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Basketball's Forgotten Experiment: Don Barksdale and the Legacy of the United States Olympic Basketball Team

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In the spring of 1947, more than eighty years after the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution ended slavery in the United States, Jackie Robinson put on the uniform of the Brooklyn Dodgers and crossed a long-established colour barrier that segregated the major leagues of the American national pastime. Robinson's Dodger debut, as Jules Tygiel, the leading historian of this crucial episode in American race relations has insightfully argued, set in motion 'baseball's great experiment'. As the United States emerged from the Second World War as the globe's leading super power, Robinson's appearance on major league diamonds focused the nation on the long struggle for racial justice and inclusion, putting to the test in dramatic fashion the proposition that black and white Americans could succeed in integrated endeavours. [1]

In the spring of 1948 Don Barksdale put on the uniform of the US national basketball team and crossed several colour lines. As a member of the Olympic squad Barksdale became not only the first African American to compete for the US team in international basketball but also the first African-American to play in an integrated game in one of basketball's segregated heartland shrines—in Lexington, Kentucky, home of the famous University of Kentucky Wildcats. Basketball's 'great experiment', inaugurated just one year after Robinson sparked the more famous experiment in baseball, reveals another chapter in the complex history of the integration of American sport. Barksdale's struggles, however, unlike Robinson's, have been almost entirely forgotten by American chroniclers of sport and society. [2] His story reveals many of the same illuminating components as Robinson's journey, but has incomprehensibly been lost in the nation's collective memory and among authors of sport history. Jackie Robinson became a

household name but Don Barksdale did not – even though both athletes overcame important racial barriers.

Tygiel and other historians have made a compelling case that beginning in the late 1940s, American playing fields not only illuminated the nation's continuing racial struggles but also transformed them in crucial ways. Chronicles of baseball's 'great experiment' have portrayed Robinson's shattering of the national pastime's colour line as the first step in changing the way a majority of Americans viewed racial boundaries. Robinson's struggles in baseball paved new paths for people of all races to compete in every social institution. Robinson will forever be remembered for his courage and talent in integrating a white-dominated territory. [3] Just a year after Robinson joined the Dodgers, American basketball courts served as the locus for another 'great experiment' as Don Barksdale became the first African American to play for the US national team.

Following the 1946-47 collegiate basketball season in which he led the Pacific Coast League (now Pac-10) in scoring and was the first African-American player ever named a consensus All-American, UCLA centre Don Barksdale found himself blacklisted from professional basketball because of his race. He discovered an opportunity in the 'amateur' leagues that flourished in the post-World War II era, starting at the highest level of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) club circuit against competition at least as good as the professional ranks during that epoch. [4] During the 1947-48 AAU season, Barksdale became such a force on the hardwood that he was selected as a member of the 1948 United States Olympic basketball team – the first African-American player to earn that honour. [5] Barksdale joined white players from Kentucky, Oklahoma, New York, Indiana, and Texas to round out the American Olympic

team. Barksdale played on the Olympic squad for two coaches who led powerful programs in the segregated South. Omar ‘Bud’ Browning, coach of the Phillips 66 Oilers (a team referred to as both the Oilers and the 66ers), an AAU powerhouse from Bartlesville, Oklahoma, directed the squad. Adolph Rupp, the legendary and controversial coach from the University of Kentucky, served as Browning’s assistant. [6] Rupp stands third on the list of all-time wins in NCAA basketball and second in number of championships won. In contemporary American culture, however, Rupp’s career has carried the stigma of his perceived racism. [7]

Don Barksdale’s inclusion on the 1948 American Olympic basketball team illuminates the ambiguities surrounding American views on race and sport in this era, adding new layers of complexity to the history of attempts to integrate American sport and American society. Barksdale’s story shares commonalities with other racial pioneers in sport, but it also has unique elements that make it both fascinating and an important part of the later stages of the Jim Crow Era. The relative ease with which this team took home the gold medal belies the racial issues they faced. [8]

Like Jackie Robinson in baseball, Barksdale had to endure training camps in the segregated South where he did not enjoy the same rights and privileges as his white teammates. Also, like Robinson, Barksdale integrated a team comprised of many white Southerners. Indeed, the percentage of white teammates and coaches with whom Barksdale had to interact on the Olympic team was ever greater than the proportion Robinson faced on the Dodgers. [9] In fact, Olympic assistant coach Rupp – who is often vilified as an outright racist – had never coached a black player at the University of Kentucky before the 1948 Games and would not coach one again until the conclusion of

his legendary career three decades later. [10] If Jackie Robinson carried out what the historian Jules Tygiel deemed ‘baseball’s great experiment’ by playing among outright racists as well as those who more moderately opined that black and white athletes could not successfully compete together, then Barksdale’s story is basketball’s version of the ‘great experiment’.

In the spring of 1948, as basketball’s version of the integration drama began, Barksdale’s talents came to the attention of the United States Olympic Basketball Committee (USOBC). This thirteen-member committee staged an eight-team tournament in New York City in March of 1948 to establish the players and coaches who would represent the ‘red, white and blue’ in the upcoming Olympic Games. Kentucky, Baylor, Louisville and New York University qualified for the collegiate half of the bracket by virtue of their late season successes in various ‘national’ tournaments. [11] Louisville, notably, received a berth in the trials from their success in the National Association of Intercollegiate Basketball (NAIB) post-season tournament – a segregated championship that excluded black players. Indeed, just months before the Olympic trials Harry Henschel, a Jewish USOBC member, protested the racial injustices at the NAIB. In response, a NAIB committee agreed to discuss integration before its mid-March, 1948 tournament. In support of Henschel’s challenge to segregation, many schools announced they would not participate unless NAIB tournament organisers lifted the ban against the black players. [129]

