

Integration of the Black Athlete and Coach in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System: A Brief History

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The integration of a school system is marked by change. Change that is measured in losses and gains. Black athletics in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System during the 1960's experienced both. Before voluntary and court ordered integration of the system, blacks enjoyed a rich history of athletics. This history was nurtured by the collective determination of the black coach, athlete and community. Black programs faced each new season with second-hand or discarded equipment, inadequate facilities and a lack of financial funding. But, in spite of the unresponsive attitude of the white school boards in lending support, blacks maintained athletic programs which mirrored their white counterparts in boys' sport and went one step beyond by providing three interscholastic sports for girls. A similar experience for girls in white schools was eliminated in the late 1940s.

The closing of eight of the nine black high schools and their athletic programs was a definite loss caused by integration. With one exception, the system did not entertain the idea of integrating whites into existing black programs, but rather chose to eliminate black programs in favor of white. The system chose not to retain the expertise and experience of the black coach in the schools, losing an important role model for the black athlete. Thirteen years after court ordered integration, the black athletic experience has become lost. The black youth of today have but one high school left to remind them of their heritage.

Despite these losses, the black athlete also gained in this process. The black athlete is exposed to the latest in up-to-date equipment and facilities. He is afforded state-wide and national visibility with greater opportunity to compete for athletic scholarships and the opportunity for gains in scholastic achievement.



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