

A Historical Perspective on Sports and the Emergence of the African American Athlete

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INTRODUCTION

My interest in creating a unit on professional athletes arose from the interests of many of my male students. They aspire to become professional athletes without the knowledge of what it takes to achieve this goal. Professional athletes are viewed as heroes and role models, and there is a special intensity of admiration when excellence is found in one's own family, race, neighborhood or country. This unit will provide an optimum opportunity to teach students about the skill, dedication, perseverance, and self-discipline a successful professional athlete has to master.

Many male students are in search of heroes and role models they can emulate. The media and the American society have elevated professional athletes to the level of deities.

The scope of this unit includes a consideration of the distinction between a celebrity and a hero. Daniel Boorstin quite eloquently argues in *The Image* that a hero takes at least a generation to emerge, and is unaffected by his historical context (22). Tradition is his ally. On the other hand, a celebrity is contemporary, here for the moment, and is subject to the media today. The passage of time which creates the hero ultimately destroys the celebrity. The hero is like a classic that is read and reread. Repetition makes the hero but destroys the celebrity.

Even though professional athletes are frequently considered to be heroes and role models, few are willing to accept that responsibility. They have been thrust into the mode of the hero, and have not given themselves for a cause as Jackie Robinson did. Their actions are generally motivated by a desire for personal growth and financial gain. Because of the mere nature of contemporary professional sports, they became celebrities and entertainers.

Because of the demographics of my school—2.5% Anglo, 32.4% Hispanic, and 60.9% African American—my unit will focus on the emergence of the African American athlete as it is revealed in the careers of Jim Brown, Jackie Robinson, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Teaching methodology will focus on developing and expanding higher order thinking skills with high interest materials. Lessons will be aligned with Project Clear and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. This unit will provide engaging experiences in which students encounter content that can be transferred to their daily lives. The main

academic goal of this unit is to sharpen critical thinking and metacognitive skills in an active learning and problem-solving environment.

Historical Background

Sports began in ancient cultures as cultic religious rituals. These activities spanned the globe from the plains inhabited by the Southwestern Indians to the veldt of Africa where the Zulu tribes lived. The non-utilitarian approach to play or physical exercise was part of ceremonial rites, and only later did these activities emphasize a sense of game and competitive play. Scholars also speculate that the Olympic games are an outgrowth of Greek myth. Even though the record has replaced the ritual in our modern world, sports are still viewed as a kind of religion. Prior to industrialization, games and other contests in all cultures were closely aligned with religion in values (Guttman, 15-31).

Michael Novak in *The Joy of Sports* proposes that today sports still imitate a liturgy (18-25). Being in a stadium is a kind of worship where fun is the order instead of religion. The joy of sports is expressed by a sense of excitement for competition, comradeship, and participation in the flow of the game. Athletes have such dedication to the sports that they submit themselves to bodily danger to fulfill the need for excitement and involvement in the game. Their discipline, dedication, and commitment to sports are not always apparent to observers caught up in the drama of the moment. The game is so powerful that spectators are drawn into the action. They become dramatically involved in the game with their voices, and broadcasters give form to the spectators' reaction.

Other scholars theorize that sports have been a means of exploitation because of commercialization. Athletes have become valuable commodities because of their marketable skills. This has made sports a matter of profit and loss for some. Teams are owned by corporations and wealthy individuals. In addition to the economic aspects, there are political and social issues as well. Major League Baseball depends on its exemption from antitrust legislation by the Supreme Court. Other professional sports rely on depreciation of their players, monies from the media, and donated stadiums. Detractors contend that athletes sell themselves into bondage for millions of dollars. They become pawns in the hands of a powerful structure of government and businessmen with an interest in the profit of sports. In a capitalistic society, athletes have become a salary, a statistic. Jim Brown has been noted as saying, "I hold more than a dozen awards and as a result have been turned into a statistic" (Guttman, 68). In the sports arena there is an intense quest for records. Both athletes and fans are vitally interested in who can break a record or set a new one (Guttman, 58-68).

Karl Marx and Max Weber proposed two important theories about modern sports, which have some validity. Marx held that there is a class relationship in the capitalistic society that governs who participates in different kinds of sports. He argued that team sports were largely played by the laboring class, while non-team sports were the province of the upper class. Team sports were seen as a leisure time activity to enhance labor

production, while the upper class indulged in sports for socialization purposes (Guttman, 66-80). On the other hand, Max Weber maintained that sports are a culture within a culture. It is not merely economics, but young vs. old, educated vs. uneducated, upwardly mobile vs. downwardly mobile. He suggested that class is important, but age, sex, education, religion, and mobility are also important factors in understanding contemporary sports. The common thread is achievement. Differences in participation rates in achievement depend on the self-discipline of physical training, which is deferred gratification necessary for amassing large amounts of capital (Guttman, 80-82).