The other side of the Olympic trials bracket came from the post-collegiate AAU ranks. The Phillips 66 Oilers, the Denver Nuggets, Brooklyn’s Prospect Park YMCA, and Don Barksdale’s Oakland Bittners comprised the field. [13] All but Brooklyn of

these latter four belonged to the AAU's American Basketball League, the nation's premier conglomeration of non-professional teams. In 1947-48, the 66ers won their sixth straight AAU championship. Playing in Oakland, Barksdale broke down multiple racial barriers that season and finished as the league's leading scorer. All eight teams in the trials met in Madison Square Garden beginning on March 28, 1948, for a three-round, single-elimination tournament to determine the make-up of the London-bound American team. [14]

The intense action throughout the tournament peaked with the Kentucky Wildcats and Phillips Oilers squaring off in the finals in what hyperbolically-inclined sportswriters proclaimed the 'greatest game of all time'. At the end of the well-fought match, Kentucky fell to the Phillips squad 53-49. [15] Multiple journalists concurred that the Oilers won only because of their size and experience advantages over the collegiate cagers. Nonetheless, the game lived up to the ballyhoo. By USOBC rules, the Kentucky and Phillips starting fives won roster spots to represent 'Uncle Sam' in the London games. [16] The committee also dictated that four additional players would be added as 'at-large' members of the team. Barksdale made a strong statement for his presence on the national team by scoring 14 points in the Bittners' first round loss to the Denver Nuggets at the trials. The *New York Times* proclaimed that Barksdale 'won the fancy of the fans with his agile rebounding and shotmaking'. [17] Since his team lost in the first round, Barksdale had to sit and watch the semi-final and final round games, hoping his first round performance garnered him enough recognition for an at-large bid on the US Olympic roster.

The *Lexington Herald*, the University of Kentucky's hometown newspaper, reported that the Wildcats recommended two collegians and that the 66ers suggested Barksdale and one other at-large player from their half of the bracket to the committee as at-large candidates. Coach Browning of the 66ers agreed with his players' proposals, stating that Barksdale 'is the best basketball player in the country outside of Bob Kurland [Phillips' centre], so I don't know how we can turn him down'. [18] While it is unclear how persuasive the player balloting was meant to be, it held little weight in the end. The USOBC chose three white players that neither the Wildcats nor 66ers had recommended to round out the squad. As luck would have it, Robert 'Jackie' Robinson of Baylor University was one of those three. The white Jackie Robinson was less acclaimed than his baseball-playing African-American namesake but was a solid guard. The only addition to the roster recommended by the players to make the team was Don Barksdale. The California star thus became the first African American to play basketball for the US national team in international competition. [19]

Commenting diplomatically on a difficult player selection process, Secretary Oswald Tower of the USOBC declared that 'the work of the committee was characterised by harmony and teamwork, and a desire for the selection of the best possible team to represent the United States'. Tower insisted that the 'leadership was efficient, tactful, and in every way satisfactory'. [20] Fred Maggiora, a fellow committee member and city councilman from Oakland where Barksdale grew up and starred after college, disagreed with Tower's rosy remarks about the selection process. Eight years after the 1948 Olympics, Maggiora confessed to Barksdale that he had to fight and beg during closed-door meetings throughout the entire selection proceedings to secure a roster spot for the

Oakland star. Maggiora explained that certain members of the committee simply did not want a black man on the American squad. Maggiora's confession reveals that Barksdale very nearly lost his role as a racial trail-blazer to a contentious selection committee. [21]

Along with Maggiora, a politician and AAU committee delegate from Oakland, and Harry Henschel, a New York lawyer, the USOBC included seven college coaches, two basketball officials, one lawyer, and Asa Bushnell, an AAU and United States Olympic Committee (USOC) executive. As USOC secretary, Bushnell was aware of the intentions of the USOC to promote the image of an egalitarian Olympic team as stated in the 1948 USOC report that would prove to the world (especially non-capitalist nations) that the US saw all of its athletes as equal. The USOC certainly desired to showcase African-American athletes on the US Olympic team as part of general US efforts to counteract Soviet charges during the Cold War of the US as a racist society. While not all Americans felt that way, Bushnell's desire to have a diverse squad may have filtered into the USOBC's selection process. [22]

Regardless of Bushnell's interest in using African-American athletes as advertisements for egalitarianism in the USOC's public relations campaigns, four of the thirteen members of the USOBC lived south of the Mason-Dixon Line. One of the northerners, Indiana University basketball coach Branch McCracken, later earned a reputation as a racist among African-American players by virtually turning future NBA legends Wilt Chamberlain of Philadelphia and Oscar Robertson of Indianapolis away from his program. [23] The Californian Maggiora insinuated that while the committee contentiously debated Barksdale's possible inclusion on the Olympic team, the team's

new head coach, Bud Browning, an Oklahoman, tipped the scales in favour of Barksdale with his positive comment about the Oakland star's abilities. [24]

On April 1, 1948, the selection committee announced its team to the nation as the players left New York City. The Kentucky team returned from the Olympic trials to a heroes' welcome in Lexington. Although they did not win the Olympic trials, their two-week excursion from campus included their first ever NCAA championship and a second place finish at the trials. More than 5,000 fans greeted their beloved Wildcats at the Lexington train station with a ceremony upon their return from New York. [25] This basketball-crazy community produced misleading local newspaper headlines declaring Kentucky as 'the greatest team in the nation' while ignoring the Phillips Oilers' triumph over the Wildcats. Reporters twisted the stories of the Olympic trial finals to include excuses such as player injuries, poor officiating, and lack of experience for Kentucky's loss. The Wildcat faithful admitted defeat only begrudgingly. [26]

