

ETHNICITY AND RACE IN NORTH AMERICA

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Stacking on the Ice? The Brief History of the African American Hockey Player

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history of the African American hockey player from Willie O'Ree in 1957 to today's players who include Anson Carter, Mike Grier, and Afro-Canadian Grant Fuhr. Research on race and contemporary sport reveals that African American males are over-represented in football and basketball, something which is attributed to factors such as access, cost of equipment, and limited images of blacks in other sports. The literature on stacking reveals that historically African Americans were thought to lack the "necessities" that go with leadership in central positions (point guard, quarterback, pitcher, catcher, and the like).

Very few African Americans participate in ice hockey, and stacking in the sport appears to be external to the ice rink, rather than on it. This paper examines those factors that have contributed to the success of African American hockey players who "made it" and their perseverance in the face of racial stigmas and low expectations of African American ice skaters and hockey players. Suggestions are also made as to what the sporting world can do to increase African American participation in hockey, as well as to tackle the issue of the stacking and re-stacking of African Americans in other sports such as tennis, golf, swimming, badminton, and baseball. Some of the material in this paper is drawn from the author's own participant observer accounts as a Division I hockey player of African American descent.