

# Providence-St. Mel in dilemma

By LEE D. JENKINS  
Defender Sports Editor

There are, without question, many facets of the Providence-St. Mel High School dilemma that transcends the athletic, but for those of us who are followers of sports, the possible closing of Providence-St. Mel threatens to end one of the city's most prolific high school sports traditions.

The Knights have just concluded one of their most successful cage seasons with their ascension to the Illinois High School Association's Class A Super-sectionals, the only Chicago Class A team to make it that far. A loss to Ottawa Marquette in a 69-68 squeaker closed out their season with a 23-8 record.

Sparking Providence-St. Mel to their fine state play record as well as the Chicagoland Prep crown as starters were 6-5 Tony Cunningham, Carl Hayes, 6-½; Terry McCline, 6-1; one of the city's 'biggest' guards in Michael Ware at 6-4 and 5-10 Darryl Jackson.

In order of their class standing, the bench included soph Tony Gordon, soph Glenn Hayes, sophomore Louis Thorpe, junior Ronald Brown, junior Leo Green, junior Joe Fields, senior Derrick Pearson, senior Morgan Williams, senior John Fountain and senior Calvin Maloue.

Varsity coach Arthur Murnan and freshman-sophomore coach Julius Walker have high hopes for next year, judging from the performance of the Knights' freshman and sophomore teams. The freshman team after losing their first game, captured their next 14 to take the freshman title. The sophs were runnerups in their division with a record of 18-5, losing four contests by two points or less.

The past achievements of the Knights as well as an equally bright future may all be as nothing with the recent decision of the Catholic hierarchy to close Providence-St. Mel.

The only Catholic high school on the west side, that happens to be all-black, has had a rocky road almost from the time that all-girls Providence at St. Mel merged in 1968. Within the period of transformation from an all-white Catholic institution of the usual na-

ture to an all-black private black West Side school the school's existence has seen problems ...but none are to be considered as deep-rooted and as controversial as the highly questionable edict that the school must be closed by mid-summer.

The Catholic hierarchy bases their decision to close Providence-St. Mel on three premises. It has been decided that Providence-St. Mel can no longer be subsidized and a 'phantom' inspection has indicated that the school building is beyond repair. The school administration is also being censured for a decrease in school enrollment.

The Catholic administration indicates that they have invested \$1.6 million in the school operation the past eight or nine years and this claim needs some clarification.

When the administration took over the financial administration of the school in 1971, they assumed 65% of the school costs. As of this date this subsidization has been decreased to 35%. During this period of subsidization, parents, staff and friends have invested over \$2 million toward the continuation of the school's programming. Even in the face of increased costs, these costs have been met without severe increases in student tuition.

A bill of particulars has been presented to the school concerning building violations, unsigned and without a date for correction of said violations. The date of the 'inspection' was indicated as February 15, a day well-remembered because of a school special program. Neither students nor school administrators recall any inspection on that date.

The decline in enrollment was compared to the student enrollment in 1957 when the school was an Irish middle-class institution. The enrollment is actually up 16% from last year. The freshman class is 30% larger than last year and over 200 students have been tested for registration next year. There are now 342 students enrolled and it is estimated that the enrollment for next year will be over 400.

All of the Catholic administration's reasoning for

closing Providence-St. Mel seems faulty. The administration of St. Mel has projected a figure double the amount of past fund-raising. Enrollment prospects look good. All professional building contractors who have inspected the building say that the structure is sound. A roofing contractor has agreed to do the necessary roofing at some \$90,000 less than the Catholic administration's estimate. A flooring contractor has made a like offer.

The academics of the school sees graduates being admitted to many of the nation's colleges and universities that are known for their rigid academic requirements. Studentathletes are not only gaining scholarships throughout the nation, they are getting their degrees as a result of their secondary school preparation at Providence-St. Mel.

The truancy and drop-outs rates are minimal. There is no gang situation in or adjacent to the school. A minimum of a 2.00 average is required for athletes to participate in school sports. The halls are quiet and general noise is at a minimum.

It may be more than a matter for general information to know that there are only two all-black Catholic high schools in the Chicago diocese. Providence-St. Mel is one and St. Michael's is the other. It could seem more than strange that St. Michael's is also slated for closing.

Paul J. Adams, just happens to be the lone black principal, heading an all-black faculty of a Chicago Catholic high school, and he is also the only principal that is neither a priest nor nun. It also happens that the Providence-St. Mel principal is not even a Catholic.

Adams and his staff are going all out in their attempts to keep Providence-St. Mel open. But their overtures, pledges, shown community support and pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

Why? There may be another side...it would be most interesting to hear.

In the meantime, the threat of Chicago losing a school of rich academic and sports tradition is very real.