

The Impact of World War II on Black Sports and Athletics

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World War II created enormous opportunities for the use of sports and games for wartime morale, preparedness, recreation, and military training in the United States, Black military training, strictly segregated in the early days of the war, utilized sport not only within the confines of the needs of its troops but to implement through integrated competition a gradual breaking of social barriers. By war's end, integrated sports and games had become a prelude to integrated units – a harbinger of postwar change. The wartime publicity for Black athletes, both civilian and military, allowed market forces to demand quality competition in a time of scarcity, which Blacks were equipped to provide. In addition, the war enabled Black athletic personalities to present themselves in a manner to support the war effort through symbolic participation in extravaganzas for war relief.

The use and opportunities provided by sports during the war gave Black athletes an initiative to participate in areas of social change even before major breakthroughs of the postwar era.



“A fearsome foursome”, – their talks generated much discussion.