I cannot adequately discuss the lives of professional athletes without addressing the doorway by which I entered their lives, the autobiography. The autobiography allows each individual to tell his own story in his own way. Each author is defined, to a certain degree, however, by the time in history in which he lives.

The autobiography is not as highly acclaimed as some other literary genres, perhaps because it does not adhere to certain conventions of literature. It cannot be considered a whole piece because the life being discussed is still in progress—it's a story without a true ending. Also, some of the authors are not professional writers, and so the autobiography has not attracted as much literary criticism as other genres have. It is considered the simplest form of literary writing and has three different rhetorical forms: the *exemplum*, which is written to be an example or illustration, the *apologia*, which is written in defense of one's life, and the *confessional*, which is written in the form of a confession of one's life (Olney, 5-7).

It is a credible form of writing and has stood the test of time. As early as the eighth century, the Greeks created the term autobiography to mean self-writing. These were initially known as memoirs and confessions. There are many definitions, but James Olney states that it is an "individual's memory reaching into three different times—now, then and the time of his historical context" (19).

This nontraditional form of literature has inspired research in several academic disciplines. It has been used quite effectively in such areas as black studies as a means of preserving the history of people whose lives were not recorded in standard history (13).

During my exploration into their lives, I discovered the complexities of each of these athletes. They are much more than mere athletes; they have a "double consciousness," other agendas that are not readily seen on the field or the court by the spectators. Only through the portrayal of their lives found in their autobiographies did I realize these intricacies.

Jim Brown

Modern sports originated in England and spread to the United States in the 1900s. The first football club was founded by the British in 1890, and this sport was introduced in the

United States in 1913. It evolved from soccer and rugby. Industrialized nations were the first to introduce organized sports. The tempo of the game builds to a climatic culmination as in Ravel's Bolero or Beethoven's Fifth. The plays are strategies carefully measured and diagrammed as in a music score (Novak, 75).

It was not until World War II that blacks began to play professional football. Kenny Washington was the first to integrate the game of football, but he was not alone. Shortly after Washington, Marion Motley and Bill Willis played in the old All-American Football Conference. Motley was one of the first black players in modern pro football. He was a fullback for the Cleveland Browns and entered the Hall of Fame as both a runner and a blocker. Motley joined the Browns in 1946. Bill Willis was an All-American tackle at Ohio State before joining the Browns in 1946. He played both offense and defense, but was most known for excelling as a defensive middle guard (Tuttle, 33).

According to Jim Brown's autobiography, *Out of Bounds*, he began playing at Manhasset High School, Manhasset, New York. He was an excellent athlete and played several sports well, including basketball, baseball, lacrosse, and track. He had high regard for his high school coach who kept him on track with his studies. He later attended Syracuse University. Although he was an outstanding athlete, he was not allowed to play until he proved himself. He sat and watched the other players drill and began to question his athletic abilities. He had decided to quit school when the superintendent of Manhasset schools visited him and convinced him to stay. Brown credits his Anglo mentors at Manhasset High with changing his life. His negative experiences might have left damaging scars, but his mentors made college one of the most important times of his life. The head coach at Syracuse promised him he could play if he returned the next year. He kept his promise. He went from fifth string to All-American and was asked to assist with recruitment of other black athletes. Among those he recruited were Ernie Davis, John Mackey, and Jim Manis. Those black athletes were instrumental in helping Syracuse win a national football title. Subsequently, Syracuse was known for its abundant use of black athletes. His abilities opened doors for the acceptance of other black athletes.

Brown was aware of the challenges black players faced, especially in the South. He felt if he had to stay with a black family instead of at the hotel with his teammates, as black players did, it would have an adverse effect on his playing ability. He was not willing to do that. In 1957 when the Cleveland Browns were scheduled to play at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, his team was taken to a small hotel on the outskirts of the city where the coach told them they did not have to hang around the lobby. He knew he meant him in particular.

