



## Basketball In the Black Colleges

### A Historical Chronology 1891 - 1980

By John B. "Johnny Mc" McLendon  
and Contributing Editor to  
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#### Part I

**THE HISTORY OF BASKETBALL** in the United States can be divided into five periods. Research of basketball history indicates certain factors at various times which allow the following delineations:

#### PERIOD I 1891-1920

A. Invention of Basketball, 1891.  
B. Early History. Entry. Incorporation Into Sports Programs of Black Colleges.

#### PERIOD II 1920-1940

Development of Basketball in Black Colleges and in Other Social Institutions.

#### PERIOD III 1940-1950

A. Black College Basketball During World War II Years.  
B. The Acceptance of Black Athletes Into the Professional Sports of Baseball, Football, and Basketball, and Its Impact on Black College Athletics.

#### PERIOD IV 1950-1960

Black College Basketball — Acceptance and Visibility.

#### PERIOD V 1960-1980

A. Basketball During the 60's in Black Colleges.  
B. Increased Significant Achievement in Black College Basketball to Date.  
C. Objectives of the Future.

The Spartan Period, I through III (1891-1950), was one of abject "invisibility". The general sports public in the United States had little or no knowledge of black college athletic teams and individuals, and certainly no awareness of their significant contribution to the total national sports scene.

Blacks were thought of only in terms of blue overalls and brogan shoes. Occasionally, a super black star managed to break the barrier with individual brilliance in a sport like track and field and football, or command wide acclaim that helped to propel him to the zenith of his era in boxing.

Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion is a case in point. While stalking every fighter in sight, he was avoided like a quarantine sign. The press reacted with disdain reserved for people with acute halitosis.

Boxing as a professional sport, clearly outlined many fine black athletes. The legacy started with Joe Gans, continued with Kid Chocolate, Henry Armstrong, John Henry Lewis, "Sugar" Ray Robinson, the incomparable Joe Louis and numerous others who used the prize ring to authenticate what they already knew about themselves.

Because of the Olympics, the speed and wizardry of Howard Drew, Ed Gordon, DeHart Hubbard, Jesse Owens, Eulace Peacock, Eddie Tolan, Ralph Metcalfe, Archie Harris, etc., were spotlighted by bold headlines.

During this early period, football heroes from northern and western schools were the only other black products of team sports. In the formative years, black athletes got the public's eye, principally through participation on teams representing majority colleges and universities.

Sports on black campuses were relegated to the back of the caboose. The press completely ignored the fact that black schools existed and social customs prevented white sports fans of the time from getting close enough to form opinions.

A writer might listen politely when the name of a resident black star was mentioned, but nobody thought much about it. So what if he were a phenomenon? He was still black and he didn't count. All blacks marched to the beat of a different drummer.

Black teams were accustomed to an altogether diverse lifestyle, but coaches kept their noses to the grindstone while their athletes groped for general recognition.

A new era, and new hope dawned when the sports scene was finally Americanized through the integration of professional baseball. (1947-48), professional football (1949-50), and professional basketball in 1950-51.

The transition was dramatic. Sports writers stopped being openly antagonistic and commentators from radio and TV stations across the country perked their ears and took notice. Together they served as a common denominator to help bridge a 100-year communication gap.

It was almost too much to imagine for crusty pioneer coaches like Harry Jefferson, Virginia State; Fred Long, Wiley College; Zip Gayles, Langston; Cleve Abbott, Tuskegee, Eddie Jackson, Howard University; Ox Clemmons, Lape College; Arnett Munford, Southern University; Alex Durely, Texas College and Henry A. Kean, Tennessee State.

While daily newspapers and radio and television stations were introducing bright, new faces from black schools to their media audience, readers of the black weekly newspaper were musing, "I told you so." The black press had kept them informed.

For years, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Chicago Defender*, *Afro-American*, *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, *Atlanta World* and the *Kansas City Call* labored to remove the "mediocre" stamp placed on teams from black schools by daily papers through editorial persuasion.

