This team is just one team in one season. It alone cannot change the discrimination against girls and their bodies throughout history. But here...

In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle

A Season in the Lives of the Amherst Hurricanes

By Madeleine H. Blais
To the world they were a bunch of teen-age girls inside their heads.

**THEY WERE**

* A SEASON IN THE LIVES OF THE AMY *
COMMANDOS

RST HURRICANES  By Madeleine H. Blais
Preceding Page: 
Primed to attack, Joda Sharp (No. 12), Pati Abod (15) and Rita Povell (23) leading the Hurricanes into their first home game, a 56-34 playoff victory over Longmeadow. The Ambler girls would go on to face their archrivals, the Northampton Blue Devils.

RIGHT: Jen Purleano, called Cleverly by her teammates because of the high arch of her three-pointers and foul shots, hit 4 for 6 from the foul line when the Hurricanes beat the Blue Devils, 63-41, in the Western Mass Regional finals.

MOVIE: From left, Carrie Thomp, Jeni Dennis, Kim Warren, Pati Abod, Kathiorem Pea and Joda Sharp listening to Coach Ron Mayer cheer them up before the Longmeadow game.

TOP CENTER Coach explaining the finer points of the half defense to Lorin Maarssen (No. 32), Sophie King and Joda Sharp.

The Voice of the Coach
The voice above the din of shuffling footsteps, loud greetings, the slamming of metal, the thud of boots. "Listen up, I want you to check right now. Do you have your uniforms? Your shoes and your nido? Do you have any other items of clothing that might be needed?"

Coach Ron Mayer believes it's possible to pack abstraction, along with more gear, intangibles like "intensity" and "game face" and "consistency" and "defense." As the members of the Ambler Regional High School girls' basketball team prepare to board the Bus into Express on their way to the Central in Worcester more than an hour away for the Massachusetts state championship, he tells them, "Today, I want you to pack your courage."

The team is 29-4, going into this game, losing only to Agawam, which, like the Haverhill team they are facing this evening, has some real height. Haverhill, known for aggressive ball, nothing dirty but just short of it, has two girls over six feet nicknamed Twirt Twats. Mayer has propped his team with a couple of specialized plays, the Murphy and the Shoate, and he tells them: "Expect to play a little footwork. Ambler girls have a reputation for being afraid to throw their shoes, but this year they have learned to take the words "defense team" as an insult. Although Coach has been careful to avoid saying "state championship" to good his team, but full he did tell one args gym not in town: "I have the two best guards in the state and probably the nation, but it all depends on the girls up front. There's an old saying - 'Guards win games, but forwards win championships.' We'll have to see."

At 6 feet 6, Mayer looms over his players. With a thick cap of graying brown hair and bangs that flop down over his forehead, he resembles a grizzly bear on aizzly legs. The girls are more like cats. For Mayer, turning them into a team has nothing to do with breaking their spirit and everything to do with harnessing it.

As Jen Purleano listens to Coach before having for Worcester, her legs can't stop twitching. One of the six seniors on the team playing high-school hoops together for the last time, she has thick, dark eyebrows and long, silky locks. For her, tonight's game is the perfect revenge, not just against Haverhill but also against some of the rivals who suffered as an athlete on the way up. For three years, she played on one of Ambler's Little League teams, the Red Sox. She was pitcher, shortstop and first baseman. When it was time to choose the all-star league, she was tooted her beats were not up to par.

Jen's teammates are just as hyped up. Half of them are giving the other half piggybacks. There are lots of handshaking and hugs. They swirl around one another, everyone making a private point of teaching Jamie Williams, Jen's co-captain, as she one
A brown-eyed girl could transmit the power of her playing to all the others. Jamila is an all-American, recipient of more than 150 offers of athletic scholarships. On the court, the strong boots on her face are like a flag demanding to be hoisted; she is a study in quickness and confidence, the ball becoming part of her body. Her nickname is Predator.

Above, Jamila Wideman (No. 11), the Predator, successfully directing the charge against the dreaded Northampton Blue Devils.

