

may have been its kings, and Robert Douglas who, as the man that inherited and successfully exploited the gains and discoveries in colored basketball made by his predecessors, was undoubtedly its crown prince.

James Odenkirk
Arizona State University

Not the Little Old Lady from Dubuque but Sol Butler, An Unheralded World Class Athlete

Jim Crowism, exacerbated by the famous or infamous Plessy v.. Ferguson Supreme Court decision in 1896, sounded a half-century death knell for integration in American sporting competition. With few exceptions African-Americans were excluded from integrated competition until professional baseball's Jackie Robinson broke the color line in 1946. One of these early black performers was the unheralded Edward Solomon Butler, a multi-talented athlete from the University of Dubuque (Iowa). Butler, the son of an emancipated slave, was born near Kingfisher, Oklahoma. He demonstrated outstanding athletic talents, particularly in football and track and field. After an illustrious athletic career in two high schools, Butler was recruited by the University of Dubuque, a small Presbyterian College near the banks of the Mississippi River in northeastern Iowa. The date was 1915 when only a smattering of African-Americans matriculated to American colleges and universities.

Butler's track and field accomplishments during college gained nationwide attention. He competed in the Penn Relays and other prestigious track and field events. In 1919 the barrel-chested 'Black Knight' broke the American record in the running long jump at the Interallied Games in Paris with a leap of 24 feet, nine and one-half inches. He defeated the renowned American speedster Charles Paddock in the ninety-yard dash. In 1920 Butler was one of three African-Americans to qualify for the US Olympic Track and Field team. The Games were held in Antwerp, Belgium and Butler was favored to win the running long jump. Fate intervened when the trackster pulled a tendon in his right leg on the first jump in the qualification round. After one more attempt, a distraught Butler withdrew from competition.

Butler's track and field career was all but over. He turned to professional football where he competed for several teams in the

fledgling National Football League, including a short stint with Jim Thorpe and the Canton Bulldogs. Butler settled in Chicago and worked for the Chicago Parks and Recreation Department helping young black athletes improve their skills. In 1954 at the age of 59, Butler, now a bartender on the Southside of Chicago, was shot and killed by a revengeful patron. A member of the Iowa and University of Dubuque Sports Hall of Fame, the little known Butler, had not fate intervened, likely would have been acclaimed as the world's greatest running long jumper until 1936 when Jesse Owens, another African-American, established a new world record in this event. Arch Ward, noted sportswriter of the Chicago Tribune said it best: "You won't find [Butler's] name emblazoned in sports page headlines of metropolitan newspapers, but [old-timers] will never forget him on the hills of Dubuque that overlook Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin."



Sunday's Picnic