Coach Rupp, nicknamed 'The Baron', added to the excuses as he 'told writers that he felt his Kentucky boys could whip the Phillips outfit if they [could] show an improvement in ballhandling and "get a few breaks"'. [27] Rupp held great power in the state of Kentucky. Writers idolised him to the point that they clung to his every word. Most of the local press yielded to him, declaring that despite Browning being named head coach and Rupp the assistant, 'the two coaches probably will operate their respective units' as co-equals. [28]

This remark may have been presumptuous, but the American Olympic squad did split into two camps for training following the trials. Rupp's Kentucky quintet took on at-large players Ray Lumpp of New York University and Vince Boryla of the Denver

Nuggets and began training in Lexington for a series of exhibition games between the two camps. Barksdale and Baylor's Jackie Robinson joined the 66ers to train in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. [29] Although the USOBC offered little public comment on how the at-large players were split, it is probable that authorities thought Barksdale would be in less peril in Oklahoma since he had played against the 66ers in the segregated state before. [30]

The Sooner state had already allowed Barksdale to play against the Oilers in Bartlesville earlier that season, showing a hint of progress toward integration, though later that summer the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled to prohibit black students from attending law school at the state's flagship public institution – a move demonstrating continued adherence to the antiquated ideals of Jim Crow and a decision that the US Supreme Court eventually overturned in a landmark federal case. [31] Although the state of Oklahoma's original 1907 constitution did not include strict segregation policies, the separate but equal clause became law when the state's first legislature passed Senate Bill Number One. In subsequent sessions, legislators segregated virtually every sector of public life, from school rooms to public pay telephones. From 1907 to 1930, more than a dozen African Americans in Oklahoma lost their lives at the hands of white terrorist mobs. By the time Barksdale came to play in Bartlesville, the threat of lynching had lessened dramatically but segregation largely continued to rule the day. [32]

While Barksdale practiced with his white teammates in Bartlesville, the US Supreme Court's decision in the 1948 separate but equal case in Oklahoma higher education, *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* – a precedent-setting ruling that helped pave the way for *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 – made

headlines across the nation. [33] The effects of the case rippled down to other segregated states, including a similar case in which the University of Kentucky denied a black high school teacher enrolment in its graduate school. At the same time, 1948 was also the year that President Harry Truman signed an executive order ending racial segregation in the United States Armed Forces. Clearly, the United States remained divided by the lingering effects of slavery and racism, lurching between ambiguous and conflicting tensions on racial issues at the national and state levels. [34]

Racial issues in the sporting landscape showed similar confusion. The immediate post-war period represented a crucial time in the integration of American sport and society. The National Football League (NFL) dropped its colour line in 1946. Pennsylvania State University integrated college football's Cotton Bowl in 1948. The National Basketball Association (NBA), conceived in 1946, broke the colour barrier during the 1950-51 season. [35] The Missouri Valley Conference, in which two of Barksdale's Olympic teammates played, integrated in 1947, while the Big Eight athletic conference (now the Big Twelve) which included Oklahoma and Oklahoma State dropped its segregation policies in 1949. [36]

Deeper in the South, where the University of Kentucky competed, racial progress proceeded at a far slower pace. Perry Wallace, a man born one month after Barksdale's trailblazing integration of team sports in Oklahoma, finally broke the Southeastern Conference's (SEC) longstanding colour line in basketball as he suited up for Vanderbilt in 1966. [37] Barksdale's playing with and against Kentucky in 1948 came long before integration reached their home conference.

Barksdale's integration of the American Olympic basketball team occurred just a year after the most significant colour line in American sport, and in some respects in the larger American society, fell. Jackie Robinson played a spectacular rookie season in 1947 at first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers. [38] Ironically, a year later, Barksdale's fate as the first black man on an American Olympic basketball team in basketball's great but forgotten experiment found him paired with a white teammate also named Jackie Robinson. [39]

Barksdale had known the more famous Jackie Robinson for nearly a decade when he teamed up with his white namesake. Barksdale met the African-American baseball pioneer in 1939 when Robinson, then a UCLA Bruin and teammate of future NFL racial pioneers Kenny Washington and Woody Strode, visited Barksdale's Oakland-area high school on the way to a football game at Berkeley. Robinson so inspired the young Barksdale that the latter vowed then and there to become a Bruin if ever he had the chance. Eight years later, after Barksdale's All-American senior season at UCLA ended with no contract offers from professional teams because of the unwritten racial segregation policies, baseball's Robinson was there again with advice. 'He told me I might have to go through the same thing (he did)', Barksdale reminisced, admitting that 'it was Jackie who convinced me I could take whatever they had to dish out. I could take it so long as I could play'. The advice from the fiery and intense Robinson proved applicable to the much less aggressive but no less determined Barksdale. [40]

During Barksdale's All-American senior season at UCLA, Robinson spent the winter playing professional basketball for the Los Angeles Red Devils instead of playing winter league baseball in Mexico or the Caribbean with other major league prospects.

