

Blocked Shot: The Development of Basketball in the African-American Community of Chicago

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Despite the scholarly attention focused on sport and the consequent publication of sports-related works over the past two decades, basketball has received relatively little attention. Few books examine the historical development of the game, and those that do focus on its eastern origins. Localities outside of that region are largely ignored. Likewise, the African-American experience in basketball, save more recent biographies of National Basketball Association stars, is almost unknown.¹ This story attempts to shed some light on the development of basketball among African-Americans in the Midwest, its relationship to the black sports network of the East and the larger white society, and the adoption of a particular style of play to the game. In the process, black basketball players won entry into the dominant white circuit when blacks were being excluded from professional baseball and football. They did so while maintaining particular cultural values resistant to subjugation by whites,

The Illinois constitution of 1848 prohibited "Negro immigration" into the state. Although the law proved unenforceable, most freedmen who left the South chose to settle their families on western lands, particularly in Kansas and Oklahoma.² Blacks comprised less than 2 percent of Chicago's population throughout the nineteenth century.³ That pattern changed abruptly when Robert Abbott founded the *Chicago Defender* newspaper in 1906 and began promoting the city as a northern paradise for African-Americans.⁴ Relative to

*I wish to acknowledge the research assistance of Ray Fetters in this project and to explain the seeming over-reliance on the *Defender* as a resource. While sources are limited in general, other black newspapers did exist in New York, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore, but they gave primary coverage to local sporting events. Copies of competing papers, such as the *Chicago Bee* and the *Broad Ax*, are no longer available.

1. Among basketball histories which do examine the African-American experience, but largely in the East, see Robert W. Peterson, *From Cages to Jump Shots* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), and Nelson George, *Elevating the Game* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

2. Olivia Mahoney, "Black Abolitionists," *Chicago History*, 20:1-2 (Spring/Summer, 1991): 22-37, discusses the 1848 constitution and its restrictive "black codes," James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 23-4; Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

3. Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 12.

4. Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 81.

black life in the South, Abbott could well substantiate his claims. More than 44,000 blacks resided in at least 24 of Chicago's 35 wards in 1910. Racial harmony seemed to exist as blacks enjoyed voting rights, held jobs, sent their children to integrated public schools, and played alongside whites in athletic leagues.⁵

Following the Civil War, John Jones, Chicago's most prominent African-American, who had been an ardent abolitionist, had been elected to the Cook County Board of Commissioners. The refugees from the South capitalized on their newfound political opportunities by electing two of their own, Louis B. Anderson and Oscar De Priest, to aldermanic positions on the city council after the turn of the century. Further exemplifying the possibilities in Chicago, Jesse Binga, a former railroad porter, opened his own bank in the city, which brought him wealth and prestige. Chicago symbolized the mecca of African-American achievement, and Jack Johnson, newly crowned heavy-weight champion of the world in 1908, soon established his residence there.⁶

African-American athletes, in particular, had integrated freely and successfully in the city since 1885. Rube Foster's baseball team prospered in the City League, and Julius Avendorph, founder of the first black baseball league in Chicago, extolled "sports as the means to friendly relations between the races" and "as a means to college scholarships for black men."⁷

While baseball remained the premier sport in the African-American community, football and basketball players also made a name for themselves. Sam Ransom starred in four sports at Hyde Park High School, leading its first basketball team to the Cook County Championship in 1901. As Avendorph had predicted, Ransom's athletic prowess earned acceptance at Beloit College. Fritz Pollard, too, followed his athletic exploits in Chicago, with All-American status at Brown University.⁸

The perception of racial equality proved a myth, however. As rural, southern blacks heeded Abbott's call and headed north, race relations eroded. Over 100,000 blacks flocked to Chicago in search of jobs by 1920, and almost 234,000 African-Americans resided in the city a decade later.⁹ As Abbott promised, opportunities in the north far surpassed the restricted socio-economic structure of the southern states; but the opportunities were hardly equal to those of whites. African-Americans faced what Antonio Gramsci characterized as a hegemonic relationship, in which whites, middle-class

5. Dempsey J. Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Chicago* (Chicago: Urban Research Institute, 1981), 1, 13; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 81; Spear, *Black Chicago*, 4, 12, 15.

6. Mahoney, "Black Abolitionists," 34; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 129-30; Travis, *Autobiography of Black Chicago*, 37-39, 42.

7. *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 12, 1910, 1; Nov. 19, 1910, 1; Nov. 9, 1912, 5. Frederic H. Robb, ed., *The Negro In Chicago, 1779-1929* (Chicago: Washington Intercollegiate Club, 1929), 80, 281, 195, 311; Carroll Binder, "Chicago and the New Negro." *Chicago Daily News*, reprint, 1927, 23.