Jim Brown includes a chapter on racism in his autobiography, but not out of bitterness, because he feels racism is an individual trait. He discusses it because he has a desire to live a "natural" life, one that is unaffected by the boundaries of discrimination. He feels the civil rights movement had not reached a mature state when he played pro football. A double standard existed. He was supposed to do his part on the field, but

become someone else off the field. The media has distorted the image of blacks; therefore, he understands why people feel the way they do about African Americans.

There are few black athletes in power and leadership roles in American professional sports. Those positions seemingly are off-limits to blacks. There are also certain positions that were off-limits to blacks when Brown was a player. Brown does not blame the leadership in American professional sports because their business is to sell tickets. They are not necessarily racist; they are trying to fill the stadium and Anglo Americans have the money to buy the tickets. Therefore, American professional sports management must try to appease the ticket buyers. How will they react to a black head coach or quarterback? Professional sports are part of the entertainment business, and owners and managers try to protect their business interests.

Brown also questions how many famous blacks give back to the community. Generally, they try to keep their wealth and tend to ignore the less fortunate and their daily problems.

Jim Brown has a heightened social consciousness; he has formed groups to help other blacks make progress. Those athletes who lend their names to certain products, however, cannot become involved in controversial issues. They cannot take a stand. They sell themselves to whatever they are representing. There should be an awareness by black stars of those who came before them and paved the way, those who had to endure bitter cruelties. There is a need for athletes at the height of their stardom to embrace controversial issues and resist complacency and selfishness.

During the mid-1960s, he helped create the Black Industrial and Economic Union. The purpose of this organization was to take young black men who had good ideas and help them get financing and supply technical knowledge to turn their ideas into realities. This organization has started many black businesses across America.

In his autobiography, Brown emphasizes that economic development is the only way to raise one's standard in this country. Many black leaders are in the clergy and appeal to emotional issues when economic issues should be addressed. Blacks need education and an economic sense of how to make money. Money is power. The capitalistic message should be pushed. He has worked for the advancement of black people within the system, the American way.

Brown argues that racism in the NFL is simply a mirror of racism in America. Each player has to be weighed as an individual. During the 1950s when he entered the NFL there was a quota for blacks, always an even number so that blacks and whites would not have to room together. That meant a number of talented athletes had to be turned away. The owners were acting in concert with society.

He never concerned himself with racial issues during his football career because racist actions were a ploy to enrage him. There was strong pressure to perform, and he was willing to give results, but not his soul. His life was a dichotomy. He was great on the field, but off the field he was just another black man with limitations. He tried to overcome the controversies in his life and feel decent about himself. Coaches thought he had a bad attitude, but it was formed by football. Football was only part of his life. His attitude was shaped by personal convictions, his views about society, and his role as a black man in America in the 1950s. It was his attitude that provoked him to persevere, in spite of setbacks, and perform during games.

His first NFL championship was a powerful time for him. He saw himself as a superstar, but never really felt accepted until his team won their first NFL Championship. He retired from pro football at the age of twenty-nine. He began to make movies in 1966. Football was only part of his life, but it set the foundation for the rest of his life. It taught him to withstand pressure and survive racial politics, and those were harder than what he suffered on the field. During his journey, he did meet people who transcended race.

Jackie Robinson

Baseball is viewed as a distinctly American game, although it is thought to have developed from the English game of rounders. It evolved from a number of stick and ball games. As early as the Civil War era there were about sixty teams in an association. Baseball has been compared to chamber music because of its slow pastoral movement (Novak, 56). The competition is almost exclusively individualistic. This game is more or less a man-to-man game rather than a team effort. A part of its attraction is its infinite detail.

In May, 1878 John Fowler became the first black player to play professional baseball, even though it was in the minors. In 1884, Moses Walker became the first black baseball player to reach the majors when the Toledo Blue Stockings joined the American Association (Morrison, 1).

The first all-black team was put together in 1885 and was known as the Argyle Athletics. They played white teams, but were not well received by white fans. In order to make the team more racially acceptable, the owner changed the name to the Cuban Giants. Players were asked not to speak English while in public and on the field. By the turn of the century no black team was allowed to play white teams (Morrison, 2).

Jackie Robinson's *I Never Had It Made* is a powerful exemplum. He grew up in a single parent home, but there were two men who had a great impact on his life—a mechanic, Carl Anderson, and a minister, Karl Downs. He began playing sports as a young boy in grammar school, and in high school he earned letters in football, basketball, baseball, and track. He was competitive and aggressive. He ran track at Pasadena Junior College and broke his brother's record. He gained public acclaim while in junior college,

and by the end of his coursework a number of colleges and universities offered him scholarships. He chose UCLA because it was near his home. He was the university's first four-letter man. He participated in basketball, baseball, football, and track. He was introduced to his wife while at UCLA, and his relationship with her was the only thing more important than sports. He left UCLA after two years when his money was depleted. He was convinced that an education would not help a black man get a job. He needed to help his mother with the family finances. He took a job as athletic director at a work camp in Atacadero, California. This was a very rewarding job for him.

