

How black athletes made it in sport in the 20th century

(axe sport et société)

Jesse Owens

James Cleveland Owens was the grandson of an Alabama slave and is better known as Jesse Owens. He was born on September 12, 1913 in Danville, Alabama. He left his native South with his family. With extraordinary athletic qualities, he developed a natural gift for athletics at 15 years old. He progressed rapidly and began to break records in athletic discipline.



Before the Olympic Games he was already known for having achieved the world record for the hundred meters in 10"2/10. He became a legend, he marked memories as he hit the world record in long jump. During the Olympic Games he made two records, first he flew at 7.94 meters, but this record was not enough for him so he flew a second time at 8.06 meters. He also broke the world record in the 200m, 200m hurdles and 4x100m relay. This triumph trampled on the racist themes of the Nazi regime. When he achieved the world record, the "black race" was not appreciated in Germany. So Adolf Hitler congratulated all the athletes except the black athlete because of his colour, this racist attitude highlighted the theory that the "Aryan race" was superior. Owens left Berlin with 4 medals.

Basketball, a white sport that has gone black over the years

For nearly a century, segregation has been very present in many areas, especially in professional sports in the United States. It forbade blacks to mix with whites, so sports teams were not made up of black players but only white players.

Following the long years of suffering of black populations due to racial differences, in the 1920s and the years that followed, African-Americans tried to make themselves known through sport, despite their difficult beginning. When blacks and whites were separated in different leagues, blacks still stood out in different sports.

The creation of black professional leagues from 1850 to 1945, in several sports like basketball, played an important role in the sporting evolution of the black community. In the 1950s and 1980s, white professional leagues began to integrate black players in their teams.



Blacks and whites have played this sport in segregated teams and leagues since its creation in 1891 including the *Harlem Globetrotters* which is an all-black team created in 1926, which was not accepted by the major leagues of the country because there were

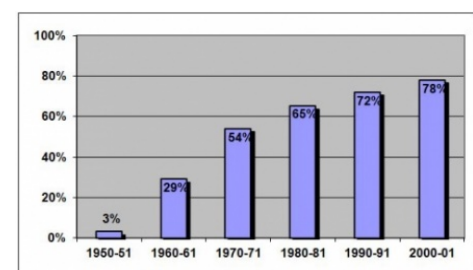
too many black people in it. This sport was practiced a lot in New York ghettos because it is considered a symbol of identity for black populations.

Years later during the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, The U.S. basketball team did not include any African-American players because segregation was still present at that time in the United States. So the team was all white. During these Olympic Games, the US basketball team won its first Olympic title by a score of 19-8 against the Canadians.

In 1948, during the Olympic Games in London, the American team positively evolved since it now had an African-American player: Don Barksdale. At the London Olympics in 1948, Don Barksdale was the first black to play for the US Olympic team, winning the gold medal.

In 1950-1, three black players joined the NBA: Chuck Cooper, selected by the *Boston Celtics*, Earl Lloyd was the first black to participate in an NBA game, Don Barksdale was the third African-American player to sign a contract with the NBA and was the first to participate in the NBA All-Star Game in 1953. In 1959, Elgin Baylor won the All-Star Game MVP Award, which is a trophy awarded to the best players in the NBA All-Star Game. He was selected 11 times for the NBA All-star Game.

This graph shows that black players are more and more present in basketball over the years. American basketball has evolved since the middle of the twentieth century. In 1950, the integration of black players into the NBA marked a major break in the history of the sport. Indeed, the professional league's squads have literally gone from white to black.



Black women in sport

In 1929, the only black college-Tuskegee Institute in Alabama- founded one of the first women's teams. That same year, Ora Washington won her first title in the American Tennis Association. She retained this title from 1929 to 1936.

Louise Stokes and Tidye Pickett were qualified for the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics in track and field, but were not allowed to compete because of their skin color. Pickett and Stokes went on to become the first black women to represent the United States at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

A few years later, Alice Coachman became the first black woman to win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Coachman won high heels at the 1948 London Olympic Games. Coachman was a member of the Tuskegee Institute's athletic program and graduated in fashion in 1946.

Lynette Woodard, in 1985, became the first black woman to play on the American basketball team Harlem Globetrotters. She spent two seasons with the Globetrotters (1985-1987) before joining a professional basketball team in Italy (1987-1989) and Japan (1990-1993). Woodard was part of the women's basketball team that won a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics.

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