

# My Personal Correspondence as History

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Over the years I have accumulated a good deal of historical data through personal correspondence. Most of this information has not heretofore been published.

One letter is from Amos Alonzo Stagg, dated Feb. 5, 1950. He was a student at Springfield College with James Naismith so I wrote to him for further information about the origin of basketball. His reply included this quotation from a letter he wrote to his sister Pauline on March 10, 1892:

There is a great furor among the boys in the school over a new game which Naismith our center rusher invented, called basket ball . . . any number of persons on a side. A basket with large enough opening to take the ball easily is hung at each end about eight feet from the floor. . . Fouls are declared for running with the ball and for kicking it. Any one has a right to the ball at all times if he can get it. I think the game could be easily adapted to girls—the main point being to get a basket as big as a house.

A hero in the integration of blacks into the Professional Golfers' Association was Stanley Mosk, the Attorney General for the state of California at the time. Mosk described his role in a letter of April 20, 1982 as follows:

Being devoted to the constitutional guarantee of equal protection, I felt it was my duty to prevent the use of public facilities by any organization that discriminated on the basis of race. When I learned that Charlie Sifford was being prevented from playing in the prestigious Los Angeles Open, which was being held on a public golf course, I communicated with the sponsors—the Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce—and with the Professional Golfers' Association, and notified them that I was prepared to go to court to enjoin them from using the course if they persisted in barring a qualified player because of his race. The Junior Chamber was very sympathetic, but declared it could do nothing because of the by-laws of the PGA, which provided that tournaments were available to "Caucasians only." The PGA responded that it was bound by its own by-laws. I was adamant and told the PGA it must change those by-laws or it could not use any public facilities. The association responded by threatening to move the tournament out of California.

The PGA did move the 1962 tournament to Pennsylvania, but within a year it eliminated the "Caucasians only" clause.

I was interested in why Paul Brown employed black players, Bill Willis and Marion Motley, to play for his professional football team in 1946. His reply was dated February 6, 1969:

I really deserve no credit for what I did. My interest then, and today, is strictly in having the best football team possible. I am totally disinterested in color, race, religion, etc. . . . In a nutshell, I am interested in the best football player I can find for a given position. Everything else is meaningless.

Vaughn Blanchard inaugurated a plan in Detroit whereby coaches were not allowed to sit on the bench or contact their players during interscholastic basketball games. Blanchard told why he had to abandon this commendable plan after two years:

It was abandoned largely because of newspaper pressure [from the three daily papers in Detroit] . . . Also, the high school coaches were not entirely sold on the idea. . . The issue finally came before the Board of Education. The Board instructed me to drop the plan after

the President of the Board asked me in open meeting if Coach Yost who was coaching at the University of Michigan at that time followed such a plan. Of course my answer was in the negative. So after he said, "Well, what's good enough for Yost is good enough for me," the matter was closed.

Ann Landers in one of her columns said, "When an older person dies, it is like a library burning down." We historians need to find these valuable and unique sources and hear their stories before it is too late.