

Reid and Steele: Adding a personal touch to reporting the news

By AUDREY L. WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

Two of the more listened to people in the Winston-Salem community are probably two of the least recognized.

It's the voices of Pat Reid and Jim Steele that local residents are more familiar with, although Steele says there have been times when people have recognized his voice off the radio.

Both Reid and Steele cover local news. The only difference between the two is that Reid works for black-owned WAAA-TV, while Steele has worked for four years now as a member of the WSJS-AM radio news team, whose audience is primarily white.

WAAA's Pat Reid

Reid, a former member of the WSJS news team, went aboard WAAA in 1983. Because the station is smaller, Reid, who has a straightforward and earthy appeal, is the station's news and public affairs departments.

Her mornings begin at 6:15 and the newsmakers have known that for quite a while now.

"Most of the people I call for my morning broadcast are very cordial," says Reid. "All my news is important but the early morning news is very important. So a lot of times I have to call folk and I know they don't like it, but I always ask, 'Did I wake you?'"

A Burlington native, Reid says she ventured into the broadcasting business on the advice of her brother, a communications graduate student at Howard University, who thought she should capitalize on her talkative nature.

Reid studied at Elon College and the Technical Institute of Alamance (now Technical College of Alamance) and earned a degree from the Carolina School of Broadcasting in Charlotte.

In 1977, she landed her first radio job at WBBB in Burlington.

"I had to learn to be nosy and it really used to hurt me when people said 'No' to me," she says.

A year later, Reid was in Winston-Salem, and it was at WSJS that she and Steele formed a friendship that still exists, even though they now try their best to beat each other to a story.

"When I first came here I had to work hard to build the confidence and trust of certain leaders in the black community," she says. "They used to tell me, 'WSJS doesn't report black news.'"

"But the really fun thing about this business is breaking news and scooping other reporters," she says.

Heading WAAA's public affairs shows and keeping abreast with local news keeps Reid on the go, but she says her 13-year-old son, Trince, understands.

"He cooks," she says. "I can come home tired and prop my feet up and just wait for him to finish dinner."

A Talker

A tangent talker, Reid moves about from one subject to another of her broadcast career. One of her recollections sends her into frenzied laughter.

"I wrote for the school newspaper (at Technical Institute of Alamance)," she says, "and I wrote an editorial about the instructors showing favoritism to the black students. Nobody talked to me. Everyone thought I was militant."

Because radio news is so immediate, Reid says she has to keep her creative juices flowing and works hard to inform the black community, especially about the events

that affect their lives.

"There's a misconception that the broadcast media is rip and read," she says. "I used to do investigative reporting and now I cover the meetings."

"I've never been a person who liked to just pull out a newspaper or pull something off the AP wire," says Reid. "This is a community station and I like to be out in the community. I like to be there."

Reid tries her best to keep the phones ringing at WAAA on Fridays at 11:30 a.m., when she and her guest discuss subjects such as blacks' attitudes toward other blacks, housing, the death penalty, and the abuse of social service on the popular call-in show "Talk About Town."

Another popular show, "Personalities in the Community," which Reid both produces and hosts, is what she calls "a program about people who are really working in the community."

