

the traditional Afro-American freedom agenda.” Harry Edwards’ role in the revolt of the black athlete illustrates that “the civil rights movement” and the Black Power movement, often portrayed in very different terms, had its origins in the same soil, confronted the same dilemmas, and reflected the same quest for Afro-American freedom. This paper analyzes Harry Edwards’ role in the black athlete revolt within the context of the Black Power movement.

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## **Hank Aaron and Home Runs: An Analysis of Black and White Newspaper Coverage of Aaron’s Chase for Babe Ruth’s All-Time Home Run Record**

Over the last several years, baseball’s home run record has been assaulted, first by Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa shattering Roger Maris’ 1961 record in 1998, and this past season with Barry Bonds breaking McGwire’s short-lived title. In her analysis of the McGwire-Sosa duel, sport scholar Shelly Lucas suggests that the media depiction of each athlete was somewhat dependent on their skin color. McGwire, the media and fan favorite was White, while Sosa, though Dominican, was played in the press as Black. When Bonds began to threaten McGwire’s record and eventually broke it, there was little fanfare that accompanied McGwire’s feat and there was a debate as to if Bonds deserved to hold the title. Surely, the ethnicity of the new home run king was a factor in the ways the media covered Bonds’ challenge.

Media coverage of these recent home run challenges offers sport historians an opportunity to look at another challenge to one of baseball’s most hallowed records – the all-time home run record set in 1974 by Hank Aaron – using a methodology that has become more popular in accurately representing the racial dialogue of the times. Aaron was the last major league player to have played in the Negro Leagues. At the close of the 1973 season, Aaron was one home run shy of tying Babe Ruth’s record. This paper analyzes Black and White newspaper coverage of Aaron’s breaking of Ruth’s home run record. The newspapers to be used will come from across the nation to gather a national perspective. The social, political, and cultural landscape will be explored to put Aaron’s record in the context of the 1970s. The analysis will attempt to answer several questions: How was the challenge of a

Ruth owned record by a Black athlete covered in the newspapers? Was Aaron's skin color a factor in the media coverage? What were the differences and similarities between Black and White newspapers in their coverage of Aaron's chase and breaking of the record? Finally, what comparisons can be made between the racial language used in the coverage of Aaron in 1973-1974 and the athletes involved (McGwire, Sosa, and Bonds) in the recent home run chases of 1998 and 2001?

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Gerald Gems, NASSH Host John Findling, & Allen Guttmann



*The Football Panel*

Ron Smith, Mike Orard, John Watterson, Mark Dyreson, & Mel Adelman