Jamila remembers playing in varsity games five and six years ago when the gym would be empty of spectators except for their parents and maybe a few lost souls who had missed the bus. Coach remembers girls who would cut practice to go to their boyfriends' games, and once during the playoffs, a team captain left to go on a school-sponsored cultural exchange for three weeks in the former Soviet Union. As far as he's concerned, the current policy could not be clearer:

You want cultural exchange? You can have it with Hperm.

Tungh, Amherst is sending three "pop" buses in the game, unprecedented support for an athletic event, boys' or girls'. Amherst is a place that tends to press thoughts over action, too much toughness. It prefers to hon-
or the work of the individual dedicated to a life of mosaic scholarship, rather than some petty group effort. But this arts, there were those who had their. It was there that ultimate badge: a weary cup on the premises for the first time in the history of an event.

Athens is a college town, with the usual beguiling ineffability that makes most college towns as maddening as they are charming and lovable. When the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a contest for town motto, Moyer submitted one that he felt should have won — “Athens: Where sexuality is an option and reality is an alternative.”

Athens is, for the most part, an enclave of nuclear free and eager for free Tibet. Pendutive with little projec-
tives of the past have never gone out of style. Humus stretch along North Pleasant Street at the town common, including the vintage “Stop or Neuter Your Pet: Prevent Abandonment & Suffering.” This is a town that savors spotted salamanders, creating love tunnels (at taxpayers’ expense) so that they can all daze from the hills in early spring and migrate to the nearby acres for sexual assignation without being squashed on Henry Street. There’s a new band called Solanaceae Composing. heavy metal it’s not. A fairminded local headline: “Well Dressed Man Robs Athens Bank.” Athens is an efficiently democratic sort of place in which try-outs for Little League, with their inevitable rejections, have caused people to suggest that more teams should be created so that no one is left out. There are people in Athens who still think “politically correct” is a compliment. The program notes for the spring musical “Miss Mo, Katie” pointedly title the musical “The Return of the Shrew,” on which it is based, as “well, Shakespearean in its attitude toward the sexes.”

The downtown area seems to support pizza joints, Chinese restaurants, ice-cream parlors and bookstores and not much else. It’s hard to find a needle and thread, but if you wish you can go to the Global Trader and purchase for $5 a pair of shoes with a rainforest theme. The surrounding communities range from the hard and easy inner-city poverty of Holbrooks, the empty factories in Chippewa and the blue-collar scrappiness in concrete plowed over with asphalt and sharp edges of pines in Whately and Hadley and the shoppers’ mecca that is Northampton. They tend to lock on Athens with growing puz-

lement and occasional contempt for the town that fell to earth.

The girls on the Hurricanes know they live in a kindly, ramshackle sort of place. Sometimes they joke about how if they weren’t playing ball, they’d be “tipping cows” — a basi-
cally useless activity necessitated by the unfortunate tendency of cows to sleep standing up.

WITH THE PLAYOFFS LOOMING, the six senior girls — Jessica and Jamila, Kathleen Poe, Krista Marvin, Patric Abad and Kim Warner — were treated to a late lunch by Jamila’s father, John Edgar Wideman, winner of two PEN/Faulkner awards as well as numerous other awards, author of the nonfiction meditation “Brothers and Keepers”; “Philadelphia Fire,” a fictional evocation of the Move bombing in 1969; “The Homewood Trilogy,” about growing up black in Pittsburgh.

It was at that lunch that the team’s center, Kristin, in trying to sum up the peculiar, almost consoling, lack of outward drama in a town like Athens, confessed that the night before she had had a dream: “My Mom and I, we went to Stop and Shop and while we were there, we went down, you know, all corn-
ulal stores in the regular order, picking out all the things we usually buy, and after that we got in line to check out.”

That’s it,” said the other girls. Jamila’s father thought maybe the dream had another layer and so he tried a gentle psychodynamic probe. He had a prescienture face, his expression changing in a flicker from stormy to melancholy to soft and for-
giving. Now it was consolatory.

“Did you run into any unusual people?”

“No.”

“How about money? Did you run out of money or anything?”

“No.”

“Kristin,” said her teammates, “that’s so sad.”

Kathleen, who is in the top 18 academically in her class of 240, told Jamila’s father that she tried reading a collection of his short stories, “the one called ‘Jungle Fever.’”

“I’m not Spike Lee. It was just ‘Fever’.”

