

Gentlemen's Agreement: The 1937 Maryland/Syracuse Football Controversy

JAMES R. COATES. JR.

University of Maryland

In October 1937, the University of Maryland and Syracuse University entered into a "gentlemen's agreement" which prevented Wilmeth Sidat-Singh from participating in a football game between the two institutions. Sidat-Singh was of Black heritage and Maryland had no players of Black descent on its squad. The game was played in Baltimore, Maryland, where Maryland, "deep with Southern tradition," had not competed against a football squad with a member of the Black race as a member of either the opposition's team, or its own team.

The research for this thesis indicates that the players from the two institutions do not completely agree on the reality of the circumstances surrounding the controversy. The evidence of the controversy does indicate that the media was expecting Sidat-Singh to play; the Syracuse players indicate he was withheld because of his race; Wilmeth was not injured; nor was he being disciplined for some misconduct on his part. The "gentlemen's agreement" was entered into by the University of Maryland and Syracuse University because of Wilmeth Sidat-Singh's racial heritage.