

# SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

It is hard to imagine the sports and entertainment worlds as they exist today without the African-Americans who have risen to the top of their fields.

## Sports of All Sorts

American sports would be a very different world without African-American athletes and superstars. Kobe Bryant. Shaquille O'Neal. Ken Griffey Jr. Barry Bonds. Randy Moss. Venus Williams. Florence Griffith Joyner. Jackie Joyner-Kersey. Dawn Staley.

As with other aspects of life in the United States, sports were once whites-only. African-Americans were not allowed to participate.

As a result, blacks created their own sports leagues. The Negro baseball leagues became hugely popular and very successful, in terms of both talent and attendance.

They also nurtured players who went on to fame in the major leagues after they were integrated. The first African-American to play modern major league baseball was Jackie Robinson.

Robinson joined the Brooklyn (later Los Angeles) Dodgers in April 1947. He was National League rookie of the year that year, won the most valuable player award in 1949 and was inducted into the baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.



Bill Russell became the first African-American coach of any major league team as Celtics player-coach.

Larry Doby was the first African-American in the American League, joining the Cleveland Indians in 1947. Doby played in the majors 13 years, was an all star six times and was the first African-American to hit a home run in the World Series, in 1948 against the Boston Braves. The Cleveland Indians also were the team that brought pitcher Leroy "Satchel" Paige to the major leagues. Paige had been a superstar in the Negro leagues.

The first African-Americans to play professional basketball joined the NBA in 1950. Chuck Cooper signed with the Boston Celtics; Earl Lloyd with the Washington Capitols and Nathaniel "Sweetwater" Clifton with the New York Knicks. None of them were stars like Jackie Robinson in baseball.

The first African-Americans to become true superstars in the NBA were Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, Elgin Baylor and Oscar Robertson.

Wilt Chamberlain, a 7-ft. 2-in. center, once scored 100 points in a single NBA game for the Philadelphia Warriors and averaged 50 points a game for an entire season.

But no one could match Bill Russell's success with the Boston Celtics. Russell, who later became the first African-American coach of any major league sports team, was a defensive, team-

oriented center who led the Celtics to a phenomenal 11 NBA titles in 13 years. He was the NBA's most valuable player five times.

The dominance of African-Americans in pro basketball can be seen in the records: African-Americans have now been NBA scoring leader 22 straight years, and 37 of the last 40 years. The last 13 MVPs have been black, and 35 of the last 40.

When professional football began in 1920, African-Americans played on a few teams. Paul Robeson, the future singer and civil rights activist, and Frederick Douglass "Fritz" Pollard were the first black stars.

In 1934, however, owners of pro football teams agreed to follow pro baseball and ban blacks. None were allowed to play professionally again until 1946.

Almost immediately after they were allowed back, African-Americans made a huge impact. Defensive safety Emlen Tunnell joined the New York Giants in 1948 and went on to set an NFL record—since broken—with 79 career interceptions.



Emmitt Smith of the Dallas Cowboys set a league record for rushing touchdowns in a season.

## Civil Rights Timeline (1951-1967)

**1951** Gov. Adlai Stevenson of Illinois orders the National Guard to suppress a race riot after whites protest a black family's attempt to occupy a home in an all-white neighborhood of Cicero, IL.

**1953** Supreme Court bans segregation in Washington, D.C., restaurants.

**1954** U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Kansas) that segregated schools are "inherently unequal." Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, MD., begin desegregating schools.

**1955** Supreme Court prohibits segregation of recreation facilities like playgrounds. Interstate Commerce Commission bans segregation in interstate buses, waiting rooms and railroad coaches.

Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat in Montgomery, AL, spurring a boycott lasting more than a year.

Emmitt Till, a 14-year-old Chicago boy is murdered in Mississippi after allegedly wolf-whistling at a white woman.

**1956** Montgomery bus boycott ends after federal court rules that racial segregation on the Alabama city's buses is unconstitutional. Bus segregation is outlawed in Tallahassee, FL.

101 Southern members of Congress urge states to resist the Brown Supreme Court decision.

NAACP forces the University of Alabama to enroll its first black student, Autherine Lucy.

**1957** Civil Rights Act, permitting the federal government to sue on behalf of citizens and creating the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, is signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Nine students integrate Central High School in Little Rock, AR. Eisenhower sends paratroopers to enforce the desegregation.

