

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Even fish know kids need a father at home

From the bont launch, I looked into the shallows and spotted him — less than seven inches long, hovering over a saucer-shaped depression. Earlier in spring, the bluegill had scooped out the nest, herded in a female, then fertilized the eggs she laid.

The bull bluegill, with his iridescent gill covers and yellow bowtie, will guard the eggs until they hatch. Let a minnow, beetle or another fish venture too near, and the bull gill attacks, his sharp dorsal fin flashing. When a slovenly carp or idiot speedboat stirs up the bottom, the bull gill fans away the silt with his pectoral fins. The gill is vulnerable to anglers when he's on guard because, hungry or not, he will take a whack at anything that comes near the nest.

Other fish, like muskie and salmon, scatter their eggs and spawn, then depart. Not the bluegill, who has an excellent reproduction rate and is one of

Michigan's most widespread and successful species. The bull bluegill, though cold-blooded and pea-brained, is a better father than many human males. The importance of Father's Day isn't told in syrupy verses of Hallmark cards. It's found in the sociological statistics. Bad things happen to kids born into a household with no father.

- Their infant mortality rate is double their counterparts, says the state Department of Social Services.

- They are three times more likely to be classified EMI (educable mentally impaired).

- They are more likely to be raised in poverty. "Women and their children account for 70 percent of Michigan's poor, largely because of the poverty of single parents. . . . 55 percent of female-headed families with children were in poverty," said the Michigan Women's Commission.

- Welfare is needed by 73 percent of



ALL-STATE

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teen mothers within four years, it being understood that 70 percent of births to teens are out of wedlock. Says the National Urban League: "That act alone is a passport to poverty."

- There are no hard statistics, but DSS says kids in single-parent families do poorly in school.

- Three years ago, I wrote about monitoring child disaster stories — small children who get shot, drowned, left in dumpsters and so on. Only about one story a year involves children with two parents. Watch them on TV yourself. You'll see grieving mothers, aunts, sisters, grandmothers — rarely an adult male.

The worst result of a kid not having a father, however, is prison. Some years ago, the Michigan Department of Corrections released some horrifying figures to the effect that a disproportionate number of prison inmates were from fatherless families. As I recall, a kid from a fatherless home had three or

four times as much chance of going to prison as a kid from a two-family home. This is not to say that all kids from two-parent homes will do well. Witness Leslie Williams, the confessed serial killer and rapist.

Nur is it to say that every kid from a single-parent home is doomed to hell. Witness statesman Willy Brandt, Leonardo da Vinci, Lawrence of Arabia and conquistador Francisco Pizarro. It's a matter of odds. It's possible for a colt carrying 145 pounds to win the Derby against a field carry 120, but that isn't the way you want to bet. Dads won't eliminate rioters, but they will better the odds their kids won't grow up to riot. Good fathers are important in raising kids and keeping them out of prison. Even a fish knows that.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional news.

## Sports drought will mean fewer Olympic medals

In this Olympic year, recent racism could hurt the historic dominance of America's dashmen. In 1957 my sprint teammates on the United States team were mostly black, and African-American runners have essentially ruled ever since. But now our annual share of the world's fastest sprint times is declining sharply. The pool of young blacks who could prevent this decline has lost thousands of potential sprinters to prison or violent death.

The imprisonment rate for black males — a group plagued with problems unimaginable to middle-class whites — is 3,370 per 100,000 compared to the overall figure of 455. A myriad of urban youngsters are running drugs instead of track. Meanwhile, the low inner-city track clubs are ill-financed. High school track budgets have been cut, and college scholarships and programs are disappearing as a partial result.

Just look at Detroit. During my day our Detroit Track Club's sprint relay teams medalled nationally and broke a world record — but the club no longer exists. The Wayne State University program that made me an All-American and turned generations of street kids into top sprinters is gone, too.

Thus, the records I set at WSU 35 years ago will stand forever. The University of Detroit track program which physically developed Cleveland Browns' defensive back Jim Shorter and other good dashmen is also defunct. The U-D track is now a parking lot.

When I dashed in Detroit in the 1950s and coached there in the 1960s, dual meets between powerful schools drew more than a thousand spectators. Clockings like Cliff Hatcher's incredible 48.8-second 440-yard dash for the city title in 1951 and the "Gray Ghost" Henry Carr's world-record 20.0/22.0 a



JOHN TELFORD

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decade later consistently bettered state and often national records. (And we dashed on dusty dirt rather than expensive Astroturf.)

Detroit launched international sprinters Lorenzo Wright out of old Miller High, Carr from Northwestern, John Lewis from old Northwestern, Eddie Tolan from Cass Tech, Stan Vinson from Chalmers, Marshall Dill from North, Elliot "The Train" Tabron from Murray-Wright and me from Denby. All but me were black, and Tabron 10 years ago was the last of the breed.

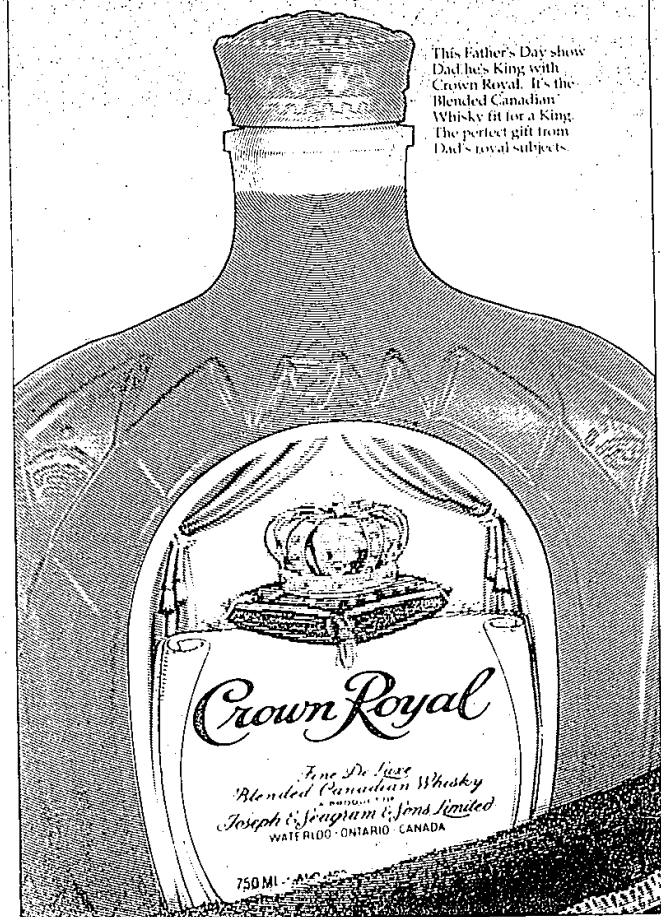
Beyond the Motor City, the drought has been even longer. Except for Reggie Jones of Saginaw in the 1970s, there hasn't been a Michigan-bred international speed-burner from outside Detroit since Hayes Jones of Pontiac and Rex Caskey of Farmington in 1964 — and they hurdled more often than they sprinted.

The NCAA's escalated admission standards will further handicap ghetto students. Community college track programs like the excellent one at Macomb Community College with its liberal admissions have eased that problem a little, but football money is hiring more sprinters — and older stars like Carl Lewis are fading.

Don't be surprised if several Olympic gold medals go to non-Americans at Barcelona this summer and at Atlanta in 1996. Sadly, there will be no more Michigan gold medalists like Hayes Jones and Caskey and Wright and Tolan and the great Gray Ghost.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district.

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