At that time, no major football or basketball clubs hired black players. The only team that hired black players was the Honolulu Bears, a minor league team. He worked for a construction company during the week and played football on Sundays. This was his first pro team. After the football season in December, 1941 he was aboard ship on his way home when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. In May, 1942 the army sent him to Fort Riley, Kansas for basic training. He applied for Officers Candidate School (OCS). All the men in his unit passed the test, but were not allowed to start to school. This was his first revelation of the fate of black men. Because of some prompting from Washington, they were finally allowed to enter OCS. He became a second lieutenant. When he arrived at Fort Riley he had been invited to play on the football team, and their first game was against the University of Missouri, which refused to play a team with a black man. He refused to continue to play on the team if he could not play in all the games.

He later received a court martial for sitting on a bus talking to another officer's wife, who was white, and was given an honorable discharge from the army in 1944. He later played for the Kansas City Monarchs, a black professional baseball team. This was not a positive experience for him. The team was poorly financed, poorly managed, and poorly promoted. Travel was hectic because it was difficult for black teams to find places to stay and eat. He began to wonder why he should choose a career where the boundaries for progress were set by racial discrimination.

Branch Rickey solved his problem. He was a tough, courageous man who was the president of the Brooklyn Dodgers. He decided to challenge the Jim Crow laws in baseball by hiring a black player. Rickey had been coach for Ohio Wesleyan in 1910 when he was involved in an incident with a black player who was not allowed to stay at the same hotel as the white players. The player's pain resonated in his mind, and he never forgot that scene.

In 1943 when he became president of the Brooklyn Dodgers he conceived an experiment to initiate equality in baseball—the "Noble Experiment." Also uppermost in his mind was the financial gains if such an experiment worked. He then tried to find the right player who could endure the abuse of name-calling, rejection by fans, sportswriters and fellow players, and still have spirit. After this player proved his ability as a player, teammate, and man, he had to shed his humbleness and stand as a participant who was not bitter. He selected Jackie Robinson. This experiment was created under the guise of

beginning a new Negro league. However, his main purpose was to absorb these players into the majors. Robinson was referred to him by Wendell Smith, the sports editor for the black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*.

Jackie Robinson was skeptical when approached by the Dodger scout. He was cynical—a tactic blacks had learned to use in order to protect themselves. After being told he was a candidate for the Brooklyn National League club, Jackie's reaction was one of surprise, happiness, excitement, and fear. They were about to embark on a journey on which they would encounter stormy seas and they had no allies. Rickey had a passion for justice and Robinson knew he was doing what he thought he had to do. Robinson had always been one to retaliate when his dignity was on the line. He did not know how he would control that fighting spirit, but he knew he must. He had to do it for black youth, his family, himself, and Branch Rickey. He was offered a contract. The press was called when he signed the contract, but there were no positive forecasts.

His initial game as a Montreal Royal in the Dodger's minor league system was a success, his athletic performance was good, and he steeled himself against the taunts and insulting outbursts. The Dodger manager perceived blacks as subhuman. Other problems included spring training games that were cancelled because blacks were not allowed to play against whites in some Southern cities. Overt prejudicial acts created problems for the team. These incidents were taking a toll on his physical health. He could not sleep or eat, and his wife sought the advice of a doctor. She thought he was going to have a nervous breakdown.

At the end of the season he emerged as the league's top batter. When he returned there were no taunts, but a standing ovation after he stole home in one of the games. His team won the pennant as well as the International League playoffs.

On April 9, 1947 Rickey brought him up to the Brooklyn Dodgers. He had a playing slump, and the taunts were so severe it brought him nearer to a breakdown. He was receiving hate mail and threats. The abuse was so severe his teammates began to come to his rescue. He began to have closer relationships with his teammates. They won the pennant. By the end of the season he felt accepted by his teammates. They were a championship team. He had learned to exercise self-control and to answer insults, violence, and injustice with silence, and this earned the respect of his teammates. They learned that it was not the color of a person's skin that counts. The press became more positive as well. On opening day of the 1947 World Series 75,000 fans turned out, many of whom were black. He was becoming a success story and went on Southern speaking tours.