Indeed, the parallels between the lives of these two ex-Bruin athletes ran deeper than their matriculation at UCLA, their personal relationship, and their mutual love of basketball. Both had parents from the Deep South who moved their families to California. Both started at junior colleges before becoming Bruins. Both spent time in the armed forces playing sports for integrated military teams while at the same time being banned from the military's segregated teams—in paradoxical fashion the US armed forces field both integrated and segregated teams during the Second World War. Both excelled in basketball and track and field at UCLA. Both played for Bruin basketball coach Wilbur Johns. Robinson played for Johns during the coach's first two seasons at the helm of the Bruin cagers. Despite Robinson leading the Pacific Coast Conference in scoring for two straight years, he failed to make an all-league team because of what he and others perceived as his coach's prejudice. Historian Jules Tygiel upholds this claim, citing an undated clipping in a Robinson family scrapbook with the quotation, 'It's purely the case of a coach refusing to recognise a player's ability purely out of prejudice'. [41]

Barksdale, in contrast, played in Johns' final two seasons as coach and became the nation's first black consensus All-American basketball player. Barksdale considered Johns one of the friendliest people he ever met. [42] This seeming contradiction leaves the legacy of Johns, the great John Wooden's predecessor as UCLA's basketball coach, in regards to race relations quite ambiguous but, perhaps, fairly typical of many white American leaders of his era. Johns apparently opposed post-season accolades for Jackie Robinson before the war but then produced the country's first black all-American in Barksdale. Johns also coached another NBA racial pioneer in Barksdale's college teammate, Dave Minor, after the war. [43]

Despite their sensational success in collegiate athletics, both Barksdale and Robinson finished their senior basketball seasons with no professional contract offers from the segregated white leagues. Robinson, several years older than Barksdale, joined the military during the Second World War and then played Negro League baseball before signing with Branch Rickey and the Brooklyn Dodger organisation. Barksdale also joined the military during the war but in the middle of his collegiate career. He played the last half of the 1942-43 season with UCLA after transferring from Marin (California) Community College, and then enlisted for two years of service. Initially stationed in Virginia where he could not play in the top military basketball leagues because of his race, Barksdale sought a change. He successfully petitioned Thurgood Marshall, Chief Counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and pioneer in the crusade to abolish legalized segregation who would later become the nation's first black Supreme Court justice, for a transfer to a base where he could hone his basketball skills. In 1945 Barksdale re-enrolled at UCLA for his final two seasons. Upon graduation he went straight to AAU basketball's highly competitive and nominally-amateur league to showcase his basketball abilities. [44]

In 1948, Jackie Robinson squelched any lingering doubts about his baseball abilities after his initial season by continuing to terrorize National League pitchers on the heels of his 1947 Rookie of the Year and colour barrier-busting season. In 1948, Oakland newspapers reported that Barksdale had busted barriers as well when he became the first African-American to play in an integrated team sport in Oklahoma while terrorizing opponents in his rookie season in the AAU's top division as the league's scoring champ. Although the AAU had allowed black players since the 1930s, the

Oakland press cheered that ‘Big Don’ Barksdale became the first ‘Negro’ to play against whites in a team sport in Oklahoma when his Bittners visited the Phillips squad on January 8, 1948. A Denver newspaper corroborated Barksdale’s pioneering effort. Curiously, no Oklahoma newspaper offered any comment on Barksdale’s breaking of one of the state’s colour lines. [45] The *Bartlesville Morning Examiner* did note that a week prior to Barksdale’s games in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma University student senate recommended that ‘Negroes’ on opposing sports teams be allowed to play when their teams visit Norman, Oklahoma. [46] While this evidence does not incontrovertibly make the case that Barksdale pioneered the integration of team sports in Oklahoma, it certainly adds strength to the claims made by the Oakland and Denver newspapers.

African-American athletes had participated in integrated athletics in the Sooner State at least since they trekked through Oklahoma in 1928 during the 3,400-mile, Los Angeles to New York ‘Bunion Derby’. The handful of African-American runners in the ‘Bunion Derby’ ran into considerable opposition from the Ku Klux Klan during their sprint through the Sooner State. [47] With the exception of the transcontinental marathoners, Barksdale’s Oklahoma debut appeared to set a racial precedent. Fans who attended the game responded enthusiastically to this advance in integration. Local papers covering the 8 January 1948 Oilers-Bittners game gushingly complimented the Bartlesville fans for the quality and quantity of their support for Barksdale’s feats on the court. After the first game, an upset by the visiting Bittners, the teams played each other the following three nights as well, with the Oilers winning easily in all three. Claims of mistreatment of Barksdale in the following games – at the hands of the referees rather than the fans – emerged from the Oakland side. Bittners coach Laddie Gale complained

after the opening night victory that ‘Big Don’ suffered from suspicious calls and non-calls during the rest of the Oklahoma series. [48]

Barksdale took the supposed mistreatment in stride, accustomed to facing bigotry both on and off the court. A few months later Barksdale returned to Bartlesville as part of the United States Olympic basketball team. His return continued his career as a racial pioneer in Oklahoma culture, putting him in a position of great peril that included the possibility of great reward. Barksdale had other choices in his quest for Olympic gold. With his wiry, muscular frame and his well-honed athleticism, Barksdale could have joined the long-integrated and highly successful American track and field team instead of the cage squad. Indeed, he was a former intercollegiate national champion in the triple jump, and widely considered a legitimate Olympic medal threat in that event. [49]

Barksdale, however, chose to integrate new territory by becoming the first African American on the US Olympic basketball squad. His decision set him apart from other African-American athletes but it plunged him into a difficult racial climate.

‘Big Don’ chose basketball, thinking that he would garner more fame as a racial trailblazer on the hardwood than a medal hopeful on the integrated cinder track. [50] Training for the Olympics in basketball in a segregated state, Barksdale began to see firsthand some of what baseball’s Jackie Robinson told him about withstanding injustices to be able to play. The Oiler camp spent a few weeks together practicing before their series of exhibition games against the Kentucky faction, and so Baylor’s Jackie Robinson and Barksdale, the only players without day jobs at the Phillips Oil Company, had a great deal of free time to spend together – a white man and a black man brought together by unique circumstances in a segregated state. Strict Jim Crow policies and a large Ku Klux

Klan chapter ruled most of the first half of the twentieth century in Oklahoma but the post-World War Two era brought new glimpses of the integration. Barksdale and Baylor's Jackie Robinson lived separately but spent their days going to movies and restaurants in loosely segregated establishments, much like Brooklyn Dodger baseball teammates Pee Wee Reese and Jackie Robinson in their pre-season down time.

