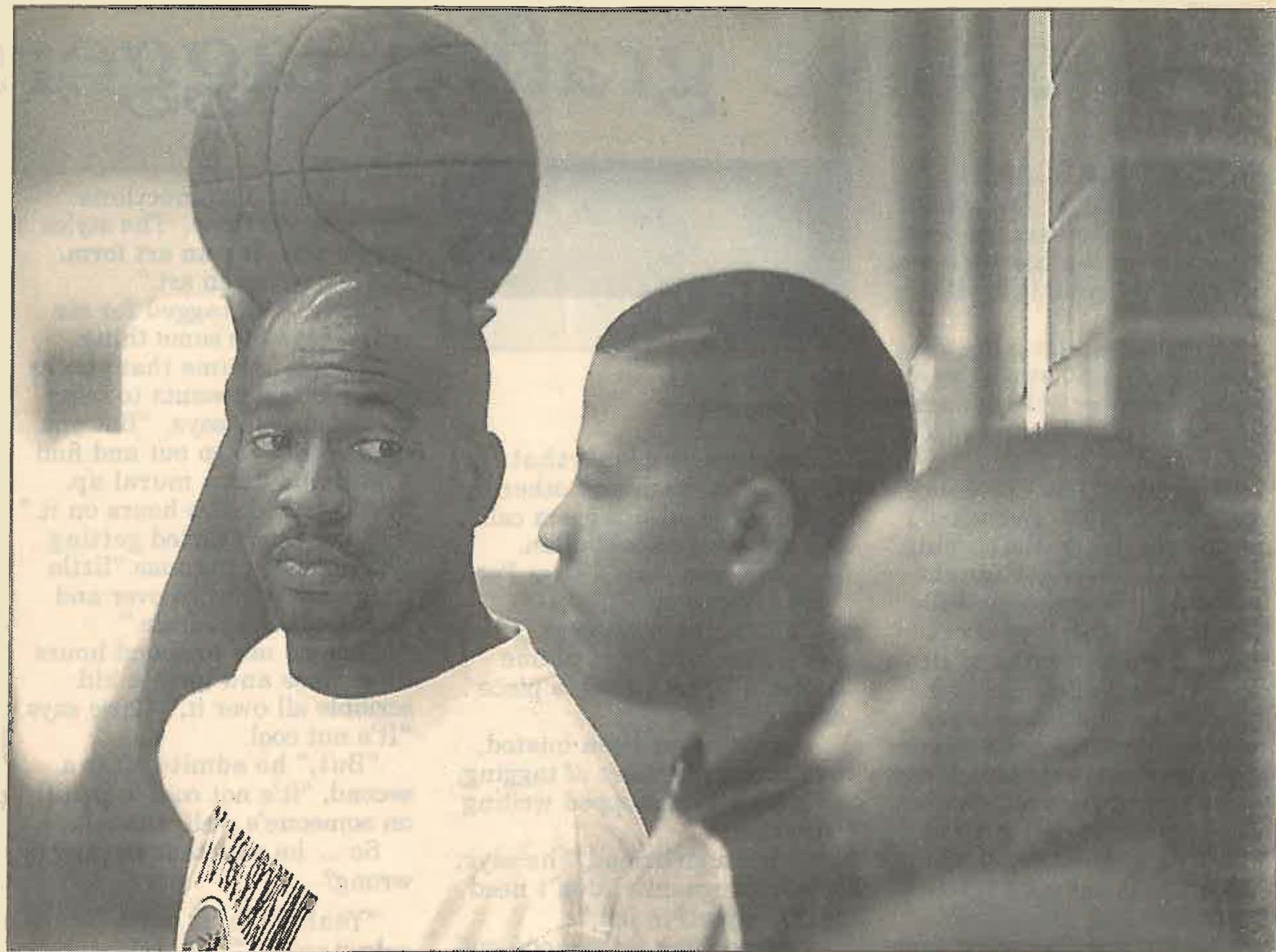
"This is becoming a large scale positive effort," said Paula MacDonald, resident services manager of the housing authority.

Late Night Hoops was originally introduced to Las Vegas in 1991. During the first season, approximately 90 players participated. This year, MacDonald estimates around 250 will take part.

The success of the program lies in the progress it makes with the youth. In the first two seasons, nearly 40 of the young men acquired jobs, 70 went on to college, and at least three received general equivalency diplomas.

While the housing authority admits that Late Night Hoops may not have been the direct cause of the kids' success, they like to think that their program had some influence.

MacDonald said that the program "improved the relations between the police and the youth. It offers the kids a new



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**WILL REED**, left, one of the directors of Late Night Hoops, talks with league coaches.

outlook and trains them to be responsible."

The organization of the program was no small task. The founders and volunteers wanted to give the youths a league that functioned like the NBA or NCAA.

The coaches are volunteers coming from institutions such as Nellis Air Force Base, Metro Police and Clark County Juvenile Court Services. Gray uniforms will be provided to practice in and black or yellow game jerseys will be used. Referees from the high school league of officials will be calling the games.

The league will be broken up into two conferences and four divisions, similar to the NBA. The top three teams in each division will advance to playoffs in which single game

eliminations will take place. The last two teams battle from the championship.

Awards and plaques are given to the winning teams as well as plaques awarded to the "all stars" who are picked to go to the NARMC conference in Chicago.

As an added attraction, an All Star day will take place. It includes a 3-point shootout, a slam dunk contest, and an inter-league All Star game.

While the program does have its critics, many in the community view it as a positive step toward rehabilitating the youth in Las Vegas.

"This program gives the kids something to do and keeps them off of the streets," said Metro Sgt. William Minor. "Kids these days need something positive to look forward to or else someone's going to show them something negative."