

# Opportunity Knocking

By Donnie R. Tuck  
Sports Information  
Director Howard U.

Black athletes comprise 50 per cent or more of the participants of the National Football League. Black players dominate the National Basketball Association and are numerous in major league baseball.

But, when it comes to ownership in professional sports, blacks have yet to scrape the surface.

In recent weeks, both the NBA's Houston Rockets and Denver Nuggets franchises were sold for roughly \$11 million each. The Denver sale was completed after the team had been on the market for almost a year.

This past May, the United States Football League (USFL) was born. It is a new 12-team professional football association which plans to begin play in March 1983.

The league already has a two-year television contract with ABC worth \$20 million and has a national cable contract. Its principal criterion for ownership is the ability to invest \$6 million in the team for two years.

"If there were a group of blacks with the economic wherewithal, now seems like the ideal time (to gain ownership) since they're peddling franchises," observes Spencer Boyer, a pro-

fessor in the Howard University School of Law, who teaches entertainment and sports law.

Boyer points out that professional sports have expanded tremendously. "All of the leagues that are flourishing have a national television contract. Hockey is struggling because it doesn't have one."

He adds, "Blacks should be interested in the new league. I don't think the USFL would deny black ownership."

David Dixon, founder of the USFL, was even more positive about the league's receptiveness to black ownership.

"I think it is an excellent opportunity for blacks who are looking for ownership of a professional sports franchise. If you only knew how frustratingly I bounced my head off the wall trying to get black ownership in Washington and in Houston."

With professional sports making new millionaires of black players every year, it would seem that they would be financially able and interested in becoming owners. Furthermore, with 100 black business having gross sales of more than \$6 billion in 1981, according to *Black Enterprise* magazine, why hasn't a group of blacks sought to purchase a pro franchise?

Basically, there are

three problems which have hindered black access to ownership," Boyer notes, who teaches one of the few courses in entertainment and sports law in the country. "One is the 'ole boy' network and the question of whether they will allow certain persons to come in."

"Another is getting a line of credit together. It takes an awful lot of money to run a pro franchise. Most sports organizations will take a loss for the first couple of years."

Still another problem is that sports really show business. Blacks have been interested in the entertainment part and not the business part of it."

According to Dr. Gattis Nowell, a professor in the Howard School of Business, the reason blacks have been apprehensive about purchasing pro sports fran-

chises is that it is an extremely high-risk proposition.

"It is purely an economic decision. There are blacks with money, but not the kind of money that they can afford to lose millions of dollars by investing in a franchise."

Boyer says a way of minimizing one's losses is by forming a syndicate. For instance, the owner of the USFL's Washington franchise has said he expects to have 20-25 general and limited partners to help provide financing for his team.

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NEW YORK—Los Angeles Lakers' Magic Johnson holds trophy on Park Avenue as he waves from his new car, given him by Sport Magazine. He received the awards for being judged Most Valuable Player in NBA playoff series. UPI Photo

## Triangle Trophies Is Terror In Durham

(Continued From Page 5)

him with an arch that would have the ball dropping about waist high near the heart of the plate. His broad compact shoulders whipped the metal bat in a quick, vicious swing. SWACK!! The ball took off as if shot from a cannon. The center fielder started running toward the fence. The base runners started trotting homeward. They knew. Allen trotted toward first base. He knew. Triangle's fans screamed lustily. They knew. The center fielder stopped running. He knew. The pitcher grimaced. He had seen it coming.

The ball? It disappeared across the fence, about 300 feet from home plate, and rolled out of sight down the hill.

That was the first of seven home runs that Triangle players hit that inning. Allen got one more. When finally the opposing team turned the third out, the score was 22-2. It ended that way.

Triangle Trophies is one of 112 adult teams that play in the city's recreation softball leagues. They play slow pitch softball, one of two styles of play in city leagues, and Triangle is a Class "A" team, one of three team classes. Class "A" is the top team ranking.

Other classes are "B" and "C" and the other style of play is modified, which means the ball is pitched faster and each pitch doesn't have an arc as in slow pitch. Players can also bunt and steal

bases in modified play, while in slow pitch where the ball must be pitched slowly with an arc of three to 12 feet, no bunting or base stealing is allowed.

The city operates 16 softball leagues, divided into four categories: men, women, church and co-rec. What all this translates to is more than 2000 men and women in Durham who play softball regularly. And another 100 or so fans at various evening games around the city, and it's easy to see that softball is BIG in Durham.

Ms. Angela Joines, athletic director of the Durham Parks and Recreation Department, says the city department provides a number of services for local softball

teams.

For example, her department provides lighted fields, because softball games begin at 6:30 in the afternoon and run until about 10 p.m. Each game is limited to just a little over one hour, and lasts seven innings. Ms. Joines' department also furnishes a scorekeeper, while umpires are handled through contracts, and each team furnishes two new balls.

Durham's teams play well. They always show well in regional and national tournaments, and Ms. Joines believes that the work of her department contributes to that success.

"We serve Durham as best we can," she said. "Some cities have larger populations and thus might have larger teams. But our teams play very well."

And if Durham's softball teams play well, players must get something out of it. Various payoffs are discussed among players. Some say softball is a way of socializing, keeping in top physical shape, and having something to do in the evenings.

One player summed it up this way: "I love ball. I will play ball until I can't walk," he said. "And if I couldn't walk, I would sit in my wheelchair and keep score."

But Durham's men don't have a corner on the softball market. A lot of women play around here as well.

Most male teams have their female counterparts, and sometimes there is as much competition between the men and women who play for the same sponsor, as there is between different teams.

But whether it's men or women, the same team or different competitors, softball is big in Durham, and almost every evening, there's a crowd of players and fans waiting patiently at a number of Durham parks for that familiar cry: PLAY BALL!

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