TO LOOK AT THEM, THESE SIX seniors on the team, who all appear to be lit with wins, would assume that their lives have been seamless journeys. In fact, as Jen Pauline puts it, she does not come out of a “Dan Quayle kind of family” — and neither do most of the others.

Whatever sadness or disruption they’ve been through, they follow them onto the court. Jen-

ny and Jamila have not gone it alone; they have had butterfly, strong right hand, an almost irresistible force heading toward the basket. She never wavers a motion; the ball is in her hands one second, then quietly dropping through the hoop the next, without drama, almost like an afterthought. There’s Kris-

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MONICA ALECE/THENew York Times
Her flushed cheeks are not a sign of exhaustion but of some private fury. When the ball came curling out of the basket, more often than not it is Kristin who has pushed and shoved her way to the prize.

The only undersized starter, Emily Shore, is so serious about her chance to play with the famous Jenni and Jamila that she spent the bulk of her summer lifting weights and batting in pickup games on Amherst's crested and weather-revenged outdoor courts with a succession of skeptical and then grudgingly appreciative younger girls.

They have become what every opponent fears most: a team with a mission.

As good as it gets. That is, of course, the exact sentiment the girls feel toward their fancy fans.

"Faster, your next betts," says Coach, "Severence service will commence shortly after this. There'll be turbulence coming to Havenhill when the Hurricanes hit Worsenall, and while the people to whom he would like them to dedicate the entire season. And that's the way it boils down: playing youth basketball is Amherst for the first time this year."

Then Pendant says she wants to read a letter from Dionne Stanton, the mother of Christ Stanton, the star of the boys' basketball team.

"You're a team," the letter began. Dionne Stanton said she was addressing them because she knew them best, but the letter was for the whole team. "Your existence as a team represents a lot of things to a lot of women like me... As a young girl I remember standing outside the Little League fence and watching the boys and knowing that I could root and catch better than at least a third of them. When our high-school intramural field hockey team and softball team asked for leagues, we were old filling. Now, we are not only a team; you're not only a team. When this group of girls got together to form an intramural baseball team, I was subjected to ridicule and anger from some of the student body..."

She continued, "I'm excited about girls baseball. It's in my junior year and would no longer play intramural sports. Part of it was a protest against my whole school... to recognize that we needed to play as much as boys. I know the strategy.

COACH GIVES THE DRIVER a signal and the vehicle starts to roll. A police car just ahead suddenly swerves its lights and in a slow ceremony leads the vehicle to the corner of Main and Triangle Streets, where another officer has been summoned to stop traffic. Coach is beaming and silently thanks his old pal, Capt. Charles Smith, who, ever in the Police Department for coming through. In addition to being a guidance counselor, Moyers has been a police officer and so, in 1961, a task he enjoys because Unlike with boys, whose arrogance and confidence often have to be eroded before he can get the team to work, this is all constructed. The way to build a girls' team is to build their individual self-confidence.

The bus heads down Main St. to a street that is most famous for being the site of the home where family Dickenson was born, where they lived, died and wrote her poetry to the corner of Neck near, where they get to run a red light, turning in front of Fort River Elementary School, then heading out to Route 9, where the escort lasts all the way to the town line. In an instant, the sign that says "Enterling Pclham" appears, and in another instant a new oneloom ahead that says "Enterling Schooltown."

The girls watch the film and chosen unanimously to pump them for the game — "A League of Their Own." The six seniors are lost in their own thoughts.

Kim Warner knows her mother, who works in personnel at the Uni- versity of Illinois, that she was the star of the game, plus her two sisters, plus her boyfriend's family. Her father lives in another city, and he sends her news accounts all of the games, he has never seen her play. She hasn't seen him since the 13th grade. She plans to go to Westfield State and major in early childhood education. On the way to the game, Kim writes a fancy letter in her head: "Dear Dad, At long last a lot of hard work paid off."

Patricia Abad's mother, a bilingual teacher, has to be at work, and although Patricia will miss her, she knows she can count on a large cheering section of friends. She almost didn't get to play this year. During her junior year, she had moved to Chicago with her mother and her new stepsister. Patricia, who is Cuban on her father's side and Puerto Rican on her mother's, prayed incessantly to the Virgin Mary that she would be able to come back from teammate like Lucía Marqueses, back when Lucía was a guiding light in their lives. She has always remembered you as one of the wisest, most caring and compassionate people I've ever met. I'm going to make you very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very much...