Displaying exemplary courage for that era, both Reese and basketball's Jackie Robinson, each of whom grew up in the Jim Crow South, chose to spend time with their black teammates and to challenge segregation policies in public venues. [51]

The white southerner from Baylor who shared a name with the major leaguer who integrated the national pastime may well have been an exception among Barksdale's Oklahoma teammates. Barksdale remembered some hostility from a few of his other teammates in the early pre-exhibition practices. 'I heard a couple of things like, "[s]eparate the men from the boys," and, just out of earshot, "if he comes by me I'll get him."' [52] Indeed, all of the Oakland star's teammates at the Oiler camp were from the South except for Lew Beck, a guard from Oregon. Of the five Oilers that Barksdale and the Texan Robinson played with, two were from Arkansas and two were native Oklahomans. [53] One of those Oklahomans, part-Chickasaw, part-Choctaw guard Jesse Renick, would soon become the first Native American to win an Olympic gold medal since Jim Thorpe in 1912. [54] Prior to the 1948 Games, Renick spent many years playing basketball in Oklahoma without apparent racial backlash – an experience probably having something to do with Renick's heritage as a member of the region's 'civilised' tribes. Renick's experiences reveal that Native Americans received a bit more

accommodating treatment than African-Americans in Oklahoma and in much of the rest of American culture. [55]

Barksdale experienced different social mores than Renick, including hostility from Oiler teammates early on in their training. ‘I caught hell’, Barksdale proclaimed of the treatment from his Oklahoma teammates after the first few practices. [56] However, neither Barksdale nor any other player in that camp mentioned any subsequent problems involving race on the team. In an interview a half-century later, his white teammate Robinson was shocked when told that Barksdale had detected resistance from some fellow teammates. Robinson insisted that physical contact was just part of the game. [57] In gauging the veracity of either Robinson’s or ‘Big Don’s’ differing memories, Barksdale did not have a history of holding grudges against teammates and therefore would be unlikely to embellish his story. Robinson might have suppressed his recall of actions that were acceptable in 1948 but were no longer tolerated in the decades thereafter.

The contradictory recollections of this particular episode raise intriguing questions that reside at the heart of social constructions of race. Individual perception and social context play critical roles in the process. Barksdale perceived racist attitudes from his white teammates but they remember no racist behaviour on the court. Was their treatment of ‘Big Don’ racist? Years later, Barksdale interpreted their rough play as racism while they perceived it as a sign of their acceptance of him on the court and a symbol of their willingness to integrate American basketball. Indeed, in contrast to the resistance baseball’s Jackie Robinson faced from some of his own teammates who tried to organise a boycott to keep Robinson off the team, Barksdale’s teammates appear far

more 'progressive' in their racial attitudes. [58] At the Olympic trials the Phillips Olympians encouraged (whether unanimously or not is unclear) the USOBC to choose Barksdale as their teammate. Therefore, if the Oilers were racist, they also accepted and even encouraged 'Big Don' to share the court with them, a step quite a few of Robinson's fellow Dodgers were unwilling to make. Such were the complexities of American race relations in 1948.

The racial motivations and actions of Barksdale's teammates in regards to their treatment of him remain unclear in the murk of historical memory. However, the racial animus of the citizens of Oklahoma toward him proved more concrete but just as complex and contradictory. The Oiler camp stayed in Tulsa's ritziest hotel for a few days before its first of three exhibition games against the Kentucky squad. The owner of the whites-only hotel was a basketball fan and allowed Barksdale to stay with his teammates on the condition that he remain with a member of his team when outside his room. One morning, Barksdale and a teammate walked down the hallway of the hotel and passed a woman who did not recognise them. The well-dressed female patron was petrified by the experience. She hurried to the front desk and promptly asked the owner if he knew that a black man was lurking in his building. Knowing she meant Barksdale, and knowing that Barksdale's skin was a lighter shade, the quick-witted owner replied that the woman had been mistaken. He assured her that she had seen not a black man but a Pakistani man. 'Oh', the woman replied, 'that's fine'. [59]

The Tulsa hotelier permitting Barksdale into his establishment reveals the peculiar elasticity of Oklahoma's colour line in the late 1940s. In some other motels, segregated boundaries were clearer. Barksdale spent most of his time in Oklahoma forced to reside

away from his teammates. When the team stayed in Oklahoma City the white players stayed in one of the town's most luxurious hotels while Barksdale stayed nearby in the home of a black couple. Barksdale was denied rubdowns by the team's trainer because he was not allowed to use the elevator to get up to the trainer's top floor hotel room. [60] Major League Baseball's concurrent great experiment ran into similar lodging issues especially in the Jim Crow border cities of St. Louis and Cincinnati, but also in Philadelphia. Baseball's first two black players, the Dodgers' Robinson and the Cleveland Indians' Larry Doby, had very dark complexions, and were unable to hide their ethnicity. They found themselves excluded from the hotels in which their white teammates stayed on road trips to the aforementioned cities. However, some other minority players who followed Robinson and Doby received more latitude from hotel managers since they shared Barksdale's lighter skin tone. As in Barksdale's case, lighter skin elicited much more sympathetic responses from racist whites. [61]

While Barksdale faced racism daily, there is no record of the Native American Renick receiving any of the same hostilities. The differences between Renick and Barksdale indicate that Oklahomans viewed Native Americans (and apparently Pakistanis) differently than they did African-Americans. 'Let's just say that the U.S., at that time, was going through a kind of funny situation as far as blacks were concerned', recalled Barksdale in a masterful understatement many years later about the era in which segregation began to erode. [62]