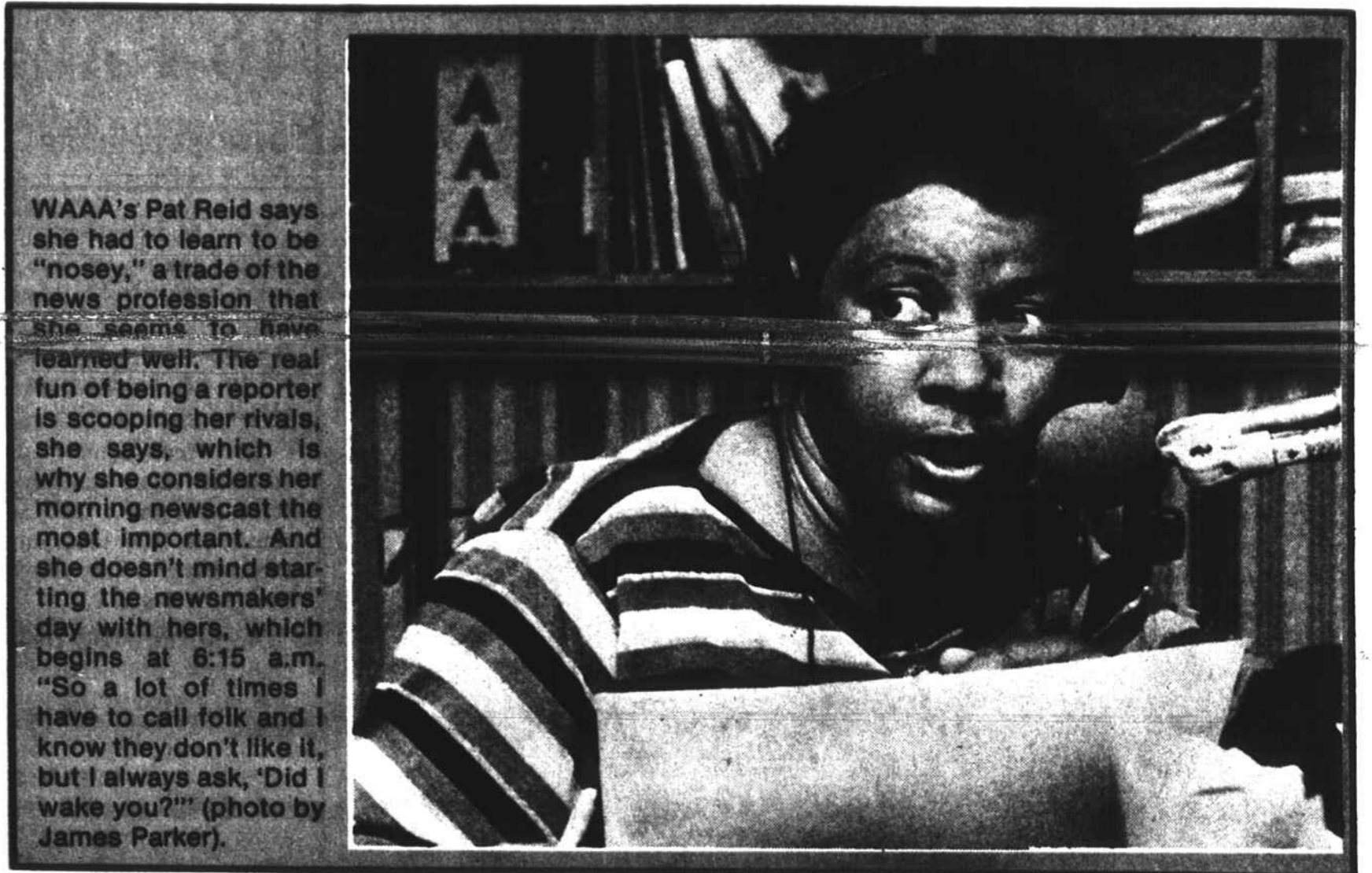
WSJS's Jim Steele

Jim Steele tried to put himself in the place of an interviewee.