Whether it was divine intervention or that 14th "very" from Lucía, the resolve of Patricia's mother to stay in Chicago eventually vanished. They returned to the Happy Valley, as Patricia is called, and Patricia could finish her senior year as a member of the Hurricanes. She has been accepted at Drew, Clark and the University of Massachusetts, pre-med.

Kristin Marvin, also known as Jill, Jolly Green and (secretly her teammates have misinterpreted her tenacity as clumsiness), is going to the University of Illinois, major in biochemistry. She likes medicine because it has a strong element of knowability. Her parents are divorce, but she was young and she lived with a lot of uncertainty. Her mother has since married a builder who's first wife had Kristin's father, who was a construction worker, and Kristin's father rushes to the games after work in his business suit. The marital re-alignment has created a necessary stance in which the daughter of her stepfather and stepmother is Kristin's double stepfather.

Coach calls Kristin Doo his absent assigned — the girl with two distinct personalities. The demure senior with the high grades, with applications at Williams, Swarthmore, Duke and Dartmouth, is Kristin; the girl on the court is her ferocious twin, Slippery. She concocted the nickname when Kristin first started playing she said "Ex- cuse me" all the time and would pause to pick her opponents up off the floor. She wants to be like Jamila: someone you don't want to meet on the court but who will be a good friend off it.

Jamila plans to study law and African-American studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Like her mother, Judy Wong, who is in her second year of law school, Jamila hopes to be a corporate attorney. As a child of mixed races, she has told interviewers she identifies not with being black or white but with being herself. Still, her bedroom has pictures of Whitney and Jesse Jackson and the children of Soweto. After the riot in Los Angeles, she wrote several poems that reflected her feelings.

In "Black," she wrote:

I walk the tightrope between the fires.

Does someone know where I live through?

Their forked tongues rape red rage.

Their physical destruction passes me by.

Who's the color fire call me?

Jen is known locally as the best thing that ever happened to Pclham, which is that little twinge on the edge of the town. Since Jen was 2 and her brother, Chris, was 4, they have lived with their father, who is a residential counselor, and the reservoirs and water treatment in Amherst. She is planning to play ball for Dartmouth and to major in engineering. She turned down Princeton, especially after the recruit, who made a home visit, would not let her father, who has a stutter, talk.

The door to her room is plastered with posters, the walls covered with粘贴, and Jen calls the walls above her bed her "strong women wall," and it is filled with pictures of her favorite role models, including Ann Richards and Toni Morrison. By her bed, she keeps a clothbound book — given to her by her teammate Ritu Powell — in which she writes favorite quotes, a summer's end ritual.

Marilyn Monroe: "If I'm going to be alone, I'd rather be myself."

"The good things you will do for other people, and be with enthusiasm."

Zora Neale Hurston: "The dream is the truth."

The TEAM BONDING AMONG these six seniors and the 19 younger girls is one reason they have played so well: the sisterhood-spiritual quest for unity. They have a team song, "Real Love," and they have team traditions (cheered necklaces with their names and plastic rings and scratched handles in basketball), team teddy bears, team towels. At team dinners, Jamila's mother carcabe loads them with silvered chicken cooked in garlic and oil and lemon and served on a bed of noodles. The meals often conclude with a doze or so girlslinking arms in a tight circle, swaying, singing, shouting, "Whoop Pff!!"

To witness adrenaline buildup at the most frenetically, nothing beats the atmosphere on one of those yellow buses on the return home after a victory over Hampl. Northampton is a five town, birthplace of Calvin Coolidge, home of Smith College. But, as Jen Dickenson, who is most happy when we play Hamp! Both teams become better. L78 fans are always friendly, always affable with the fans. They'll even laugh at the scornful chant: "You're outnumbered, you're outnumbered."

A victory against Hamp! especially by their territory at Pclham gym, especially in front of at least 1,200 people with several hundred more turned away at the door, was a great moment to whomp and cheer the whole way home, to sing Queen's famous anthem, "We Are the Champions," to slap the ceiling of the bus, to open the windows and to shout:

What are the Hurricanes rock the house. Where are the Hurricanes rock the house.