8. Archie Oboler, ed., *The Oski-Wow-Wow: A History of Hyde Park High School Athletics* (Chicago: Hyde Park High School, 1924), 12-18; John Carroll, *Fritz Pollard, Pioneer in Racial Advancement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

9. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 12.

males in particular, rested atop an already established social hierarchy. In such positions of power they ordained the cultural norms and values which all subordinate groups were given the choice of accepting, rejecting, adopting or adapting.¹⁰ In fact, the African-American community had little choice in the matter. The white working class saw blacks, who might accept even lower wages, as a threat to their job security, and the white middle class refused to accept even the wealthiest of black entrepreneurs as its equals. While many blacks had hoped to assimilate into the mainstream white society on an equal footing, such actions forced the development of a parallel, and alternative culture, one that adapted some white forms but synthesized them with traditional values rooted in the African-American experience to produce a distinct black urban culture.¹¹

Allen Spear has asserted, in *Black Chicago*, that one manifestation of such development occurred in the "wide range of social clubs that catered to specific groups in the community."¹² Black athletic clubs, such as Rube Foster's Leland Giants, spearheaded an initial drive for assimilation, based on W.E.B. DuBois's philosophy that "a talented tenth" of African-Americans might compete equally and favorably with whites and win their acceptance.¹³ Middle-class blacks thus began to organize their own basketball leagues shortly after the turn of the century. The *Defender* cited a men's league in 1909, and a church league operated within three years.¹⁴ Black women's social clubs organized the first game among females, as the Philomathics defeated the Nonpareils at Ogden Park in 1911.¹⁵

The *Defender* reported that black youth lacked interest in basketball, favoring indoor baseball instead. The black community became more interested when a basketball game occasioned a racial incident. In 1913 Evanston High School refused to play Lane Tech, whose team was led by a black star, Virgil Blueitt. The referee awarded a forfeit victory to Lane. While other racial incidents had predated the event, the Blueitt case signaled a wholesale change in race relations. Despite the favorable ruling, overt discrimination, segregation, and exclusionary practices became the norm thereafter.¹⁶

10. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

11. Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

12. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 110; and 117, cites the Broad Ax, Nov. 2, 1907; May 9, 1908; May 21, 1916; Dec. 31, 1910; Jan. 21, 1911, and May 18, 1912, on the development of a separate black baseball league.

13. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 68-82.

14. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in A Northern City* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 55, cites the *Defender*, Dec. 26, 1908, on the 1909 league; and St. Clair Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community* (Chicago: Work Projects Administration, 1940), 131, cites the *Defender*, Sept. 7, 1912, on the church league.

15. *Defender*, Jan. 28, 1911, 2. The game took place on Jan. 21, 1911.

16. *Defender*, Dec. 7, 1912, 8; Mar. 1, 1913, 8; Nov. 29, 1913, 7; *Lane Tech Yearbook, 1914*, 210-11, 215, show the contributions of black athletes, including Virgil's brother, Napoleon. As Evanston had black athletes on its football and track teams, the refusal to play may have reflected Blueitt's skill as well as his color. Earlier racial incidents are reported in Special Parks Commission, *Annual Report, 1907* (Chicago, 1908), 6, 19-20, 22, 24; and William L. Katz, ed., *The Negro in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 288, 291.

With initial funding supplied by Julius Rosenwald, a Jewish philanthropist, a YMCA was built in the heart of the African-American community in 1913. Thereafter it was supported largely by a consortium of meatpacking companies that had begun using black workers as strikebreakers as early as 1900. With the advent of World War I, southern blacks flocked to Chicago in search of such jobs. As many as 70,000 flooded the metropolis, supplying 25 percent of the stockyards labor force, and congregating in what was rapidly becoming a black ghetto in the area around the Wabash Avenue YMCA on the city's South Side.¹⁷ Ida Wells Barnett, a black civic leader, charged that white YMCAs, the Salvation Army, and the Mills Hotels denied blacks the usage of rooms and their gymnasiums. Likewise, when black neighborhoods encroached upon city parks or playgrounds, an African-American playground director was appointed by city officials, implicitly signaling that the space was suitable only for blacks.¹⁸

The increasing segregation of the African-American community indicated the exclusionary intent of white society, but the YMCA programs provided continued hope for integration and a boon to the development of basketball. By 1914 the Y had its own league of four men's teams and engaged in competition with white teams throughout the city. Within a year the *Defender* reported that basketball had become "the leading attraction" at the black YMCA in suburban Evanston.¹⁹ The team at the Wabash Y in the city declined a challenge from their counterparts in Louisville because "they were tied up with white teams for the remainder of the season and wished to measure their skills with their white brothers."²⁰ One such adversary even included Napoleon Blueitt, brother of the Lane Tech basketball star.²¹ The next year, the Blueitt brothers and their colleagues formed a black athletic club, the Lincoln A.C., to compete with the whites in football and basketball. Fritz Pollard and other notable black stars later joined the team for important games.²²

The Y basketball team, known as the Wabash Outlaws, provided a measure of racial pride as blacks began to feel the hurt of segregation and discrimination in other spheres of life. The Outlaws defeated the White Eagles convincingly, 33-24 in 1915. Described as a "rough bunch of Polacks who, if they can't win fair, they rough it," the White Eagles were banned by most teams in the city.²³ With Virgil Blueitt contributing 17 baskets, the Outlaws swamped the white

17. Steven Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 115; Grossman. *Land of Hope*, 4, 200-01, 218-19; Travis, *Autobiography of Black Chicago*, 14.

18. Spear, *Black Chicago*, 46-7, cites Barnett's letter to the *Record-Herald*, Jan. 26, 1912; 205-06 on parks. Smaller pockets of black settlement existed on the west and north sides.

19. *Defender*, Feb. 14, 1914, 7; Mar. 7, 1914, 6; Feb. 16, 1915, 4 (Evanston Quote).

20. *Defender*, Feb. 6, 1915, 4.

21. *Defender*, Mar. 13, 1915, 4.