Eventually he began to retaliate when remarks were made about him. He then was thought to be an "uppity nigger," while a white player would have been judged as being spirited. He batted .297 for the season, was named National League Rookie of the Year,

and led the Dodgers to the World Series. Within two years of Robinson's first season, the majority of the teams had blacks on either their major or minor league rosters.

In the 1950 season Branch Rickey left the Dodgers, and that's when Robinson's troubles began. He had difficulty with the new management. His relationship with the press became negative. In 1955 he signed a contract with Chock Full 'O Nuts after he met the owner, Bill Black. The day he signed the contract with Black, he found he had been traded to the Giants for a pitcher and \$30,000.

After his baseball career, Jackie became involved with some civil rights organizations. In 1964 he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. This was a great honor for him. Unlike Willy Mayes, Robinson knew that baseball was not his life, only part of his life. What he did was to open doors for other blacks, but in the end he felt it did not change anything. By the late 1960s there were no blacks in baseball management. Blacks were thought not to be smart enough to serve as managers, officials, and executives in policy-making positions. Jackie Robinson is still considered to be a hero by many.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Basketball is a purely American game created by an American, Reverend James Naismith, for Americans. It was developed to be played indoors without the roughness of football. The first basketball team was formed in 1892. Basketball was revolutionized by the original Celtics shortly after World War I (Anderson, 4).

Naismith created the game for young white men; however, it has evolved into an African American game. Basketball is played by blacks in schools and on the streets. They have refined its style and made it a cultural staple. Because of the urban migration of blacks after World War II, more blacks began to play the game of basketball. It came to be known as the "city game" or street game. It has been thought to mirror the life of blacks because of its improvisations; movements are formal and casual, swift and defiant, held back then exploding, full of leaps and breaking away. Its characterized by fakes, disguises, and deception. As in the stories in black literature, the hero does not make his antagonist aware of his intentions and inner self until the decisive moment. The game is fast paced with thousands of actions. Each player has his own *style and grace* (Novak, 100-102). Each game has its own character. This game has been compared to jazz. Even when a play is called or a pattern is established, the game flows. Basketball is versatile. At the end when time-outs are called to plan strategies, it can become as formal as football. Players improvise opportunity (Novak, 109).

While Jackie Robinson broke the "color line" in baseball in 1947, basketball was a little later to integrate. It was not until 1950 when the Boston Celtics integrated professional basketball by drafting Chuck Cooper. Shortly afterwards the New York Knicks acquired Nate "Sweetwater" Clifton from the Harlem Globetrotters. Prior to

1950, African Americans were not welcome in professional basketball (Barden, 16-17). During the 1950s and 1960s Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics and Wilt Chamberlain of the Philadelphia Warriors were renowned players.

Like the other athletes I have studied, Jabbar is a very complex personality; he is not just an athlete, but a man of many faces. As he reveals in his autobiography, *Giant Steps*, he is a product of the 1960s when segregation and desegregation were the focus in our society. Growing up during that period seems to have had a profound effect on Jabbar. He was an only child and a loner. Although he lived a somewhat insulated life in Harlem until the riots, he was aware of racial tensions in other parts of the country.

He began playing basketball during elementary school with his friends in his neighborhood. He was very awkward until fourth grade when he discovered his famous hook shot by accident. At that time it was not perfect but it felt right to him. He became a much better player in high school. He was picked as a preseason All-American when he was in the tenth grade and began to play in Madison Square Garden. That is when his popularity in basketball began to blossom. He noticed that he was always expected to win. Then, the fun of the game ceased and the pressure began. He was sheltered from the press by his coach.

Jabbar had a good relationship with his high school coach until the coach made a racially motivated remark when the team was losing. Jabbar never forgot that statement and did not fully trust him afterwards.

The Harlem riots took place the summer he was working in a community project. He was returning home from a day at the beach and emerged from the subway amid the riots. During that summer his experiences led to a heightened social awareness of the position of blacks in American society. It was also during this time that he met Wilt Chamberlain who had a club in Harlem. He had been a distant admirer, but became a close friend.

By the time he finished high school he had many offers to play college basketball. He was academically astute and was perceived by college coaches to be not only an asset to the team, but a successful student. He chose UCLA because of his impression of the coach and the aesthetic beauty of the campus itself. The fact that it had a winning team was also important to him. They had just won the national championship for the second year in a row. His career at UCLA was successful, but his relationship with the press was strained because of their impression that he was aloof and lacked interest in the game. The reality was that his expression was a combination of pride in his exceptional athletic skill and anger.

