

50 YEARS LATER

Brown v. Board of Education

Nation still feels effects of decision

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.
STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

Jack Alexander remembers segregation. The 73-year-old Topeka, Kan., native remembers walking out of his house on his way to grade school.

To his right, one block down the road, was a school only whites could attend. Three blocks to his left was an all-black school.

"I don't remember ever questioning why I couldn't go to the school on the right" he said.

Alexander's education was marked by the Brown v. Board of Education case. His hometown was the center of one of the most important cases ever to reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

The court combined five legal disputes under the Brown v. Board of Education heading — the class-action lawsuits all sought an end to the same thing.

The separate but equal doctrine said blacks and whites could have equal facilities that were segregated by race.

But the Brown decision, which marks its 50th anniversary May 17, was about more than schools, said Perry Hall, UNC professor of African & Afro-American studies.

"To some people (the case) means integration, but to me that's not the most important thing," he said. "The decision itself didn't do anything except hang the words on paper, but it did lay the groundwork for black folks themselves to talk about how they're going to achieve progress in their lives."

A statement by the Supreme Court, Alexander said, was more important in his city than years of riots and civil rights marches and centuries of racial tension.

"Without Brown, we would not have civil and human rights activities as we know them today," Alexander said. "For me, it was the bedrock of civil rights."

The supreme law of the land said everyone in the nation was equal, regardless of his skin color, Alexander said. That opened a lot of people's eyes. "Once that system was broken down ... and we decided that we would do away with separate but equal, then people got to looking at (other things)."

Bill Richards, the president of the Topeka chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that represented Oliver Brown and nearly 200 other Kansans in the case, said the 1954 decision was the nail in the coffin for abolishing apartheid for blacks in the United States and the beginning of a new social awareness for blacks across the nation.

On paper, the Brown ruling was an ending, putting a stop to a doctrine that divided Americans. But many say Brown was the first step in a long fight for equality that stretches into the present.

"It took the civil rights movement itself, with all the struggles and marches and boycotts and violence and sacrifice, to actually bring about change on the ground," Hall said.

"There are students who are not much older than you that say they experienced the process of desegregation. ... There clearly is a lot of work before we can say there is anything like equal education opportunity for all people."

Richards said the city still is making progress 50 years later. He said other things indirectly related to race and socio-economic status leave a lot of problems with which they must deal. "We're still in the struggle," he said.

That's why Jack Alexander says it's not enough that he merely remembers the Brown case.

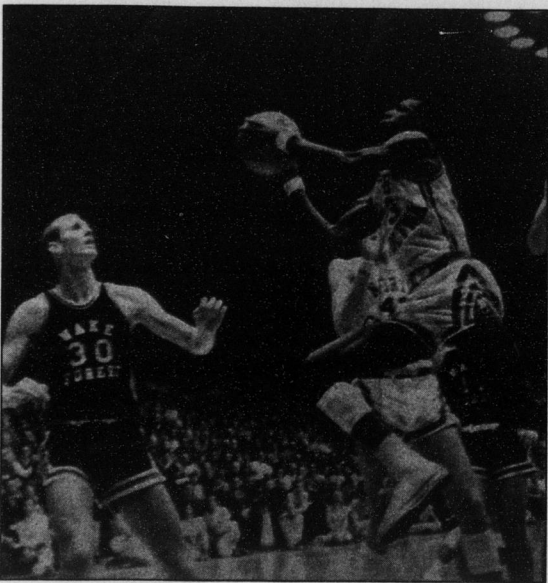
He says he has to talk about it with his five great-grandchildren. "Some of us lived through that period of time and were a part of some change, and hopefully when they look back they can see how, hopefully, the community is getting better at dealing (with) that problem."

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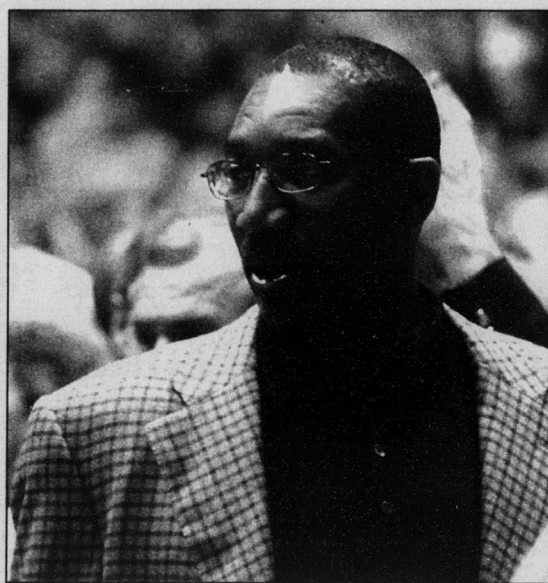
In June of 1951, almost three years before the landmark Supreme Court case that ruled the doctrine of "separate but equal" unconstitutional, the University admitted to its School of Law the campus' first black students.