With sports writers Chester Washington, J. Don Davis, Fay Young, Dan Burley, Jim Hall, Sam Lacey, A.S. "Doc" Young, Wendell Smith, John Johnson, Ric Roberts, "Skpper" Dixon, Marion Jackson, Bill Nunn, "Scoop" Jones, Cal Jacox and Lem Graves of the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, Art Carter of the *Afro-American*, A.M. "Alex" Rivera of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Bill Tuck and "Shorty" Davis of *The Carolina Times*, chourishing long and loud about the flashing feet, accurate shooting, and hard punches of sculptured black giants, the pre-Renaissance agony was made easier.

In order to provide readers of *The Carolina Times* with a clear understanding of this evolution, attention will first be focused on a general look involving the CIAA, 1912-50 and a closer look at 1940-50. Subsequently a close look will be taken at the crucial period of 1950-60, the beginning of "Visibility" for Black College Athletes.



**THE Coach**

McLendon (seated) flanked by Tennessee State assistant coaches Richard Mack (left) and Harold Hunter with NAIA national championship trophies won 1951, 1958 and 1959. Both Mack and Hunter played basketball under McLendon's tutelage at North Carolina College at Durham.

## About Coach McLendon

### The Man Who Invented Four Corners

By Howie Evans  
Sports Editor  
Amsterdam News

Coach John B. McLendon, one of basketball's greatest innovators, was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in a significant off-season development.

For nine years, friends, fellow-coaches, writers and former players waged a quiet war with the selection committee to recognize his enormous contributions to the sport in virtually every part of the world.

In international circles, McLendon is highly regarded for his ability to uncover, develop and accentuate basketball talent.

The Hall of Fame ceremony in Springfield, Mass., was quite fitting since Coach McLendon personally knew the late Dr. James Naismith, the man who invented basketball.

Dr. Naismith took McLendon under his wings while he was a student at the University of Kansas in the mid-30's.

Because of racial prejudice existing at the time, McLendon was not permitted to try out for the Kansas basketball team.

John Bishop scored a career high 33 points and Donald Sinclair added 24 as Central downed Livingstone 94-85.

Livingstone dropped to 1-4 in the CIAA, 2-6 overall.

The first half had five ties before the Bears gradually pulled away from the Eagles taking a 48-38 halftime lead.

The Eagles rebounded behind the heroics of Bishop, Sinclair, and David Binion and took a short-lived 54-53 lead at 14:20 on a basket by Sinclair.

Blake led the Bears with 27 points; Adrain Wright and James Hart added a dozen apiece.

Livingstone (85) Blake 27, Wright 12, Jim Robinson 6, Allen 7, Miller 9, Moultrie 8, Hart 12, Joe Robinson, Davis 2, James Robinson 2, Brown, Rogers.

NCCU (94) Sinclair 24, Griffin 5, Murphy 7, Tyson 5, Bishop 33, Faucette 4, Binion 8, Wright 4, House, Moore, Johnson, Taylor 3, Evans 2, Willie 2.

Halftime: Livingstone 48-38. Fay, St 62, NCCU 61

FAYETTEVILLE — Fayetteville State snapped a three game NCCU win-

grinned, tongue-in-cheek.

Even though McLendon was denied the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate basketball, he became a student of the game and turned to coaching. In 1935, while still a junior, Dr. Naismith recommended him for a coaching position at Lawrence Memorial High School near the university.

He coached the team to the Missouri-Kansas athletic conference championship his senior year.

From 1934-40, he was an assistant coach at (what is now) North Carolina Central University. He became head coach in 1940, starting a reign of terror that oldtime Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association observers still remember with reverence.

In 12 years, McLendon guided the Eagles to 264 wins against 60 defeats. It was during this period that he experimented with and created many of the offensive and defensive stratagems used worldwide by college, national and professional teams.

One of his early ideas was "The Two-in-the-Corner Offense," which he graphically outlines in the 1957 Converse Yearbook. Today, they call it "The Four-Corner Offense" and give credit for its creation to Dean Smith, University of North Carolina. Not so!

Around the same time, McLendon caused a mass confusion in the CIAA with a puzzling defense that, at times, resembled a zone and, on other occasions, appeared to be a

man-to-man defense.

Actually, it was a tricky combination of zone and man-to-man defense. It is widely known now as "The Match-up Zone." Still no credit to its creator.

