

Black History Sports

Written by Stacey Hough, Columnist
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We annually celebrate Black History Month and often the same names are mentioned as the events and milestones are re-told. Often, in sports also, the familiar names are brought out each February. Jackie Robinson, Jesse Owens, Hank Aaron are some names that we hear constantly, and all are very deserving of their place in history and in our hearts. But there are so many accomplishments and heroes that have impacted the world of sports whom happen to be Africa-American, and may not always come to mind first. This week and next, I will share some other notable Black Historical figures from the world of sports.

We know Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball. But Larry Doby, a native of Camden, SC, joined him in the big leagues in the same season. In 1947, Doby was brought to the major leagues by the Cleveland Indians, becoming the first Black player in the American League. Larry Doby went on to make the All-Star team in 7 consecutive seasons as a centerfielder. He also has the distinction of being the first player ever to go directly from the Negro League to Major League Baseball (Jackie Robinson spent time in the minor leagues before joining the Brooklyn Dodgers, understandably, to prepare him for the harsh treatment he would get in the big leagues). Another notable accomplishment for Mr. Doby is the fact that he, along with teammate Satchel Paige, became the first African-Americans to play on a world Series winning team when the Indians became champions in 1948.

A generation has come to idolize Michael Jordan as the greatest basketball player to ever play the game. That is valid opinion, but Bill Russell is the greatest winner to ever play the game of basketball. Russell, a 6 foot, 10 inch center for the Boston Celtics in the 50s and 60s, won 11 NBA Championships in 13 years. That total includes 2 championship he won as a player-coach. Bill Russell made history when he accepted the job as head coach of the Celtics in 1966. He was the first African-American head coach in the history of the National Basketball Association. Russell's playing accomplishments are legendary, and too many to list here, but I will lift up a

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few of them. He once had 51 rebounds in a single game. Russell once averaged 24.9 rebounds per game in the playoffs. He is tied with Michael Jordan in second place for most regular season MVP awards with 5(Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has 6). Bill Russell was also known to be a dignified and socially conscious athlete, and outspoken about the racial problems during the times he lived and played in 1960s. He also earned a gold medal in the 1956 Olympics as part of the basketball team. And he won the NCAA championship during his last year of college at the University of San Francisco. Bill Russell was the consummate winner.

These are just two more names to look up online when its time to look at the evolution of sports and the impact of African-Americans toward that end. There are so many more great heroes to admire. Hopefully we will continue to spread the love around, and not just in February, but throughout the year.