The racial interpretations of Barksdale in the white and black presses reveal additional layers of complexity to basketball's 'great experiment'. White newspapers rarely mentioned the skin colour or heritage of Renick but frequently labelled Barksdale

as ‘a Negro star’, complimenting him with the stereotypical physical adjectives applied during that era to black players such as agile, athletic, and quick-jumping. His skin tone was identified as sepia and tan, while the varied white shades of his teammates went without description. Certainly the 6’6”, 200-pound Barksdale embodied all of the athletic traits the media ascribed to him, but those were not his only assets. [63] White and black newspapers alike focused on his even-tempered charm off the court and his athleticism on the court but usually neglected to mention his feathery short- to mid-range shooting touch and his wizardry on defence. These other skills helped Barksdale’s game immensely but they comprised only peripheral attributes for a player with his physical abilities. White columnists also continually professed ‘Big Don’s’ congeniality, trying to persuade readers of the social acceptability of their acquaintance with him and their support of his status as a ‘good Negro’. [64]

Curiously, Barksdale’s inclusion as an African American on the Olympic basketball team made few ripples in the national print media. Even more surprising, his pre-Olympic efforts garnered little notice in the largest black press outlets as well. Summer sports stories in black newspapers focused on Jackie Robinson’s second season in major league baseball and on the composition of the integrated US Olympic track and field team. Had he chosen to become an American trackster, Barksdale would have received far more pre-Olympic media attention, especially in the black press. Indeed, when he won his Olympic basketball roster spot he received little more than paragraph-long stories at the bottom of black sports pages across the country. Oddly, black newspapers did not altogether neglect basketball during the summer months leading up to the Olympics. Outdoor and local leagues generated weekly columns – Olympic

basketball, however, represented an afterthought. [65] Throughout the black press, only the *Chicago Defender* showed any excitement about his groundbreaking basketball roster spot. The Chicago paper's correspondents cheered that experts predicted Barksdale as a starter during the Olympic tournament. [66]

The news media's oversight of basketball's 'great experiment' reveals a great deal regarding the role of basketball in American culture in that era. The American-invented sport was not yet a 'national' pastime in its homeland. Arguably, basketball had yet to develop a fully national following by the late 1940s. The infant NBA rarely travelled outside the Northeastern seaboard while the AAU national tournaments seldom attracted teams from east of the Great Plains. College basketball enjoyed popularity more evenly across the country but it had yet to create a coherent national identity. Elite-level basketball remained a game with great regional but little national status. [67]

Furthermore, international basketball had yet to catch the fancy of the masses. The 1948 London games featured basketball as a medal sport for only the second time in Olympic history owing to the cancellation of the 1940 and 1944 Games. The American basketball contingent had raced through the 1936 Berlin games with little difficulty and expected little challenge in England in 1948. The competition increased somewhat in London but the crowds did not. London's 10,000-seat Harringay Arena rarely filled to more than a quarter of its capacity during the Olympic tournament. Very few of the USOC-funded sportswriters who accompanied the American Olympic team wired back substantial summaries of the basketball games to their American markets. American sportswriters focused on track and field, long the centrepiece of US fascination with Olympic spectacles. [68]

The Olympic basketball team received a great deal of local news coverage in Oklahoma and Kentucky newspapers during their three-game pre-Olympic fundraising exhibition schedule that preceded their trip to London. On June 30, the Kentucky squad plus Lumpp and Boryla, met the Phillips five plus Barksdale and Robinson in Tulsa for the opener. Kentucky stayed close early and into the second half until ‘Big Don’s’ cameo. ‘Until the Negro star went on the floor the score seesawed between the two teams’, proclaimed the *Bartlesville Morning-Examiner*, hometown paper of the 66ers. Barksdale scored three quick buckets of his nine total points that turned the tide of the game for the 66ers to garner a six-point victory. The Oklahoma newspapers raved about Barksdale’s ‘brilliant floor work’. [69] The Kentucky press, on the other hand, did not even mention Barksdale’s name in their post-game write-up. [70]

Two nights later in Kansas City, Kentucky got revenge, winning a thriller at the buzzer in double overtime, 70-69, despite Barksdale leading all scorers with 22 points. ‘Big Don’ started this contest for the 66ers but both the Oklahoma and Kansas newspapers failed to feature his feats. His game-high scoring honours did receive a brief mention in the Kentucky papers as they marvelled about the play of their opponents’ ‘Negro star’. [71] After the first two games, Kentucky columnist Babe Kimbrough opined, ‘had it not been for the great play of the California star [Barksdale], the Wildcats would have had two victories – and both by sizeable margins’. With the series tied at one game apiece, the two sides travelled to Lexington, Kentucky, for the rubber match. The two closely fought games added a great deal of intensity to the bipartisan team, as the fourteen players had not yet emotionally transitioned from being opponents to teammates. While the games stayed clean and displayed terrific basketball, there was no doubt that

Kentucky was playing Phillips in these contests, rather than the American Olympic team playing an intra-squad scrimmage. [72]

Arriving in Kentucky for the series finale, Barksdale found a more intense form of Jim Crow segregation than had existed in Oklahoma. The city of Lexington maintained strict racial guidelines. In fact, Barksdale barely made it into the town for the third and final game. Teammate Jackie Robinson reminisced that he met with several people before the trip about Barksdale's prospective reception in Lexington. At that meeting he remembered being told, 'Rupp said we can't bring that so-and-so (referring to Barksdale) into the state'. The group decided that if 'Big Don' did not go, none of them would go. Barksdale made the trip but stayed with a prominent black family in town while the rest of the team stayed in Lexington's finest hotel. [73]

While he still did not receive equal treatment in public, Barksdale mentioned that as time went on he and his teammates got along very well. [74] His teammates made no formal protest about their black teammate and even came to his defence against Rupp and the other coaches. In contrast, less than six months earlier several of the white Brooklyn Dodgers circulated a petition claiming they would boycott if their black teammate, Jackie Robinson, made the final big league roster. [75] Robinson won his place on the Dodgers through the unwavering support of his team's management, which rejected the protests of certain racist players. Barksdale, in contrast, kept his spot in Kentucky through the unwavering support of his teammates even though the most famous college coach in the nation was willing to exclude him from playing in Lexington.