But it was not until 1955 — one year after the ruling in Brown v. Board of Education — that UNC fully integrated. Under increased pressure from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, officials repealed a policy forbidding blacks from enrolling as undergraduates.

What started as a lawsuit to correct inequalities in the Topeka, Kan., school system had ballooned into a reform movement that forever altered the face of education.



North Carolina guard Charlie Scott averaged 22.1 points and 7.1 rebounds per game after becoming the first black scholarship athlete at UNC.



DTH FILE PHOTOS

LEADING THE WAY

Scott, Smith blaze a trail for black scholarship athletes at North Carolina

BY BRIAN MACPHERSON
SPORTS EDITOR

Dean Smith had his priorities straight when it came to responding to criticism.

When the longtime North Carolina basketball coach received a disparaging letter from an alumnus shortly after awarding a scholarship to Charles Scott, the school's first black scholarship athlete, he went straight to the files.

"I check this guy's Educational Foundation contributions, and it was like \$25," he said. "I didn't write a nice letter back. I would have if he had given like \$1,000."

"But I said that I'm the coach, and I make the recruiting decisions. If we don't win and you're not happy, then get me fired."

But Scott — who could not be reached for this story — didn't exactly get his coach fired.

His unique talent wasn't the only justification for his place on the roster, either. He showed the strength of character necessary to break down color barriers in the ACC.

He likely wouldn't have chosen to take that path, however, if he hadn't seen those same qualities in his coach.

He was impressed when Smith took him to his predominantly white church to worship during his recruiting visit.

"It showed me that if I went to Carolina, I'd

just be one of the guys," Scott wrote in an article after his career. "That's what makes you feel comfortable when you're afraid. And make no mistake, I was scared about what I was doing."

He found comfort, though, in the tolerance of his coach. One incident early in Scott's career deeply influenced his perspective of Smith.

When Scott arrived late for practice in Carmichael Auditorium one day, Smith told Scott to don a 25-pound vest and run the steps of the bleachers, as per team policy.

"Though he usually ran us for about 10 minutes, I was up there for half an hour," Scott wrote. "When I finally came down, he said, 'Oh, Charles, I'm sorry, I forgot about you. I thought you were out there practicing.'"

"I said, 'Coach, I'm the only black guy on this team. How could you not notice I wasn't out there?' The man just didn't see color."

Smith's ability on the court also proved Scott's instincts correct — he scored 17.6 points per game in his sophomore season.

The next season, he hit a last-second jumper to hand UNC an 87-85 win against Davidson. The win propelled the Tar Heels to their third consecutive Final Four.

It was that success, in fact, that helped erase any racial tensions that might have existed within the team.

But it wasn't the only reason Scott bonded with his teammates. Smith required that players rotate roommate pairings on road trips, and the team developed into a close-knit unit.

"The thing about a basketball team is that you have a common goal," Smith said. "That's why they are buddies."

Individually, though, Scott began to dominate. He averaged 22.3 points and 7.1 rebounds per game in his junior season, and he averaged 27.1 points per game in his senior season.

The ACC Player of the Year voting after Scott's junior season, in fact, created the only racial conflict in which Smith became involved.

Smith argued vehemently that Scott had earned the award, but the exclusively white media chose John Roche of South Carolina.

"That year, I don't think there was a better player than Charles Scott," he said.

Despite that controversy, Smith tried to minimize his own contribution to the improvement of racial relations in the South.

"I wasn't into the Branch Rickett type, wanting to get everything at once," Smith said. "But if I could have had five scholarship guys like Charles Scott, we would have had them."

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INTEGRATION

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willing to recognize its mistakes. But he said it is important to remember the past to move on in the future.

In order to push for continued diverse enrollment, Terri Houston, director of on-campus recruitment and support for the Office of Minority Affairs, said the office hosts programs that enable minority families to visit the University and share in the "Carolina" experience.

"Our University has made it clear that we are striving for a diverse campus and being a welcoming community," Houston said.

Houston said that UNC tries to recruit faculty, staff and students from diverse backgrounds to reassure applicants and minority students that UNC welcomes and encourages diversity.

"We talk about diversity, but they can see it in the people that are in the University," she said.

Chapman recognized the strides the University has taken over past decades, but he said that often, mere diversity doesn't guarantee racial justice.

"The low-paid workers are more diverse than they used to be, but they are still being paid minimum wages and treated with disrespect," he said.

UNC still is not perfectly integrated, many said, and efforts must be made to ensure that minorities feel welcome.

"There are things we can do and things we can talk about, but actions speak louder than words," Houston said. "Holding ourselves accountable is important."

With the opening of UNC's free-standing Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History on July 1, the campus will have a place to commemorate the importance of diversity.

The center will feature presentations, projects and art galleries, among other cultural arts.

"I know it has the potential, but that is up to the University (to improve integration)," said Joseph Jordan, director of the center. "It's quite possible the center will be a place where people can feel comfortable together."