22. *Defender*, Oct. 30, 1915, 7; Nov. 6, 1915, 8; Nov. 13, 1915, 8; Dec. 18, 1915, 8; Nov. 12, 1921, 10.

23. *Defender*, Dec. 18, 1915, 8.

Harrison Maroons, 63-9, and went on to defeat Hull House and several other white teams, often by large scores during the 1915-16 season.²⁴

Such lopsided victories, coupled with whites' growing perceptions of blacks as job stealers, may have heightened racial tensions. The *Defender* looked inward and began to cover black basketball teams in the East in 1917. Such coverage fostered the sense of a national black sporting culture parallel to that of white society, and goaded by the *Defender*. the team from the Wabash Y embarked on an eastern tour for inter-city contests, When Will Anthony Madden brought his New York Incorporators to Chicago for a return match in 1918, he seemingly violated the growing sense of racial consciousness by using two white players. Despite Chicago's protest New York prevailed, but fights ensued during the game, and crowds swarmed the court afterward, verbally abusing the New Yorkers.²⁵

Despite such mishaps, the middle class board of the YMCA continued to extol the promise of sport, and businessmen and churches avidly supported more basketball teams.²⁶ Most blacks, however. faced the realities of segregation and discrimination. Parks, playgrounds, and schools became increasingly exclusive, and red-lining real estate agents and fire-bombing campaigns ensured that African-Americans remained within the designated black belt. Escalating social tensions finally erupted in the summer of 1919, when a race riot cost 38 lives.²⁷

After World War I racial boundaries became clearly established in the city. Increasing segregation and race pride fed to self-reliant entrepreneurial ventures. The belief that a "talented tenth" could still succeed in white society persisted throughout the 1920s, however.²⁸ Black entertainers proliferated, particularly in the black and tan cabarets of the black belt. Whites, however. owned the majority of such clubs, just as they continued to control athletic facilities. Rube Foster was the first to seek greater independence, removing his baseball team from the City League and forming the Negro National League in 1920.²⁹ Black basketball teams soon sought similar freedom. More

24. *Defender*, Jan. 15, 1916, 9; Nov. 18, 1916, 7; Dec. 2, 1916, 6.

25. Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). 14, addresses the development of a national black sporting culture. *Defender*. Feb. 17, 1917, 8; Mar. 3, 1917, 8; Mar. 10, 1917, 8; Mar. 24, 1917, 5; Mar. 31, 1917, 7; Apr. 7, 1917, 8; Dec. 29, 1917, 1, 10.

26. *Defender*, Mar. 4, 1919, 9; William L. Katz, *The Negro in Chicago*, 143.

27. On racial tensions see Vivian Palmer, Community History Studies at the Chicago Historical Society, History of Douglas, interviews 12-13; History of Grand Boulevard. Documents #3-4; Spear, *Black Chicago*; Katz, *The Negro in Chicago*, 272, 274, 282-3, 287-8, 290-1, 295; Travis, *Autobiography of Black Chicago*, 15, 20, 25-6; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 118-27; Michael W. Homel, "Negroes in the Chicago Public Schools." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1972; *Defender*, Jan. 9, 1915, 8; Jan. 16, 1915, 2; Jan. 23, 1915, 4; Mar. 17, 1917, 1. On the race riot, see Katz, *The Negro in Chicago*; and William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1978).

28. Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 72.

29. Athletes, such as Jay Mayo "Ink" Williams, Paul Robeson, and Fritz Pollard, often served as producers, promoters, or agents in the thriving black entertainment industry; see John Carroll, *Fritz Pollard*, 91, 189, 216, 110-114, 224-5; Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson*; and Stephen Calt, "Anatomy of a 'Race' Label: The Mayo Williams Era." *78 Quarterly*, 1:4 (1989), 9-30. Katz, ed., *The Negro In Chicago*, 1922, 266-86. 323 on white control. Riess, *City Games*, 118.

churches began sponsoring teams that drew large crowds, and one observer claimed that the teams served as a publicity tool to increase attendance, Olivet Baptist Church supported men's and women's teams and eventually claimed 11,000 members, reputedly the largest congregation in the country. Clergymen, the YMCA, the Defender, and athletes preached the congruent values of church and sport as a means of hope, salvation, and racial harmony.³⁰ Cornel West has charged that this black middle class, anxious, insecure, and questing for socioeconomic status, was too willing to be coopted by whites.³¹

If wholesome sports activities, as defined by the middle-class organizers, were meant to induce racial harmony and integration, they also served racial pride which transcended class lines. In 1921 the Forty Club, an organization of black socialites, sponsored a team of former high school and college stars, including Virgil Blueitt and Sol Butler, the Olympic track star, on an eastern tour and in the AAU tournament. The *Defender* took especial glee in reporting the team's tournament victory over a white American Legion team, which "gave the Fortys the laugh. . . expecting an easy victory."³² The *Defender* reported that after the black team took a 14-8 halftime lead, an "orgy of fouls" and questionable calls by the referees ensued in the second half to help the white team, but to no avail. In the second game against the white DeSoto A.C., the *Defender* charged? "all fairness and clean sportsmanship were thrown to the winds," as five fouls were called on black players in the closing minutes to allow a white victory.³³ Another black team representing the 8th Regiment, highly esteemed African-American veterans of World War I, finished with a 71-5 record and second place in the City league against white teams.³⁴