They rock it all the way down.

But even though they beat Hamp! in the Western Massinals, they weren't really champions — yet. Do they have what it takes to make it all the way? We'll have to see.

The bottom line is that if a smaller group of girls can't be beat, if a smaller group of girls can't be beat, then it is the right time to tap into a market of girls who are interested in teamwork and play and competition. To the world, these team-niners have pretty names: Pat, Kristin, Jen, Calm, Jamila, Sophie, Julie, Emily J, Emily B, Jan, Lucia, Carle, Rita, Jess, Julie. But as far as the girls are concerned, they are the codes that encapsulate their rare and superb skills, their specialty positions and their individual styles. They are Cloudy and Cougar and James.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Apr 18, 1993; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2004) pg_219

bones and Ginger and Grace and Stphy and Pred-er. They are warriors.

The girls crowd into a locker- or guru room and the women con-

cometion than usual, they dress in their beggy garter-

or band-stand and stand. Mean-

while, the arena is redolent of hot dogs, peanuts, ice cream, and anticipation, one side of the blackboard filled with their poster-men and poster-women with the fans from Harvard.

The girls walk out word-

lessly. They look up.

You have to live in a small
town for a while before you can brush aside a lanternila-

in New England, where
tensions are as deep in the soil.

But if you've been in a town like Amherst for a while, you can go to an out-of-town
game, even one as import-

ant and consequently a facility as the Centrum, and you can
test this sudden burst of wel-

come rain in the form of the
touching familiarity of faces that are as much a part of your

landscape as falling leaves, as foreign as in season, as

rhubarb in June. You scan the

small crowd, and sometimes for worse, you

know who's who. You know

who's hot and

who's cold.

Even if you are the

lawyer who represented your fel- lovely

or one of their friends, in a land dis-

pute or a custody case. You

see the realtor who tried to

sell house sold posthumously to the new kids in town. You

see the doctor who was no

help to your asthma and the one

who was. You see the

teacher who declared your

baby brother a complete

mystery and the teacher who

always stops to ask what your

remarkable brother is up to

now. You know which man in

the beloved elementary-

school principal, new retired.

You recognize the plump-

cheeked ladies from the cafe-

teria who specialize in horse-

men's cuisine and beans for 15

cents. You see your

family and you see the fathers and mothers and sisters and stepmothers of your

teammates. You know whose

brother flew in to

watch the game; whose step-

grandparents came from

Michigan.

But what is most im-

portant about all this is how
much more than just a game is something that is under-

scored, as tacit as the pro-

gram, as the program's order to fall to winter to spring, and just as comforting.

Usually there is a burst of

cheering at the start of a
game, but this time the Am-

herst crowd is nearly silent as the referee tosses the ball.

The Fluhrerhill center taps the

ball backward to her
down to the right, and the wing, who instant-

antly sets up the center.

Easy layup, Amherst

blanks first. Nothing. In the

last two games, the

crowd cheers. It is the only

pure cheer they will get.

Within a few seconds, the

score is 0-4 Amherst, and

something truly remarkable takes place. The Hurricanes enter a zone where all of

them are all-American. It's a

kind of controlled frenzy that can occur when a group of

athletes under only the most

elusive of circumstances. It's not

certain what triggers it, perhaps

10% of Amherst's gerdyn

three-pointer from the wing, or even

when you drive the baseline and as she

wheels beneath the basket

like a bird of prey she releases

the ball back over her

head, placing it like an egg

against the backboard and

through the hoop. It may have

been 10 seconds, 30 seconds, when Dan- erls set the ball, pun-

ning it down court on

a one-on-one break, makes a

look-leap, going with the

quickly fires the ball across

the lane to Kathleen for an

unscreened layup. Whatever It is that started it, there is

nothing Haverhill can do to

stop it, and once the roof has

only fuel for Amherst's frezzy
to the.

Back in the locker room,

Kathleen wins over on

ord. As a matter

of fact, the

women's coaches can't remember it being no

4-6.

An astonished Amherst can

hardly even cheer. Dan Am-

herst fans shout: "Where's

Dr. Kevorkian?" Another

made the very un-Amherst

command: "They should bring

on the Fluhrerhill boys for the

second half!"