Students said they are looking forward to the building's opening so that they can have a resource on campus that sponsors diversity.

"The Stone Center will hopefully open dialogue between different groups of people," said sophomore Carmen Harris, a member of the BSM.

Many said they hope the new construction and dialogue regarding minority issues will let minority students know that they are being heard.

"There needs to be a debate," Chapman said. "That in itself can help make African-Americans and other minorities feel like they have a voice."

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Black coaching candidates still face challenges

As an African American, I have been truly blessed. I have reaped the benefits of the hardship endured by black pioneers in the past for my sake in the present and future.

They suffered the stinging sensation of a high-pressure blast from fire hoses so I could vote in the next election.

They took repeated blows to the head so I could eat at the restaurant of my choice.

They tolerated the spit and curses that laced the words of white protesters so I could attain the best education and career possible.

It's been a long time coming, but there's still a long way to go.

While blacks have been able to assimilate into common aspects of American life through time, the opportunities given to black coaches in athletics have proven to be unacceptable.

Only five of 117 Division I NCAA football teams — 4.3 percent — have a black head coach at the helm. NCAA basketball, a sport dominated by black players, yields a rate of only 20 percent.

In its 71st year, the SEC finally got around to welcoming a black football coach when Mississippi State hired Sylvester Croom in December.

Compare these numbers with the fact that blacks comprise more than half the student-athlete population in the revenue



BRANDON PARKER
COLUMNIST

sports of basketball and football, and the preposterous situation in intercollegiate athletics today becomes clear.

The covert tactics and excuses that have been utilized against blacks in past hiring processes for head coaches are embarrassingly blatant.

Maybe an administrator wants someone with prior head coaching experience. But by implementing this criterion, the field is narrowed from hundreds of black candidates to no more than 10.

After eliminating those blacks who currently serve as head coaches, the applications of eligible minority contenders easily could be — and usually are — lost among those of white applicants.

Maybe a school requires an advanced college degree in order to be considered for the job.

But it's important to remember that blacks are celebrating only the 50th anniversary of the integration of public schools. That process still is not complete.

Yet blacks are expected to have

better academic credentials than people of a race that has experienced superior educational opportunities for more than 200 years.

"In some ways, that's like if you had played basketball for only six months and you had to go up against someone who has been playing ball all of their life," said UNC co-defensive coordinator Marvin Sanders. "It doesn't match up."

Maybe an athletic director is afraid of how the alumni and boosters will react to the hiring of a black head coach.

But are the alumni at Georgia Tech complaining about Paul Hewitt?

Was there a negative reaction by the boosters at Michigan, Rutgers, Oregon or Iowa State after their trips to the 2004 NIT semifinals with a black head coach leading the way?

Granted, jobs are on the line for both coaches and administrators when hiring takes place.

But what is the difference between the risk taken when hiring a white coach and when hiring a black coach?

Both start with a record of 0-0 and have equal potential to succeed or fail — although the standard for measuring progress isn't necessarily the same.

And don't let a black coach partake in the same erratic behavior as party animal Larry

Eustachy, or strip-club patron Mike Price.

Unlike these two white coaches who were given a second chance, black coaches would be better off sending in their permanent retirement papers.

"Most coaches aren't Moses," said Floyd Keith, executive director of the Black Coaches Association. "They aren't going to part the Red Sea."

"If you aren't successful right away or mess up, your chances of being rehired are nil."

Black candidates can find themselves in a lose-lose situation — stay quiet and wait for an opportunity that might never come or speak out against the system and become a marked man without a chance.

Legendary UNC coach Dean Smith, a pioneer in the advancement of blacks in collegiate athletics, voiced the importance of networking and connections. He also is aware, however, of the difficulty blacks can face in doing so.

"I've always told assistants to go to camps and get to know others," Smith said. "I don't know any coach that will hire an assistant that he doesn't know personally. But if you aren't in the loop and you are black, it gets harder and harder."

Keith pointed out that many administrators aren't usually familiar with coaches at histori-

cally black colleges.

"Comfort level is part of it," he said. "Some people who are the decision makers don't want to have the responsibility of making that move."

This lack of initiative retards the situation even further and hurts the chances of minority candidates finding an opening at another university.

"I think someone who comes in and breaks the ice makes it a little easier for schools to hire another black head coach," said Steve Robinson, assistant basketball coach at UNC. "If you've never had a model, you might say, 'I'm not sure what I'm getting.'"

Thankfully, we have had our share of models. Men like Fred Snowden, Willie Jefferies, Bob Wade, John Thompson, Nolan Richardson, Tyrone Willingham, Sylvester Croom and many others have stepped up and opened numerous doors for aspiring black coaches.

Nevertheless, the coaching conflict speaks volumes of the racial problem that remains in American society today.

Until more opportunities are created, more barriers are broken and more color is added, it will be impossible to fully erase the racial divide and view all things in a colorblind manner of equality.

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