

# Introduction

Edwin B. Henderson, the well-known physical educator and athletic administrator from Washington D.C., was the first person to write extensively about the history of the black athletes' involvement in American sport. His 1939 study, *The Negro in Sports*, was the first book of its kind, giving a historical overview of the black athletes' participation in various activities at both the amateur and professional levels of sport. Since the publication of Henderson's book, a number of articles, book chapters, and monographs have been written that touch upon everything from biographical studies of famous black athletes to the process of integration in major league baseball. Varying in quality and approach, these works have combined to give us a better understanding of the black athletes' involvement in American sport and a clearer picture of the racial antagonisms that have existed between blacks and whites in this country. Some of the best known scholarly works dealing with various aspects of the black athletes' past include Jules Tygiel's *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (1983) Randy Roberts' *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (1983), Bill Baker's *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (1986), and Rob Ruck's *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (1986). The more popular works written on the history of the black athlete include such books as A. S. "Doc" Young's *Negro Firsts in Sports* (1963), Edwin B. Henderson's *The Black Athlete: Emergence and Arrival* (1968), Jack Orr's *The Black Athlete: His Story in American History* (1969), and Oceania Chalk's *Pioneers of Black Sport* (1975).

Coinciding with the aforementioned studies down through the years have been the occasional publication of scholarly journals that included either sections or devoted an entire issue to the black athletes' involvement in American sport. Without exception, these journals consisted either of more popular articles intended to extol the virtues of individual black athletes or were composed primarily of sociological studies interspersed with an occasional historical article dealing with some aspect of black involvement in sport. In 1951, for example, Edwin Henderson edited an issue of *The Negro History Bulletin* that was devoted almost entirely to the black athlete. The articles included in the issue were intended for public rather than scholarly consumption and included everything from Henderson's essay on "The Negro in the Olympic Games" to Albert Brooks' frequently cited piece entitled "Democracy Through Sports." In 1975, *Social Science Quarterly* included a section in their March issue entitled "Racism in Sports." This particular issue included some classic sociological studies on the black athlete by such well-known sport sociologists as Barry McPherson and Stanley Eitzen. "Race in Sport" was the theme of the Spring 1978 edition of *Arena Review*. Included in the journal was Lee Lowen-

fish's frequently cited essay on the Jackie Robinson Story, Jomills Braddock's analysis of newspaper coverage of black and white athletes, Michael Washington's article on black boxers and an article from the *Village Voice* by Ianthe Thomas. *The Crisis* devoted most of its May 1983 issue to the black athlete. The issue included standard works by Harry Edwards on college athletics and the socioeconomic nature of the modern Olympic Games, and a brief historical article by Bessie Stockard on black women in sport. Finally, *The Western Journal of Black Studies* included a section in its Fall 1987 issue entitled "Black Athletes and Sports in America." Included in the issue were two articles, one by Gary Sailes on the participation patterns of black athletes and another by Bobby Daniels on the intellectual development of black student-athletes.

This special issue is unlike any of its predecessors in that it is devoted entirely to historical examinations of the black athlete. While there is no special theme that ties the following articles together, all but one of the essays deal with some aspect of college sport and each of them touches upon topics that have been only briefly written about by sport historians. In the initial essay, William H. Wiggins, Jr., an associate professor of Afro-American Studies at Indiana University and 1988 recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship examines the racial stereotypes depicted in Jack Johnson and Joe Louis newspaper cartoons between 1908 and 1938. Drawing on the work of such scholars as historian Joseph Boskin and folklorist W. K. McNeil, Wiggins points out that the careers of Johnson and Louis spanned different socio-historical time periods, but that the two heavyweight champions shared some of the same physical traits of the Sambo stereotypes depicted in newspaper cartoons. The two fighters were variously portrayed as "savage, ape-like figures," depicted in a "manner that reflected the grinning, big lipped, buck teeth, bulging eyes Sambo mask," stereotyped with Sambo's dark skin complexion, and given a Sambo dialect by newspaper cartoonists. Wiggins makes clear that newspaper cartoonists did display different Sambo images in the two fighters, being fond of portraying Johnson as a watermelon eater and dandy, while depicting Louis as a lover of chicken, a skillful razor cutter, and a slow-thinking, lazy Tom. Wiggins concludes by noting that Louis began to be portrayed in more humane ways by newspaper cartoonists by the latter part of the 1930s, increasingly being depicted as a handsome Afro-American rather than being forced to wear the Sambo mask.

Thomas G. Smith's article examines the efforts of blacks to expose the exclusionary policies that existed in professional football between 1934 and 1946. In the process of his study, Smith, an associate professor of history at Nichols College, also furnishes information on black football players at predominantly white universities, a topic that has been given only scant attention by sport historians. Nichols briefly charts, for example, the college careers of such athletes as Oze Simmons, Wilmeth Sidat-Singh, Jerome "Brud" Holland, and Woody Strode. Donald Spivey's essay examines the protest lodged by students at New York University against that school's administration for its failure to see that the black Leonard Bates was allowed to participate in a

football game against the University of Missouri. Spivey, an associate professor of history at the University of Connecticut who is probably best known by sport historians for his recently edited book *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, explains that the students at NYU were appalled by the fact that their university “acquiesced” to Missouri’s insistence that Bates not be allowed to participate in the November 2, 1940 game because of his color. The confrontation that ensued between the students and administration at NYU was, argues Spivey, historically significant and had “a substantive sociopolitical impact.”

My article explores the racial turmoil that took place between black athletes and white coaches at the University of California, Berkeley, Syracuse University, and Oregon State University. These three revolts were typical of many of the racial disturbances that took place on predominantly white university campuses between 1968 and 1972. Black athletes of the period found themselves in an almost impossible situation where they were expected to fulfill their traditional role as college athletes, but were simultaneously being pressured by their fellow black students and others outside the university community to become involved in the black protest movement being waged throughout the country. The final piece of the issue is a personal interview conducted by David Zang with Calvin Hill, the Yale graduate who starred for several years with the Dallas Cowboys, Washington Redskins, and Cleveland Browns. Hill addresses a variety of topics, ranging from a discussion about the influence his father would have on his life to his thoughts about the importance of education in America’s black community and the possible reasons for the overrepresentation of blacks in competitive sport. Perhaps more than anything else, the interview with Hill uncovers a very proud man who has a deep commitment to both the black community and American society.

There are a number of people who contributed in various ways to this issue. I would particularly like to thank Steve Riess, Dick Crepeau, and Jack Berryman for their expertise and editorial assistance. I would also like to thank the contributing authors for sharing their research on the black athlete and thus adding additional insights into America’s sporting past.

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