It was while he was attending UCLA that he began to study different religions. He made a break with his parents and Catholicism. As a result of his exhaustive study, he abandoned the Catholic Church for Islam. This would cause him to make some profound changes in his life and lifestyle.

In 1969 he began considering professional teams because he knew that was the next stop for him. He sought the advice of his father and his friend Sam Gilbert. His skills warranted him serious consideration by the American Basketball Association, which sent doctors to check out his physical and mental condition and to determine his stamina. He was more interested in the American Basketball Association even though the National Basketball Association had more tradition. He was not stirred by any tradition in this country at that time. However, the National Basketball Association made him a very good five-year offer and for the first time he felt he was rich. The American Basketball Association's offer was significantly lower. As a result of these negotiations he found that professional basketball was a business. After he accepted the NBA's offer, the ABA wanted to increase theirs. He was offended to have been taken lightly. He had given his word to the NBA and his values of respect, conviction, and fairness would not allow him to change his word. His religion, Islam, taught him to detest hypocrisy. He went where he did not want to go because of his sense of honor and fairness.

As a Buck, he had the opportunity to play against his friend, Wilt Chamberlain. Chamberlain had dominated basketball. It was his identity; therefore, he guarded his place in pro basketball fearlessly. He fought for it, and it was off limits to anyone. The contests between Jabbar and Chamberlain were not only battles of strength, skill, and speed, but identities. Jabbar created a special shot for Chamberlain. They did remain friends until Chamberlain voted for Nixon and proclaimed black women were inferior and lacked sophistication. While Jabbar was identifying with his blackness, Wilt was distancing himself from his culture.

After he became a Muslim he became more estranged from his parents. He was devoted to Islam and visited several Islamic countries as well as studied Islam at Harvard during the summers.

Even though he did not suffer the same kind of racial discrimination as some did, he was a victim in many ways. Fans yelled degrading statements at him. He began to understand that basketball was a white man's game that had been refined into a black man's game. Because owners and management were white, there were certain inequities black players had to endure. He was fined and suspended for incidents, but his white counterpart was not. He understood that basketball was a business and most ticket buyers were white. Management had to keep them happy. Racism and envy only encouraged him to be a better player. His religion helped him to cope with racism. It taught him not to be a racist. The owners need white players to keep white fans interested. All team owners are white, as are most general managers and coaches. When a majority of the players are black, it creates a marketing problem. The income the sport needs to survive is held by whites. Basketball is a black man's game, with white owners, being sold to whites.

Athletes are supposed to be American's heroes without having volunteered to do so. Children look up to athletes as role models. Jabbar writes that this is nonsense. Athletes are more visible but not more valuable than any other professional. Athletes should only be esteemed for what they do best, play the game. Each person should have his own beliefs and values, and not look to athletes as models of morality. However, there is pressure on athletes to maintain an image of morality and not upset the economic structure of the business.

Jabbar was surprised when he received large amounts of positive mail from his fans. He was surprised that he was appreciated for his efforts. In later years, he made concerted efforts to become more outgoing and more receptive to the media. The media became more civil toward him. Part of his change is attributed to more contemporary journalists who are younger and more sensitive to racial awareness. His life changed as a result of the changes he made in his personality. He has been reunited with his parents.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the challenges they faced, these men have gone on to achieve a measure of greatness in their sport.

Jim Brown is considered by many to be the greatest running back in NFL history. He was the leading rusher in eight of nine NFL seasons. He was named to the All-NFL team eight times. He was the NFL's Most Valuable Player twice, NFL Rookie of the Year in 1957, and played in nine straight Pro Bowl games. In his career he totaled 12,312 yards rushing, 262 receptions, and 15,459 combined yards. He scored 756 points in his career. He holds the record for the most combined net yards, most career yards rushing, the most points in one season (126), the most consecutive games scoring a touchdown (10), and the most 1,000 yard seasons (7). He was the second youngest player inducted into the Football Hall of Fame at age thirty-five. In addition, he has done a great deal of community work with youths in the Los Angeles area.