Sensing profit in black sporting ventures, the *Defender* avidly reported on basketball games, particularly those of eastern teams. Since 1917 it had prodded local teams to challenge their New York counterparts. By 1921 the *Defender* took it upon itself to sponsor the former Forty Club team in inter-city competition and initiated its own tournament, in which two black teams defeated whites to gain both the lightweight and heavyweight championships. The commercial potential of such games attracted interracial crowds and a previously untapped black audience. Such ventures spawned numerous other teams, including one from the Giles Post of the American Legion, which would eventually evolve into the Harlem Globetrotters. Even the YMCA

30. On the growth of Olivet Baptist, see Tuttle, *Race Riot*, 98; and Carroll Binder, *Chicago and the New Negro*, 18. See Robb, *The Negro In Chicago*, 263, on the relationship of athletic teams and church attendance. *Defender*, Mar. 4, 1919, 9; Nov. 1, 1919, 11, indicates church teams in two divisions. See *Defender*, Dec. 3, 1921, 10, and Nov. 25, 1922, 10; on community efforts to promote athletics.

31. Cornel West, cited by bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 27. Also see Judith Stein, "Defining The Race, 1890-1930," in Werner Sollars, ed., *The Invention Of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 77-104.

32. *Defender*, Apr. 2, 1921, 10 (quote): see Nov. 6, 1920, 9; Dec. 25, 1920, 6; Jan. 8, 1921, 6; Feb. 26, 1921, 6; Mar. 5, 1921, 6; Mar. 22, 1921, 6, on the eastern tour.

33. *Defender*, Apr. 2, 1921, 10.

34. *Defender*, Apr. 2, 1921, 11.

team was forced to defend itself against charges of professionalism in its attempts to win at all costs.³⁵

Among the independent teams a strong women's contingent emerged. The Chicago Roamers, managed by Sol Butler, began play in 1921 under women's rules with three offensive and three defensive players. Led by Isadore Channels, a meatpacker and national black women's tennis champion, the team, mostly composed of school teachers, enjoyed great success against other women's and boys' teams.³⁶

In 1924 the Roamers stated their intention of joining the women's division of the City League; and, later that season, they defeated the Harvey Bloomers, a white team, to win the *Defender* trophy before a large crowd of 4,500, including many black socialites in decorated boxes. Isadore Channels contributed nine baskets in a 19-3 rout. The following year, the team entered the tournaments of the Jewish Peoples' Institute and the Amateur Athletic Union. In the latter they were soundly beaten by the white Tri-Chis, described by the *Defender* as the "best in the country."³⁷

Shortly thereafter Isadore Channels retired and a number of players defected to start their own teams. Virginia Willis captained the Olivet Baptist team, chief rivals of the Roamers within the African-American community; and Corinne Robinson, an emerging young star, opted to play for the Mid-City A.C. in the AAU tournament. The *Chicago Whip*, another black newspaper, entered the scene when its sports editor, Al Monroe, offered to sponsor a game with the white Taylor Trunks, the national women's champions. With Sol Butler, the Roamers' manager and sports editor of the *Chicago Bee*, engaged in men's games, the Olivet team represented the African-American community in a 32-16 loss, as the Taylor Trunks proved too fast.³⁸

The popularity of the women's game mushroomed as interracial games and the number of teams increased. Like the men, women jumped teams often until the Roamers managed to monopolize most of the black talent for the 1927-28 season and an eight-team black women's league brought some stability. A second women's league, with Corinne Robinson as director, followed in 1929, and a women's church league initiated play with 10 teams a year later. That 1930 season witnessed the return of Isadore Channels to the Roamers, who defeated Olivet in an invitational tournament. When a return

35. *Defender*, Dec. 2, 1916, 6; Dec. 30, 1916, 7; Jan. 27, 1917, 7; Feb. 17, 1917, 8; Mar. 3, 1917, 7; Mar. 10, 1917, 8; Mar. 17, 1917, 1; Mar. 24, 1917, 5; Oct. 20, 1921, 10; Dec. 24, 1921, 10; Feb. 11, 1922, 10; Feb. 18, 1922, 10; Feb. 25, 1922, 10; Mar. 18, 1922, 10; Apr. 8, 1922, 10.

36. The Romans were sometimes referred to as the Romas or Romeos, *Defender*, Jan. 17, 1920, 9, states an intended game; Mar. 16, 1921, 6; gives the first game account; Dec. 24, 1921, 10; A.S. "Doc" Young, *Negro Firsts in Sports* (Chicago: Johnson Pub. Co., 1963), 198; Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., *A Hard Road to Glory: A History of the African-American Athlete, 1919-1945* (New York: Warner Books, 1988), 45; *Polk's Directory of Chicago, 1923*, lists Channels, national tennis finalist, and; later, a champion; and school teachers Margrete Lewis, Nettie Hall, and Esther Henderson.

37. *Defender*, Dec. 20, 1924, pt. 2:8; Feb. 21, 1925, 12; Jan. 16, 1926, pt. 2:5; Mar. 20, 1926, pt. 2:5 (quote).