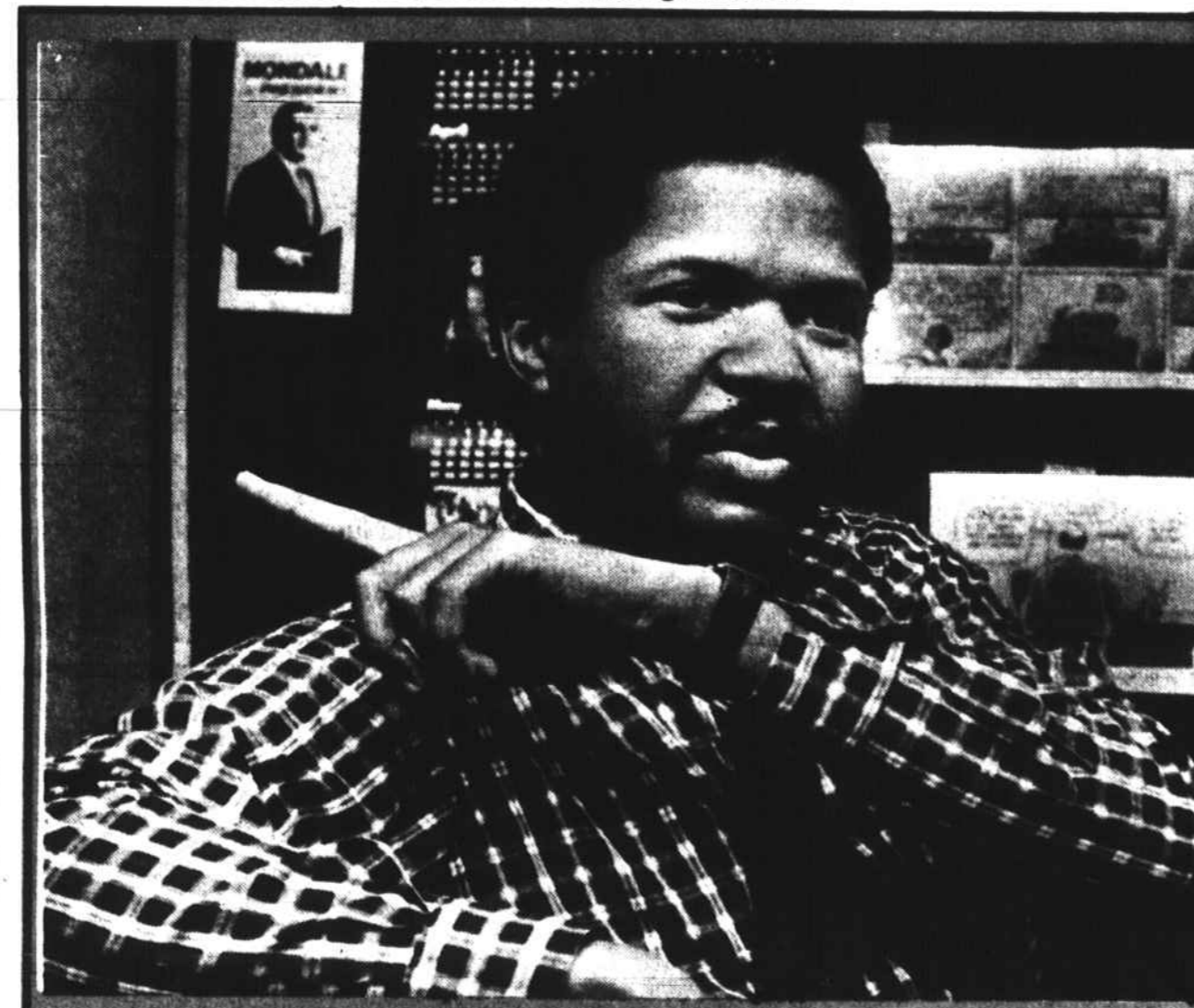
"I stuck the microphone in my face," he says, "and now I know why people don't like it."

Steele, who has mellowed since his days as the outspoken Afro-American Society president at Wake Forest University five years ago, knows what it's like to be backed in a corner.

After being elected president of AAS at Wake, Steele was interviewed by a member of the student newspaper and an off-color remark he made about the organization



WAAA's Pat Reid says she had to learn to be "nosy," a trade of the news profession that she seems to have learned well. The real fun of being a reporter is scooping her rivals, she says, which is why she considers her morning newscast the most important. And she doesn't mind starting the newsmakers' day with hers, which begins at 6:15 a.m. "So a lot of times I have to call folk and I know they don't like it, but I always ask, 'Did I wake you?'" (photo by James Parker).



Though Jim Steele, WSJS-AM anchorman, is heard more than he's seen, he makes it his business to go that "extra mile" to make himself visible in the community. His view of a profession laden with the constant pressure of deadlines and events happening at the most inconvenient of times: "It's a game. It's a sport. Racing against time" (photo by James Parker).

was used in the story.

"I said that it wouldn't be just that 'niggah' organization," says Steele. He found himself having to explain himself and make amends with the black alumni of Wake -- which is why he says he has an honest sympathy for Jesse Jackson, who took a blistering for referring to Jews as "Hymies" and New York as "Hymietown." Steele then grimaces at the mention Milton Coleman, the *Washington Post* reporter who disclosed Jackson's remarks to the public.

An ultimate goal for him once he landed his first job

was to fine tune his writing, and after shadowing Reid, she soon became his mentor.

It's the *personal touch* that Reid helped him to develop, he says, the personal touch that local black leaders feel more comfortable with.