With Jackie Robinson as catalyst, the Dodgers won six pennants in ten seasons. He stole home 19 times. He was named National League Most Valuable Player in 1949, leading the league in hitting (.342) and steals (37), while knocking in 124 runs.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was Sporting News Player of the Year (1967, 1969), three time First Team All-American, National Player of the Year twice, and three time NCAA Tournament Outstanding Player. He won three national championships and was the recipient of the Naismith Award. He also led UCLA to an 88-2 record. He graduated as the sixth highest scorer in major college history (2,325 points, 26.44 points per game). He was the leading scorer in UCLA history, led the NCAA with a .667 goal percentage in 1969. He holds NBA career records for the most minutes (57,446), most points (38,387), and most field goals. He was the first player in NBA history to play 20 seasons. He led the NBA in scoring, rebounding, and blocked shots. He was NBA Most Valuable Player

six times, NBA Rookie of the Year in 1970, and NBA Finals MVP two times. He has also coached the NBA Los Angeles Clippers (2000) and NBA Indiana Pacers Training Season (2000). He has been named head coach of the USBL Oklahoma Storm.

These athletes are worth studying because their lives reveal their interest in issues larger than their statistics and records. Their autobiographies are also exemplums because they achieved success only after overcoming great obstacles. Some athletes may be heroes; others are only celebrities.

LESSON PLAN 1: Function of Sports

Objective

Compare/contrast the function of sports historically and today.

Questions:

1. What was the function of sports historically?
2. What is the function of contemporary sports?
3. What were the rituals of ancient sports?
4. What are the rituals of contemporary sports?
5. How are contemporary sports like ancient sports?
6. How are contemporary sports different from ancient sports?

Method:

1. Break students into cooperative groups and have them research the history of sports.
2. Assign each group the task of analyzing sports in other cultures and compare the function of sports in our culture.
3. Complete a graphic organizer of the similarities and differences of sports then and now.

Materials

Reference books, Internet, paper, pencils, and access to the school library.

Product

Each group must complete a Venn diagram of similarities and differences.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be the product itself.

LESSON PLAN 2: Hero versus Celebrity

Objective

Compare/contrast the hero and celebrity.

Questions

1. What are the characteristics/motives of a hero?
2. What are the characteristics/motives of a celebrity?
3. How is the hero different from the celebrity?
4. How is the hero like the celebrity?
5. Is a pioneer a hero? Why? Why not?

Method

1. Break students in to small cooperative groups and have them research hero and celebrity.
2. Assign each group the task of determining the characteristics of both the hero and their celebrity as a result of research findings.
3. Create a rubric to determine the hero, and one to determine a celebrity.

Materials

Access to the school library, the Internet, paper, and pencil.

Product

Rubrics for a hero, and one for the celebrity.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be the accuracy of the rubrics with written documentation

LESSON PLAN 3: Jackie Robinson

This lesson might take several days to complete.

Objective

To analyze Jackie Robinson's autobiography to determine whether he is a hero or a celebrity.

Questions

1. How do you break into history?
2. Can you explain the role of a pioneer?
3. What is a hero?
4. What is a celebrity?
5. What is segregation?
6. What is Jackie Robinson's greatest accomplishment?
7. How did the Brooklyn Dodgers find Jackie? Why did Branch Rickey select him?

Method

1. Form a Literary Circle with the whole class. Assign and explain roles:
 - Discussion Director (formulate a list of questions after reading)
 - Illustrator (draws a picture of something of interest to be discussed)
 - Summarizer (prepares a brief summary of what has been read)

- Literary Luminary (select a few special sections of the text the group might like to hear read aloud)
- Vocabulary Enricher (look for important words)
- Every student should assume a role at least once.
2. Break into cooperative groups to continue literary circle process.
 3. After reading and discussion, use rubric to determine whether Robinson is a celebrity or a hero.

Materials

Copies of chapters 1-7 of Jackie Robinson's autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*, paper, pencil, rubrics for hero and celebrity (rubrics were completed in a prior lesson).

Product

Checklist indicating whether Robinson is hero or celebrity. Written summary of supportive documentation.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be accuracy of documentation.

LESSON PLAN 4: Jazz and Basketball

Objective

Compare the movements of the game of basketball to those of jazz.

Questions

1. What is jazz?
2. What does improvisation mean?
3. What is basketball?
4. What does tempo mean?

Method

1. Whole group: Watch a clip of a professional basketball game, and discuss the movements of the players.
2. Listen to a jazz tune, and discuss the tempo.
3. Watch the clip of the game while listening to the jazz tune.
4. Complete a graph of the movements of the game and the tune.
5. Compare and discuss.

