



Atkins' 1953 football team defeated New Bern to capture the State 3-A football championship.



Atkins captured the first of its three consecutive state 3-A basketball championships under the tutelage of coach Sam Cary in 1952.

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much differently," Griffin said. "The kids today are bigger and stronger, but they don't have the fundamentals down the way we did. I learned the basics early and they stayed with me throughout my career."

In football, Charles Washington was Atkins' head coach. The Atkins staff consisted of only three coaches - Washington, Warren "Pete" Oldham, who is a member of the N.C. House of Representatives, and Irvin. The Atkins team that captured the 1953 state championship consisted of 48 players, with 30 others on the junior varsity team.

"Things were so different then," Griffin said. "In football you never came off the field. I played three positions, end on offense, linebacker on defense

and kicker." During its run, Atkins was a member of the NCNHSAA 3-A ranks. Atkins was one of only two schools for blacks in Forsyth County. Everyone in the city attended Atkins and those in the county attended Carver. At the time that was the classification of the biggest African-American high schools.

During his senior season, basketball was played at a very high level. Among the teams in the state championship tournament were Reidsville's Washington High, Durham Hillside, Highland High of Gastonia, E.T. Jones of Washington, Laurinburg Institute, Second Ward of Charlotte, and Williston High of Wilmington.

"We played top competition," Griffin said, "especially in basketball. We played teams from North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and even a few

from Washington, D.C."

Because of segregation Atkins couldn't play against white teams such as R.J. Reynolds.

But the team had some "unofficial" scrimmages against some of the area's top teams and more than held its own.

"How would we have done if we had been able to play for a state championship against them? We had the top athletes. What do you think? I think that speaks for itself."

During Griffin's days African-American athletes' opportunities were limited in the South. Griffin's efforts in sports were rewarded with a scholarship to Tennessee A&I (now Tennessee State) in Nashville, Tenn. He played football for one season but decided to return home to Winston-Salem. He enrolled at Winston-Salem State, where he played for coach "Tank

Conrad" in football. After he married his high school sweetheart (Barbara Hodge), he joined the Army.

Griffin's athletic ability quickly caught the attention of his superiors in the Army. Stationed in Hawaii, Griffin played on football and basketball teams there, where for the first time he played on integrated teams. His teams captured championships in both sports and Griffin was named to the All-Army Team. Griffin was the only African American on his basketball team and one of just a few on the football team.

When his two-year tour ended, Griffin headed home to Winston-Salem, where he accepted a job in the factory at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. He worked there for 31 years before retiring in 1987. Today he and his wife of 47 years are enjoying their retirement.

Since his playing days ended, Griffin has seen a lot of good athletes and teams in Winston-Salem. Among them was the 1968-69 Atkins basketball team, which captured the NCHSAA 4-A state championship and posted a 30-0 record. His youngest brother, Willie, was the team's leading scorer.

"I think that team showed what Atkins could do against white schools," Griffin said.

"They were good and they weren't afraid of competition. But when I compare them to the teams I played on, I don't think they could have beaten us."

In the same year, the Camels football team lost in the state



Bill Griffin glides in for a layup in Atkins' 1954 state 3-A basketball championship. Griffin grabbed 17 rebounds in the victory.

championship game in football to Wilson-Fike. A couple of years later, Atkins was turned into a high school (9-10 grades) and is now a middle school. Along the way, much of the school's legacy has been forgotten.

"Integration was a good idea," Griffin said. "I don't think we really benefited from it, though. We lost a lot of our history and now the kids from our community are spread out everywhere."



Booker T. Williams, Bill Griffin, Joseph Adams and Leo Hughes (left to right) played on three state championship basketball teams at Atkins.

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