38. *Defender*, Apr. 10, 1926, pt. 2:9; Oct. 23, 1926; pt. 2:7; Jan. 29, 1927, 10; Robb, *The Negro in Chicago*, 309; *Polk's Directory of Chicago*, 1928-29.

match a week later between Olivet and the Taylor Trunks was billed as one against the "colored champs," the Roamers protested vehemently, noting that they had never lost to Olivet in six years of competition. Despite such objections, Olivet played, and the major newspapers covered the game, reporting that Violet Krobacek, the Trunks' center, poured in 21 points in an easy 35-10 victory.³⁹

The proliferation of women's teams continued despite the Depression, many of them composed of schoolgirls who had learned the game in high school physical education classes. By 1931 the Whippets from black Phillips High School reached prominence by defeating Olivet, and former Roamers' players took third place in the AAU tournament as the Oberlin girls. Despite such pretentious titles, the women's teams displayed democracy on the court, particularly in church leagues, where working-class domestics mixed with clerks and teachers. By 1934, the Club Store Coeds team featured a 6'7½" center and Tidye Pickett, an Olympic track qualifier, in dominating other teams. They embarked on a national tour before returning to challenge the Spencer Coal Company, the national women's champions.⁴⁰

Male teams found even greater opportunity to promote racial pride and reap profits. The Union Park Grenadiers, a black team from the growing African-American community on the West Side, brought in the Blueitt brothers to defeat their Irish rivals from Trumbull Park in 1922. Four years later, they succeeded in winning the West Side Parks championship by defeating the Poles of Eckhardt Park. Likewise, the St. Monica's team won the Catholic Order of Foresters League title by using black high school stars, "many of whom never saw the inside of a Catholic church in their life," as the Defender readily admitted. High school stars found ready solicitations for their services at black colleges and on local semi-pro contingents.⁴¹

With an increasing number of teams competing for limited dollars within the black community, promoters sought to provide greater entertainment value by sandwiching their games between rollerskating and dances at

39. *Defender*, Jan. 29, 1927, 10; Feb. 6, 1927, pt. 2:6; Feb. 13, 1927, pt. 2: 6-7; Feb. 19, 1927, pt. 2:6; Nov. 26, 1927, pt. 2:6; Mar. 10, 1928, pt. 2:8; Nov. 2, 1929, 18; Jan. 18, 1930, 11; Jan. 25, 1930, 11, 17; Dec. 13, 1930, 8; *Chicago Evening American*, Jan. 15, 1930, 15; Jan. 16, 1930, 14; *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 16, 1930, 22.

40. Wilma J. Pesavento, "A Historical Study of the Development of Physical Education in the Chicago Public Schools. 1860-1965." Ph.D. Dissertation. Northwestern University, 1966, 137, states that such instruction started for girls in 1921. Nine of the 27 females who could be identified through Polk's *Directory of Chicago* were listed as schoolteachers or students, 10 were domestics, and eight clerks or office workers. *Defender*, Mar. 14, 1931, 10; Apr. 4, 1931, 16; Dec. 22, 1934, 9; Mar. 2, 1935, 8; Mar. 16, 1935, 10. Women's teams require a fuller examination. Among the burgeoning literature that analyzes women's sport experiences amidst hegemonics relationships, such as patriarchy, religious influences, and class factionalism, see Lois Bryson, "Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10:4 (1987): 349-60; Gerald Gems, "Sport and the Americanization of Ethnic Women in Chicago," in George Eisen and David Wiggins, eds., *Ethnicity and Sport In North American History and Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 177-200; James A. Mangan and Roberta Park, eds., *From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras* (Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass, 1987); and Michael A. Messner and Donald Sabo, *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1990).

41. *Defender*, Mar. 18, 1922, 10; Jan. 16, 1926, pt. 2:5; Mar. 6, 1926, pt. 2:7; Apr. 3, 1926, 9 (quote).

neighborhood ballrooms. Other teams employed well-known athletic stars, such as DeHart Hubbard, Paul Robeson, or Joe Lillard to arouse fan interest. Such promotions fostered a transition from the southern rural culture of many newcomers to the urban black culture of the north, as they tied African-Americans to a national sporting culture that exhibited common sport forms within the capitalist framework.⁴²

With both black and white entrepreneurs seeking the limited opportunities for profit within that commercialized culture, many teams were forced to seek greater rewards on the road, following the model of the established baseball teams. The most profitable of such barnstormers, later to become the Harlem Globetrotters, embarked on their initial odyssey to Wisconsin in 1927 amidst charges of fraud. With Dick Hudson, a former pro football player acting as manager, and a coach who masqueraded as the famous Sol Butler, who had held a world record in the long jump, the team advertised its players as college all-stars. While espousing credentials from such institutions as Colgate, Amherst, and USC, most, in fact, were former Phillips High School stars who had never been to college. The *Defender* charged that the team capitalized on such subterfuge at the expense of unwary whites who paid to see the impostors. Such guile, reminiscent of the trickster in black oral culture and music, was also employed by barnstorming black baseball players to outwit whites. Among the basketball players was Joe Lillard, who would later lose his college eligibility due to professionalism and his professional football career due to the color of his skin.⁴³

While the 1920s seemingly portrayed a heyday for black basketball, that was not the case in the schools. Unlike the independent teams, interscholastic players could not isolate themselves on homecourts within the black community or escape discrimination and racism in the city. Despite the YMCA's idealistic proclamations of fair play, teamwork, respect for others' rights, and the integrative benefits of interracial competition, reality often proved otherwise.⁴⁴ Although individual blacks were accepted on athletic teams at several schools, they often felt isolation outside of the black belt. Even at Phillips High School, predominantly black by 1922, extracurricular clubs remained white only. When the mixed basketball team traveled to Tilden High School, the Tilden team refused to play. A Tilden student explained that "we nearly laid them [the three blacks] out. When they went home our boys waited and chased them . . . the whites weren't hurt, but the coons got some bricks."⁴⁵

42. *Defender*, Dec. 12, 1922, 10; Feb. 2, 1924, 11; Feb. 19, 1927, pt. 2:6; Jan. 11, 1930, 11.