Materials

Clip of a professional basketball game, a jazz tune, graph paper, colored pencils, dictionaries.

Product

A graph of the comparison of movements of both game and jazz tune.

Evaluation

Students will be evaluated on their discussion of the similarities of the movements.

LESSON PLAN 5: Jim Brown

This lesson might take several days.

Objective

To interpret Jim Brown's autobiography, and create a timeline of his football career.

Questions

1. When did Jim Brown begin playing football?
2. What problems did he encounter at Syracuse University?
3. How were those problems resolved? Were they resolved?
4. What were his feelings about his college experience?
5. What motivated him to pursue a football career?
6. When did he begin playing for the Cleveland Browns?
7. What were some of the highlights of his career?
8. How was he perceived by officials?
9. When did he stop playing professional football?
10. Was he only interested in football? Why? Why not?

Methods

1. Whole group: Read chapters 1-10 of Jim Brown's autobiography and discuss.
2. Break class into small cooperative groups to create a timeline of the career.

Materials

Copies of chapters 1-10 of Jim Brown's autobiography, *Out of Bounds*, paper.

Product

A diagrammed timeline with written documentation.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be the product itself with accurate documentation.

LESSON PLAN 6: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

This lesson will take several class periods.

Objective

Draw inferences on Jabbar's autobiography.

Questions

1. What influence does what is happening in society have on the events in Jabbar's life?
2. Does the time in which he lived predispose him to act/react the way he does?

3. Is Jabbar representative of the historical period in which he lived?
4. What is distinctive about the historical period and the situations described in the autobiography?

Methods

1. Whole group: Read chapters 1-3 in class.
2. Use the herringbone to write a brief summary of each chapter.
3. Copy the book and make it available to each class member to read in and outside of class.
4. Break students into cooperative groups to continue to read, discuss, and summarize.

Product

Create an emotional analysis chart of Jabbar's feelings—chart how they change when different events occur in his life, and when his personality changes.

Materials

Copies of Jabbar's autobiography, graph paper, paper, pencils.

Evaluation

Evaluation will be the product itself and its written documentation.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Teacher Resources

- Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem. *Giant Steps*. New York: Bantam Books, 1983.
The autobiography of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, which includes the changes in his life before and during his professional basketball career.
- Anderson, Dave. *The Story of Basketball*. New York: Morrow Books, 1988.
A chronicle of outstanding basketball players and unforgettable moments in each one's career.
- Barden, Renardo. *All-Time Greats*. Florida: The Rourke Corporation, 1992.
An extensive review of past and present basketball players who were considered some of the greatest in the game.
- Boorstin, Daniel. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Atheneum, 1975.
Boorstin makes a clear distinction between the celebrity and the hero.
- Brown, Jim. *Out of Bounds*. New York: Zebra Books, 1989.
An autobiography of Jim Brown. He discusses not only his professional football career with the Cleveland Browns, but his convictions as an African American male.
- Guttman, Allen. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
A comprehensive history of sports from their onset as a cultic religious ritual to contemporary sports. He discusses the similarities of sports today and those of ancient times.
- Hollander, Zander. *The Basketball Book*. New York: Random House, 1990.
An encyclopedia of basketball and its stars from A-Z.
- McKissack, Patricia. *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1994.
A history of the Negro Baseball Leagues and what the players' lives were like as they traveled and played baseball.
- <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/negroleague/.html> (2000)
- Morrison, Michael. *Negro League Baseball, Gone But Not Forgotten*.
- Novak, Michael. *The Joy of Sports*. New York: Basic Books, 1970.
The author discusses sports—their origins, evolution, and culture implications.

Olney, James. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

A collection of essays on the theory and literary criticism of autobiographies.

Tuttle, Dennis. *The Composite Guide to Basketball*. Philadelphia, Penn.: Chelsea House Publishers, 1997.

A discussion of legends of baseball and a chronology of great players.

———. *A Composite Guide to Football*. Philadelphia, Penn.: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.

A discussion of past and present football stars.

Student Resources

Some of the teacher sources will be available for student use in addition to the following list.

Anderson, Dave. *The Story of Football*. New York: William Morrow, 1997.

Lace, William W. *The Houston Rockets Basketball Team*. Springfield, N.J.: Enlow Publishers, 1997.

Silverman, Brian. *Going, Going, Gone: The History, Lore, and Mystique of the Home Run*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000.

Stewart, Mark. *Football: A history of the Gridiron Game*. New York: Franklin Watts Publishing, 1998.