In 1948, the University of Kentucky had not yet opened its doors to integrated team sports. Barksdale would be the first black basketball player to compete against the

Wildcat team, and the black community of the city celebrated the milestone with a softball game and a great party on the eve of the game. Lexington's black community treated Barksdale like royalty at the party. A band played and hordes of people excitedly discussed the game. Adolph Rupp and the white side of town anticipated the game as well, but their enthusiasm emerged from Wildcat pride rather than hope for racial progress. [76]

The night before the game, Barksdale received a phone call. An unidentified man on the line threatened to kill him if he played in the game the following night. Although shaken, Barksdale decided to play anyway. In spite of the threat Barksdale played an outstanding game against the Wildcats in front of a segregated, predominantly white crowd, with a few black fans relegated to a separate seating section. The game, played in Kentucky's outdoor football stadium on an imported hardwood floor, went on without incident until midway through the first half. During a timeout, a trainer brought a water bottle out to the Oilers. For an integrated team in a segregated state, the trainer should have taken two bottles in order to conform to segregated custom. The crowd noticed the single bottle. All 14,000 fans quieted, fixated on that one water bottle being passed around among the parched Oiler players. Three Oilers gulped out of the bottle and continued passing it around the circle to Barksdale. Amidst total silence in the stadium, 'Big Don' thought for an instant, took a drink and passed it on to the next teammate, backcountry Arkansas native Gordon Carpenter. The tension grew as the crowd awaited Carpenter's move. The white player grabbed the bottle offered by his black teammate, took a drink and passed it on; seemingly unfazed by the attention this segregated crowd

gave to the shared refreshment. [77] After the game, Barksdale thanked Carpenter for his bold move. ‘Never a doubt, Barks’, the Southerner replied and laughed. [78]

On the court as well as during time-outs Barksdale functioned as a fully equal member of his team. The Oilers edged the collegians by six points in the end, largely due to Barksdale’s courageous effort. His 13 points stood just a bit above average, but the educated Kentucky basketball crowd understood the major difference he made for his team down the stretch. ‘Donald was grabbing rebounds and starting the fast break’, recalled George Durham, the team’s public relations director. [79] After the game, convinced that his teammates fed him the ball in the final minutes of the game to showcase his individual skills in front of the many racists in the crowd, Barksdale thanked the Oilers in the locker room for their kind gesture. Barksdale’s teammates pleaded ignorance on the matter, but he was grateful nonetheless. [80]

Local Kentucky newspapers headlined the Olympic team’s display of roundball excellence the following day with smaller subtitles praising Barksdale’s heroic performance. The *Louisville Courier-Journal* revealed deep in its article that Barksdale ‘was the first Negro to play opposite a Kentucky athletic team in Lexington. He received a big ovation when he was introduced before the game and another one when he left after the tilt ended’. [81] The *Lexington Herald* proclaimed in passing that ‘Barksdale spearheaded the Phillips second-half scoring drive which gained the 56-50 victory’. Barksdale and his teammates had won over the partisan crowd. [82] Despite strong loyalties to ‘The Baron’ and his troops, Kentuckians, pleased with the quality of basketball they witnessed, added red to their cherished blue and white to root for the London-bound American team.

Revealingly, in key ways the local Kentucky press downplayed Barksdale and his Oklahoma teammates' achievements by focusing on the Olympic team's future in London rather than the Wildcat loss. After briefly documenting Barksdale's heroics in the middle paragraphs of his article, the *Lexington Herald's* Kentucky basketball beat writer, Babe Kimbrough, explained to his readers that most of the Wildcat cagers went home to see family in the few days between the exhibition series and the Olympics. The Oilers, on the other hand, stayed in Lexington. Kimbrough mentioned that the visitors spent most of their time as guests at the Lexington Country Club playing golf and swimming. While Kimbrough did not mention names in this lucky group, it is highly unlikely that Barksdale enjoyed the luxury of spending the weekend with his teammates at the pool and on the links, as the Lexington Country Club was a segregated establishment. [83]

Four days after Barksdale became the University of Kentucky's first African American basketball opponent the entire US Olympic team boarded the *USS America* in New York City to cross the Atlantic for the London Games. Upon arrival in Britain, Browning, Rupp, and their men immediately headed north for a four-game tour of Scotland to promote the game of basketball in the British Isles. This trip gave the coaches their first chance to commingle the two squads that had practiced separately since April. [84] Browning and Rupp mixed their troops into a 'blue' team and 'white' team for each of the Scottish games. Newspaper reports of these exhibition games gave few details. The scanty records reveal that 'Big Don' scored 6 points in the second game, and 2 points in the third. His statistics for the first and fourth games went unreported, but it is clear that he did not receive high-scoring honours in either of those games.