43. *Defender*, Dec. 12, 1908; Apr. 23, 1910; Feb. 20, 1915, for accounts of baseball barnstormers. See *Defender*, Jan. 27, 1917, 7; for the already established eastern basketball circuit. On Globetrotters, see *Defender*, Mar. 14, 1931, 10; Feb. 20, 1932, 8; Jan. 21, 1933, 9. On Lillard, see Oceania Chalk, *Pioneers of Black Sport* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1975), 228-30. Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations In American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 36-9, 45, 60-6, 83, 96-105, on oral culture and music as protest.

44. Wabash YMCA Records. Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago, 68-44, Box 3, folder 3-1, Report of Physical Section for 1925. Board of Directors Meeting, Jan. 22, 1926.

45. Katz. *The Negro in Chicago*, 249-54.

Phillips earned revenge when it defeated Tilden, 26-22, with "rapid and bewildering passing" to win the Central Division title in 1922.⁴⁶ Ruben Spears, the black Phillips center, was carried off the court by the winning fans. During the 1924 season, Phillips' players were tripped and kicked in their defeat of Lindblom. In rough games for the divisional championships against Englewood, the lightweight team faced biased officiating as numerous foul calls allowed Englewood to tie, then win. Despite their tarnished victory the Englewood players refused to shake hands. In the heavyweight contest a fight ensued and police had to clear the floor. Phillips prevailed and went on to the city title game, where it lost to Lane Tech, a school of 3,000 students, ironically, led by a black star, Bill Watson. The outcome seemed a foregone conclusion when the referees disallowed Phillips' baskets for alleged violations and Spears, the star center, fouled out. Not a single foul was called on Lane.⁴⁷

The *Defender*, sensing a chance to promote racial pride and capitalize on Phillips' success, sponsored inter-city matches, in particular, a game against Armstrong High School in Washington, D.C., deemed the country's top black team by the African-American press. When Phillips won handily, the *Defender* offered a return match in Chicago the next year, which drew 4,500 paying customers and thousands more turned away in a game billed as the "Annual Winter Classic." The following year the *Defender* rented the Chicago Coliseum, as Phillips narrowly defeated a team from Louisville.⁴⁸

Commercialization marred Phillips' 1927 season. Despite another playoff berth, the school forfeited all of its games for using an overage player and for playing against an alleged pro team in Cleveland. Not content with punishment, the white school principals bickered over the rights to Phillips' playoff profits.⁴⁹

The Phillips Junior High School drew 2,500 fans when it reached the championship game the next year. When the lightweight team advanced to the championship game as the South Side champs, they faced an uncertain opponent, as the north sides deadlocked in a three-way tie. The white principals proposed that all four teams, Phillips included, be picked from a hat to decide the two opponents for the championship. Phillips refused the blatant disregard for its accomplishment, and traveled to Indianapolis for a game while awaiting the outcome of the debate. Upon their return, they rejoiced in a 23-10 victory over Harrison "with whirlwind, precision passing," being the first fully black team to win a city championship.⁵⁰ The team held the ball and

46. *Defender*, Feb. 18, 1922, 10.

47. School teams competed on two levels, designated by weight to equalize competition. *Defender*, Jan. 19, 1924, pt. 2:2; Mar. 1, 1924, 10; Mar. 15, 1921, 10.

48. *Defender*, Apr. 5, 1921, 1; Apr. 26, 1921, 1, 13; Feb. 21, 1925, 12; Feb. 28, 1925, 11; Jan. 2, 1926, 1; Jan. 9, 1926, pt. 2:4.

49. *Defender*, Feb. 12, 1927, pt. 2:6.

50. *Defender*, Jan. 14, 1928, pt. 2:9; Mar. 3, 1928, pt. 2:8; Mar. 10, 1928, pt. 2:8; Mar. 17, 1928, pt. 2:10 (quote); Mar. 14, 1931, 10.

played its subs to hold down the score in an act of sportsmanship: and even the *Chicago Tribune* acknowledged that “dazzling speed, accurate and amazing shooting, and stout defense” made it “the best lightweight contingent in the city league in several years.” Jubilation reigned at the awards ceremony, as students snake danced through the school and out into the streets. Albert “Runt” Pullins, the team star and a dribbling ace, soon graduated to the Globetrotters.⁵¹

The Globetrotters, still playing as the Savoy 5 in 1929, had reason to opt for the road in search of fair play. In a game in which they led the white Golde Clothiers at the half, Golde supporters still offered 2-1 odds. The reason became evident as the refs started calling fouls on Savoy with the opening tip. Joe Lillard, the Savoy star, fouled out early, and a white player was awarded a basket and two foul shots even though he had not been shooting. Unruly fans and the Savoy team left the court with the game tied and greater support for the ongoing campaign for black referees. Blacks charged that racism, collusion, or both, unduly biased the officials’ judgment.⁵²