McLendon left North Carolina for Hampton Institute in 1952 where he remained for two seasons, winning 32 games. Following his brief sojourn with the Pirates, he moved to Tennessee State where his career skyrocketed.

From 1954 to 1959, McLendon won 149 games while losing just 20 with the Big Blues. It was at Tennessee State that he became the first college coach in the U.S. to win three straight national championships. His teams won 16 straight games in NAIA tournament play, a record that still stands.

Equally significant, during the span, he sent Dick Burnett, John Barnhill, Ben Warley, Joe Buckholter and Porter Merriweather to the National Basketball Association. Much earlier, Hal Hunter, a guard he coached at North Carolina College (now North Carolina Central University), became the first player from a black school to sign an NBA contract.

Many of his peers imitated everything he did. The famed Boston Celtic fastbreak of the Bill Russell era was a page out of McLendon's book. Following a successful fling as a pro coach with the Cleveland Pipers and a

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## NCCU Eagles Find Winning Ways

### Eagles Win Three of Four Since Semester Break

NCCU has started off the New Year by racking up three wins in four games. The Eagles began the 1981 season with an 89-80 win over pre-season favorite Johnson C. Smith on January 8. Then on Saturday, January 10 they disposed of Livingstone College 94-85. They suffered their only setback Monday, January 12 when they traveled to Fayetteville State 62-61 but rebounded Wednesday, January 14 to upend Division I UNC-Wilmington 82-73.

NCCU 89, J.C. Smith 80  
Junior guard John

Bishop led five Eagles in double figures with 20 points as NCCU upset pre-season CIAA favorite Johnson C. Smith 89-80 in McDougald Gym. Senior guard Donald Sinclair added 19, freshman reserve guard Michael Wright 15, junior reserve forward David Binion 13, and freshman forward Duane Griffin 10.

The Eagles outrebounded the Golden Bulls 50-48 with Binion getting a game high 14 rebounds. Griffin pulled down 10.

J.C. Smith (80) Singleton 16, Reid 1, Smith 5, Lowery 9, Flores 18, Tibbs 8, Logan 10, George 1, Oliver 12, Thompson, Woods, Simmons, Boykins.

NCCU (89) Sinclair 19, Griffin 10.

Murphy 3, Tyson 5, Bishop 20, Brooks, Evans, Wright 15, Moore, Taylor 2, Binion 13, Willie 2.

Halftime: NCCU 42-32.

NCCU 94, Livingstone 85  
John Bishop scored a career high 33 points and Donald Sinclair added 24 as Central downed Livingstone 94-85.

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FAYETTEVILLE — Fayetteville State snapped a three game NCCU win-

## MEAC Begins League Play

Four Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference basketball teams begin their trek in quest of a regular season championship, and a possible MEAC title this weekend, the tenth annual MEAC Tournament is scheduled for March 6-8 (Friday-Sunday) in the Winston-Salem Memorial Coliseum.

For the first time ever, the MEAC Tournament winner will gain an automatic berth into the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I Basketball Tournament. The NCAA's first and second rounds are set on March 12-15, regional games are March 19-22; and the finals are scheduled in Philadelphia on March 28 and 30.

Friday night, defending MEAC champion Howard University (4-4) will entertain tough NCA&T (6-1), while South Carolina State (0-6) travels to Delaware State (1-5).

On Saturday, Delaware State hosts NCA&T, and

S.C. State will be at Howard. Each will be seeking victories to get a jump on the rest.

Florida A&M (6-3) and Bethune-Cookman (4-5) begin conference play on January 16.

## NCCU Basketball

At McDougald Gym

**Women**  
Jan. 21 N. C. A&T  
Jan. 22 Atlantic Christian  
Jan. 24 Winston-Salem  
Jan. 26 St. Augustine's  
Jan. 30 UNC-Asheville  
Jan. 31 Fay. State  
Game time is 5:30 p.m.

**Men**  
Jan. 26 St. Augustine's (Doubleheader)  
Jan. 31 Fay. State (Doubleheader)  
Game time is 7:30 p.m.

ADMISSION FOR DOUBLEHEADERS (At The Door)  
Adults—\$4.00 (Non-Central) Students—\$2.00

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