"In the black community people conceive you as working for the white station," says Steele, 26. "I could be wrong but you would probably be more apt to talk to the station that relates to you, and Pat taught me to be in contact with the black community."

Still Friends

Probably the reason Steele and Reid have continued their friendship is that the WSJS reporter is just as outspoken about issues as she is and whatever else the subject may be.

"I say what's on my mind," Steele says. "I don't hold back."

Steele, who lives 26 miles away in Mocksville, arrives for work at 11 a.m. His most ready memory perhaps was when he was a newcomer at WSJS and a news story broke in a neighborhood somewhat foreign to him.

"Somebody got killed at the Dungeon (a now-defunct local nightclub)," he says, "so I just flew over there with my tape recorder and got my interview with the cop. I was just standing there listening to the witnesses and this guy walks over to me and asks for my tape."

"I told him that I hadn't taped anything, but he insisted that I give him the tape," says Steele, "so I gave it to him and he just tore it up."

He says that incident taught him that respecting other people's rights is important, and exercising that respect has become his way of curbing the paranoia many may have of the media.

"It's not that you're catering to anybody, but to everybody," says Steele, "and since blacks are the minorities, it may seem as though you go that extra mile to reach the black community."

That added mile is when he opts to go and talk with people face-to-face rather than using the telephone to get his questions answered, he says, which he considers a plus because he feels it helps to be visible.

Both Reid and Steele are in a constant race against time. The added pressure of getting a story finished in time for the news, whichever broadcast it may be, seems to be their fuel for existence.

"That's what gets you going," says Steele, "that pressure. Racing back with the tape. Writing it in your head. You're thinking 15 seconds of good material."

"It's a game," he says. "It's a sport. Racing against time."

He balances athletics and academics

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Fifteen-year-old Jerome Lovelace, receiver and defensive back, gave members of the Hanes High football team quite a shock when the coached lined each of them up and asked for report cards.

"People looked at me at Hanes," says the ninth-grader "and thought, 'Oh, Jerome, he's black. He plays football. He doesn't make good grades.'"

When it was Jerome's turn to show the coach what his report card looked like, he had only A's and B's in all of his courses, which were academic. That, he says, won him respect among his peers and any other students that might have doubted his academic abilities before.

Albert Nesbit has no doubts about his son's ability, and he refuses to blame prejudice or people who typecast others as the reasons Jerome's academic talents are sometimes overlooked.

"He's so low-keyed," says Nesbit. "Unless you spend a lot of time with him you would never know about his grades. He doesn't boast and he doesn't push for the honor roll. He just does it."

Jerome was inducted into the North Carolina Scholars Program this year after being nominated by his guidance counselor, Jane Suitt.

"Jerome doesn't sacrifice one for the other," she says. "He excels in academics and athletics. I think Jerome is a young man with goals. He's a planner."

"Teen-agers live very much in the present," says Suitt, "while Jerome manages to live in the present and set goals for the future. Most of all he's a thinker. In class discussion, he's the one who asks the penetrating questions."

History is at the top of his list of favorite subjects and math ranks a strong second. His career goal is aimed at computer technology. At

Young & Gifted

North Forst High School next fall, Jerome will be enrolled in his first computer class.

"I like math and working with computers," says Jerome. "I really like working with computers for the challenge and I think they're fascinating."

Recreation for Jerome is playing basketball, skating at one of the local rinks, talking with girls on the phone, bike riding and listening to the radio.

But a lot of his time is spent alone.

"I think a lot," says Jerome, pausing for a moment to think about the next question.

"Let me think about that," he answers.

Jerome has a very broad view of most things. Whether the subject is positive or negative, he goes beyond the initial responses.

"Some of my classes are a challenge," says Jerome. "Science usually is. But I enjoy history because when you find out about what happened in the past, it may help you in the future."

"Lots of people ask, 'Why worry about the past?' I just think it's good to know."