The Phillips High School team fared better, with both the lightweight and heavyweight teams advancing to the city championship in 1930. While the lights lost in overtime, the heavyweight game provided a drama that characterized the black urban culture that revolved around religion, sport, and hope. With 16 seconds left to play and Morgan Park leading, 19-18, Agis Bray, the Phillips’ star and a future Globetrotter, intercepted a pass and headed for the basket but was promptly fouled. The Morgan Park fans booed as Bray stood at the line until a referee courageously required that they desist. In the dead silence that followed, a young Phillips girl, a recent southern migrant, prayed out loud, “Oh Lawdy, Mr. Jesus, please let Bray make the basket.” When Bray obliged she looked skyward and asked for “just one more.” She promptly fainted as the ball fell through the basket, ensuring a 20-19 win for Phillips.⁵³

Despite their championship victory, the team remained uninvited to the national championship tournament held annually at the University of Chicago. Fearing a southern boycott, Amos Alonzo Stagg invited Morgan Park, the white runner-up, instead, despite a vehement protest by the *Defender*. Throughout the remainder of that decade and into the next, black newspapers crusaded against exclusionary practices in organized sports, professional baseball in particular.⁵⁴

51. Robert Pruter, “Early Phillips teams paved way for DuSable,” *Illinois High School Sports Historian* (Jan. 1990), 4, cites the *Tribune*; *Defender*, March 17, 1928, pt. 2:10.

52. *Defender*, Jan. 12, 1929, pt. 2:5.

53. *Defender*, Mar. 22, 1930, 13.

54. *Defender*, Mar. 29, 1930, 16; William A. Brower, “Has Professional Football Closed The Door?” *Opportunity*, 18 (Dec. 1940), 375-377; David Wiggins, “Wendell Smith, The Pittsburgh Courier-Journal and the Campaign To Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945,” *Journal of Sport History*, 10 (Summer 1983): 5-29.

When both Phillips' teams reached the finals the next year, the lightweights found themselves in a familiar situation. Phantom fouls cost them their best player in the first half and turnovers inevitably went to the opponent. A last-minute foul resulted in a one-point loss. The heavies couldn't find anyone willing to give them a practice game, so they traveled to the national black tournament in Hampton, Virginia, which they won easily. Upon their return home, they dropped the title game to Crane Tech and its 6'8" center before an overflow crowd of 5,000.⁵⁵

The lightweights avenged their loss in 1932. The *Defender* described the victory over "the white boys" of Crane Tech as one in which "most of Crane's tallies . . . were made on free throws, the fairest of referees being seemingly unable to proportionately balance the fouls when a largely white team is contesting against one mostly colored."⁵⁶ With the departure of Stagg from Chicago, and a new tournament director, the Phillips team finally received an invitation in 1935 to what had become a local tournament. As a local affair there was no longer a need to appease Southerners or fear a boycott. By that time African-American athletes appeared on many teams throughout the country. The Xavier University team of New Orleans, which compiled a 67-2 record from 1935 to 1938, featured as many as five Phillips players from Chicago.⁵⁷ Throughout the 1930s, the black press clamored for the inclusion of black athletes in the mainstream sporting culture, but the reality of discrimination and the failed hopes of the talented tenth proved obvious for baseball and football players.⁵⁸ The loosely organized state of professional basketball, however, still allowed some hope for black males. By 1941 both the New York Rens and the Globetrotters had won world championships, and the Rens were even able to force desegregated seating at their games.⁵⁹

By 1940 basketball had come to serve several functions in the African-American community. Unable to fully integrate with the dominant white culture, African-Americans adopted its sport forms, such as baseball, football, and basketball; but adapted their own particular playing styles to fit a black urban culture that assimilated southern rural migrants and incorporated them into a parallel national sporting culture. While such developments were largely organized by northern middle-class blacks, they included working-class participants and gamblers by the mid-1920s. As much as they assimilated, they also gave vent to protest, for all blacks, regardless of their class

55. *Defender*, Mar. 7, 1931, 11; Mar. 21, 1931, 10; Mar. 28, 1931, 16; Apr. 4, 1931, 17. Bob Pruter, "Early Phillips Teams," 5, has pointed out that the rules of that time required a jump ball after each basket, giving Crane Tech a distinct advantage. Bob Gruenig, the 6'8" center, went on to a Hall of Fame career.

56. *Defender*, Mar. 19, 1932, 10; Claude A. Barnett Papers at the Chicago Historical Society, Box 397, file 21, cites the *Defender*, Mar. 4, 1932, for the quote.

57. I want to thank Bob Pruter for noting the decline of the tournament between 1930-1935, and his analysis of conditions in a letter, April 18, 1994.

58. *Defender*, March 4, 1939, clipping in Wabash YMCA Scrapbooks, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago; Carroll. Fritz Pollard, 196-206. Wiggins, "Wendell Smith."