Among the spectators is

Kathleen's father, Donald Poe, an associate professor of psychology at Hampshire

College, who saw how her de-

fense was played against one of the stars of Kri-

tin and Emily Store, kept

Haverhill score so low.

When sport, was an

infant, Donald Poe tried to

teach him to say "ball" on his

first word, and it was told

that "b3" is a hard sound for

a baby. He expected a new

to be in

athlete, and when Kath-

leen came clinging he didn't

have that expectation. Yet

I promise you. There will be

more than just a game.

Still they regard him with

disbelief. They can't decide

if he is real, or just the new

man at the game.

VER THE GAME was over. On the way home, they watched a

store, three things: the game. Jon was

stunned at how it had all

fallen into place: We were scared, it was

scary. While they watched themselves, televi-

sion viewers all over the

and were witnessing the recap of

the highlights and hearing the

verdict of professional com-

mentators who claimed these
games had wandered into the

wrong league. They should have been playing Carpe-ter's men at U Mass; they could have

the Celtics. The boys would

hear all that in the days to come, but

at this moment they were

mostly thanking the pres-ent: that the truth itself had

been told. They were singing

to Kristin, who turns

18 this day. Then they extend

the pleasure of the game to

students, teachers, sis-

ters, even to some of those

40 who busied themselves

in the school night of unprecedented late-

ness, and in one final ad, a

team, these girls shout, is the

perfect union that has served them so well on the

court. "Ah, Jon!"

out of Pelham — thanks to

12, on the map at last.

Kathleen's father revealed that the whole team could sleep that

night in the gym at the

high school, the coolest, most

honey, softest place they

could now imagine, that they
could tie rope into its floor, become part of it forever. She

kept trying out rhymes in

her head, phrases popping into

her mind like sudden re-

born: top and stop, pride and
care, forever and saved, never,

smart, true, you.

Haop Phl is a of intangi-

ble, unachievable breed.

It satisfies the soul, and a

life-long need.

We represent our school.

Now maybe both will

get some well-earned re-

spect.

We are not the kind

who have wanted the ride to

end. The bare trees,

the velvety night air, the ca-

coon of the bus itself.

At the town line there

another police es-

sue, this time back into
town.

The cruiser was once again

full of proud, slow ceremony. At the corner of Main and

Triumphs, the cruiser seemed
to lurch right to take the short-cut back to the school,

but then its headlight lost its

fill, it continued to move for-

ward, so that the girls would

be safe, through town the

long way.

The bus, beretmen in its

white and brown, moved past the red-bricked Dickinson

housestand with its top-heavy trees, tall and thin with a crown of evergreens. I love you, Great
dark? Downtown was al-

most empty save for a couple

of people walking in the front
to window of Antonio's and a
towel worker sweeping in the

dark shadows of Bart's Ice

Cream. As the lights lights

from the crunter bounced off

the street signs and the

boulevard past St. Bridget's

the rigatone, turning each

Turning each corner, the

bus rolled into the school parking lot a few

minutes shy of midnight.

All the light from the

players shouted: "There are people there, waiting for

us!" But the
tience was a small crowd

standing in the cold and

in the stars, clapping.

When the bus came to a stop,

Coach stood up. "I prom-

ised you a good job. There's

just one thing you need to

know. That you're the state

champions, the season ever

never expected you to win.

And now, I'd like every-

body else on the bus to please

wait so that the team can get

off first."

Often the Hurricanes will

be treated to the same

squealing chump. On this

t, they rose from their

seats, slowly, in silence, State

champs! For the final time this

season, with great care

borders on tenderness, the

teammates gathered their

stuff, their uniforms, their

shoes, their socks, their game

faces and their courage. And

in a decision that was never

actually articulated but seemed to have evolved as

naturally as the parapet of a

perfect three-pointer, the

Hurricanes waited for cap-

tain Jen Pariseau to lead the

way. They did, and she

by one of the rest of the men

followed, with captain Jamiila

Widman the last of the

Hurricanes to step off the bus into

the swirling sea of well-wish-

ers and other fans.

Overhead the sky was

low-hanging and as opaque

as it had been earlier in the
day and in the sun, but stars

made it shine.