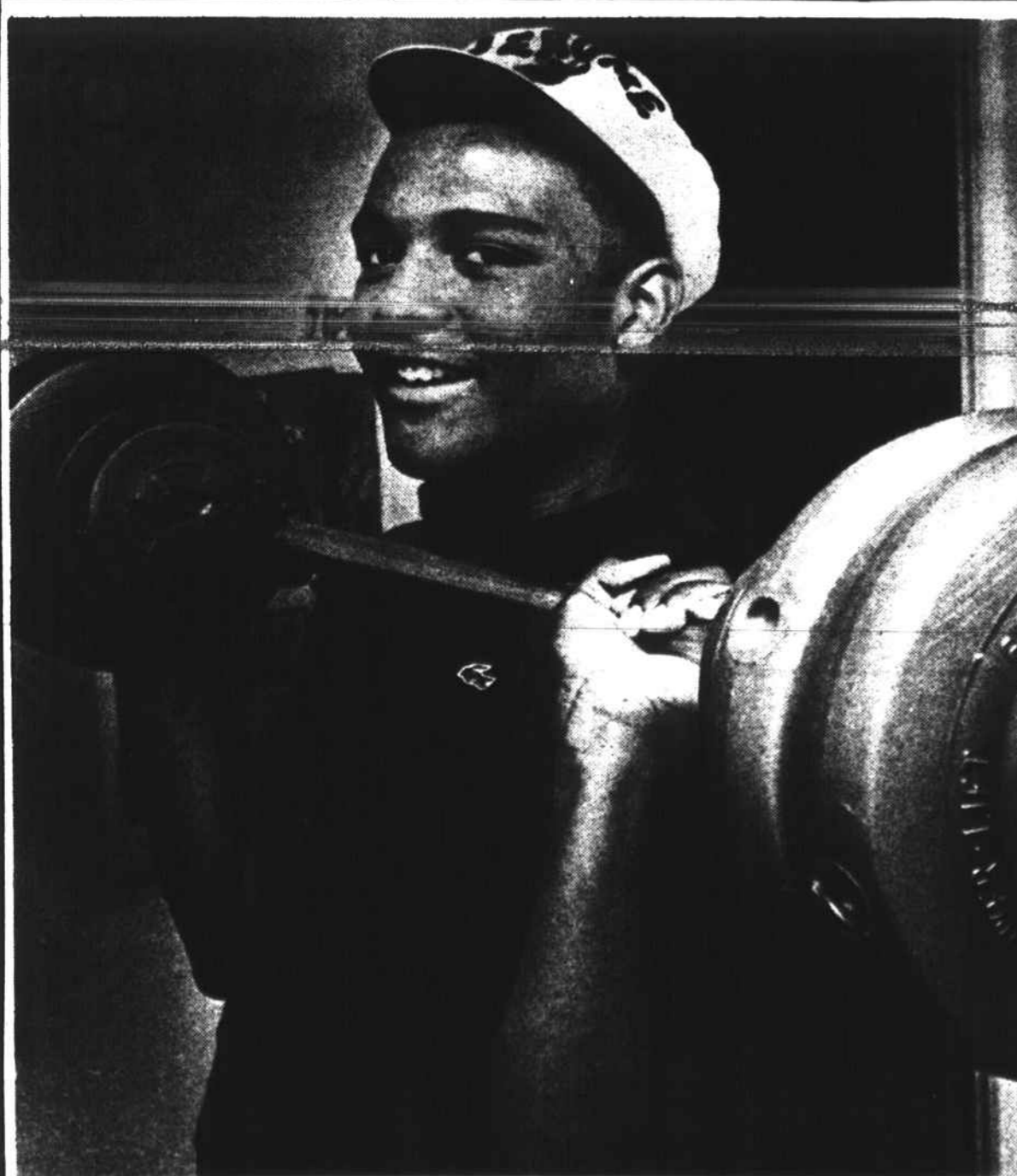
Like most young men, Jerome has a lot of admiration and adoration for his father, whom he says he looks to whenever he needs help.

Although Hanes had a 2-4-1 football record this season, it hasn't discouraged Jerome, who's already preparing to tryout for the team at North Forsyth. One of his major projects for the summer, he says, is to build his body for the team. He works out every other day and presently bench presses 155 pounds.

"I can be very prejudiced," says Jerome's mother, Kamonia, "but I think Jerome does very well in school. He doesn't do the boasting -- I do."

This summer, Jerome will have another challenge: his baby sister, Alvernia, who is a toddler and eager for her brother's attention.

"I've been an only child for so long," says Jerome, "that I got used to being myself, especially on rainy days. On rainy days I like to play Atari, but she can't play."



Preparing To Lift

Jerome Lovelace: Making the points in athletics and academics (photo by James Parker).