59. *Defender*, Feb. 11, 1933, 10; Nov. 16, 1935, 15; Mar. 14, 1936, 14; Ashe, *A Hard Road to Glory*, 51; Claude A. Barnett Papers, Box 397, file 21, newspaper clipping, Feb. 27, 1939.

consciousness, suffered a deep race consciousness. For, while some African-Americans gained wealth, prestige, and socioeconomic status within the black community, none could deny that their color limited true progress outside of it.⁶⁰

Team names, such as the Cheetahs, Flashes, and Bullets were meant to connote a particular image matched by a particular style of play that featured speed, intricate passing, and clever ballhandling. Joe Lillard's Hottentots recalled a pride in African roots, not unlike the appeals of Marcus Garvey. Traveling teams, such as the Harlem Globetrotters or Chicago Collegians gave pretense to a level of sophistication, independence, opportunity, and self-empowerment. Not only did they possess the means to escape the ghetto and demonstrate equality, or even superiority to the white man, at least on the basketball court, but success provided a piece of the American dream for players like "Fat" Jenkins, who reputedly earned a \$10,000 salary in 1930.⁶¹

It is probably no coincidence that the popularity of the blues paralleled the growth of basketball in Chicago during the 1920s. One gave vent to black frustrations, the other to black hopes. The merger of both was clearly seen in the deportment of spectators who cheered, chanted, sang, and even prayed exuberantly at games, not unlike an evangelical church service.⁶² Both church and basketball assumed characteristics of festival, celebrating temporary feelings of power and a sense of community that reinforced pluralism as much as assimilation. Raymond Williams has termed such activities residual practices, in that they are retained from the past and serve to reinforce the values of an alternative culture.⁶³ Nelson George asserts that the blues even served as a form of resistance to the dominant culture by celebrating black heroes and emphasizing their virility.⁶⁴

The celebration of black heroes, at times, transcended the African-American community and engaged the mainstream white society, as in the cases of Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. Owens' Olympic fame proved transitory, however, and he was soon relegated to carnival-like exhibitions, racing against horses. Joe Louis, too, despite a long and spectacular reign as heavy-weight champion, died in poverty. While the interracial basketball contests of local teams or the national championships of the Rens and Globetrotters

60. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

61. *Defender*, Feb. 18, 1922, 10; Mar. 4, 1922, 10; Dec. 27, 1924, pt. 2:6; Jan. 9, 1926, pt. 2:4; Oct. 23, 1926, pt. 2:7; Mar. 17, 1928, pt. 2:10; Apr. 7, 1928, pt. 2:10; Jan. 15, 1930, 8; Feb. 3, 1934, 11; Mar. 27, 1937 clipping in YMCA Scrapbooks. Donn Rogosin, *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 35, makes the point of athletics as one sphere where blacks might challenge whites. *Chicago Evening American*, Jan. 15, 1930, 15, on Jenkins' salary.

62. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 180-90, on "sorrow songs" among southern blacks; Angela M.S. Nelson, "The Persistence of Ethnicity in African American Popular Music: A Theology of Rap Music," *Explorations in Ethnic Studies*, 15:1 (Jan. 1992), 47-57; Levine, *The Unpredictable Past*, on the construction of an African-American culture. *Defender*, Jan. 9, 1924, pt. 2:2; Mar. 1, 1924, 10; Mar. 22, 1930, 13, for examples of fan behavior.

63. Williams cited in Alan G. Ingham and Stephan Hardy, "Introduction," in Alan G. Ingham and John Loy, eds., *Sport In Social Development* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1993), 3-4.

64. Nelson George, *Elevating the Game*, 1992, 11-12.

proved the abilities of black athletes and the potential of sport as a means to social harmony, Jackie Robinson still required the subterfuges of Branch Rickey to gain his place in baseball.⁶⁵

Eventually the black style of play would come to dominate basketball. But when success threatened white perceptions of superiority, the best black players were integrated into the professional white circuit; or, in the case of the Globetrotters, required to become clowns, despite players' objections, in order to fit a white racist image that allowed blacks to entertain them.⁶⁶ Once again, the efforts of African-Americans to throw off the shackles of the slave mentality, to free their sharecropping brethren who had come north for salvation, enjoyed only limited success. For most, who remained mired in the ghetto, basketball resulted in just another blocked shot, providing psychic rewards for many but delivering salvation to a relative few. The failure of even that "talented tenth" to win wholesale acceptance in the larger American society would lead to a more aggressive and sometimes hostile approach, first evident in the Detroit riot of 1943, and progressing to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Whereas violent revolution could not overcome white dominance, however, some sport practices could. Within another generation the black style of basketball with its exuberant expressions of the African-American culture, characterized by powerful dunks and joyous expressions of physicality, predominated in the game.⁶⁷

The experience of African-American basketball players in Chicago was just one part of a more complete cultural fabric woven out of many interconnected threads. Other case studies of Eastern cities indicate some parallel developments.⁶⁸ The promise of opportunity in the North allowed urban middle-class blacks and religious groups to organize teams for pride and profit. Women, as well as men, played the game in organized leagues and barnstorming teams. Residential segregation and other exclusionary practices by the white majority forced the development of a parallel sporting culture of African-Americans. Sporting events helped assimilate rural migrants from the south into the urban culture of the north. In the process, distinct black cultures coalesced and transformed the American mainstream popular culture. Though racism blocked their efforts, African-Americans ultimately changed the nature of basketball.

65. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experience: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

66. Frank Waldman, *Famous American Athletes of Today* (Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1951), 91-2; George, *Elevating the Game*, 60, 72-6, likens the improvisational style of black players to jazz and discusses the Globetrotters, 41-2, 49.

67. The film title, "White Men Can't Jump," offers a parody of stylistic differences and abilities relative to basketball.

68. John M. Carroll, "The Origin of Black Basketball in New York," and James Coates, "Basketball: The Baltimore and Washington Experience," presentations made at the North American Society for Sport History Convention, May 29-June 1, 1993, Albuquerque, New Mexico.