Barksdale teamed with three Wildcats in the second game and lost to a squad coached by Rupp that included the other two Kentucky players. In Game 3, 'Big Don' played in a winning effort with only one Kentuckian. It is unclear if Barksdale played on Rupp's squad during any of the games but he did play with Wildcats. While this tour represents an important step in the cohesion of the team, the sparse evidence available reveals little about how it impacted the racial dynamics of the team. Still, the Olympic team's Scottish tour marked the first time that Kentucky's all-white Wildcats had played with a black teammate. [85]

Returning to England, the US squad opened preliminary round pool play by routinely defeating the Swiss, Czechoslovakian, Argentine, Egyptian, and Peruvian teams in eight days of competition. As reigning gold medallists, the Americans played with great confidence, believing they had more talent than any other team in the world. While the coaching staff and management knew very little about the other teams, they took their positions with the national team very seriously and strove to win the gold medal. The rest of the world understood that without a doubt that Americans played basketball better than anyone else. The US cagers lived up to the high expectations, playing proficiently in the preliminary games except for a closely fought two-point victory over the feisty Argentine team. Barksdale played well in all the early games and starred in the close victory over Argentina. [86]

Olympic basketball rules in 1948 stated that only ten players could play for each team in each game, requiring Browning and Rupp to leave four of their players in street clothes for every contest. [87] After sitting out the opener due to the roster limitations, Barksdale scored 4, 12, 17, and 10 points respectively and started at least one game in the

preliminary round. Reporters noted that Barksdale fit in very well with both the fast-breaking Kentucky offense and the more methodical Oiler attack. The coaches mixed their squads together during the first four games and distributed roster spots equally among all fourteen players. In the final game of pool play, however, Browning and Rupp opted to homogenise their squads. They thought that playing primarily Oilers with Oilers and Wildcats with Wildcats would give the players greater team chemistry on the floor. The new format worked well in a drubbing of the Peruvians, convincing Browning and Rupp to continue playing more uniform quintets. [88] Advancing to elimination play, Barksdale scored three points as a starter in the quarterfinal rout of Uruguay and sat out of the runaway semi-final victory over Mexico. [89]

The only uncertainty before the gold medal game against the French involved a plea on behalf of both coaching staffs for the basketball supervisors to allow both teams to suit up all fourteen of their players for the finale. The basketball rules committee acquiesced on this special occasion to the mutual request. [90] The rule exception absolved the coaching staff of having to leave certain players off the floor for the cherished gold medal game, and it affected the overall individual player tallies. Every American player sat out between one and three of the eight total games, and even if the rules committee had held their ground on roster sizes in the final the tallies still would have been unequal. [91] These statistics clearly indicate that Barksdale held more than just a token spot on the team. The box scores and accounts from the games show no traces of overt racism from the coaches as they allocated playing time and roster spots. Barksdale's omission from the roster during the first game raised a red flag to some observers at the time, but USOBC Chairman Louis Wilke confessed to the *Oakland Post-*

Enquirer that the players drew straws and Barksdale unluckily picked a short one. [92] Moreover, the day of the first Olympic game, a Kentucky newspaper projected Barksdale as a starter in two of the three offensive schemes that the team could employ. Therefore, while Browning and Rupp could have used their black player sparingly if at all, it appears that they treated him in the same fashion as they treated the other thirteen players. [93] Barksdale was on the team to play and not included merely as a Cold War public relations stunt for the Olympic ceremonies to show the world the egalitarianism and justice of American society. [94]

The coaching staff, which may not have even worried about equal playing time on their squad, revealed a traceable rhythm to their allocation of roster spots even through their strategy change to two units. Yet in the semi-finals they altered their pattern and sat Barksdale and two other at-large players in a move that seemed out of character with the customary rotation. In the preliminary round games, two at-large players, two Oilers, and two Wildcats sat out two games each while every other player sat out once. In the elimination rounds, only one Kentuckian and two 66ers sat out while every at-large player sat out at least one of the three games. [95] Without explanation as to why the coaches changed their line-up rotation, the final game proceeded as advertised with every American playing. Barksdale scored eight points in the gold medal tilt as the Americans garnered yet another lopsided victory, 65-24. [96]

Basketball's 'great experiment' concluded with a gold medal for the 'integrated' American team. No overt racial incidents had marred the team's march to victory in London. Having left legalised segregation at home, Barksdale received a warm welcome in Great Britain. [97] Indeed, in 1948 British society was in the process of confronting its

own racial policies. A month before the London Olympics commenced, the United Kingdom admitted several hundred Afro-Caribbean emigrants into its borders. In the post-war era, Britain needed reconstruction and sought skilled and unskilled labourers from its commonwealth countries. With this unprecedented wave of immigration, Caribbean citizens gained special immigration status and could enter, work, and settle with their families but did not receive equal treatment. The new immigration policy signalled the beginning of the United Kingdom's efforts towards multiculturalism and multiracialism, but it did not change race relations in the British Empire overnight. [98]

British crowds welcomed Barksdale. As the integrated American Olympic basketball contingent travelled around the United Kingdom, Barksdale did not receive verbal abuse or awkward ogling from the mostly white British fans – they saw him instead as an exotic. Interestingly, 'Big' Bob Kurland, a white star from Oklahoma, caught most of the public attention and harsh treatment. The seven-footer was the beneficiary of frequent catcalls and off-colour remarks from gawkers in the streets of London as well as boos and hate-filled barbs from envious fans in the stands. [99]

Following the London closing ceremonies, the American basketball team toured Paris for a few days of sightseeing. In France, Barksdale continued to be treated with dignity and respect. *Ebony* magazine reported later that year that Barksdale was singled out in Paris, but only by young ladies because of his good looks and charm. [100] The common notion of France as a more racially tolerant country than the US stemmed in part from African-American world champion cyclist Marshall 'Major' Taylor. As a cyclist during the turn of the twentieth century, Taylor raced all over Europe and attracted many French fans. [101] While he felt that the French treated him better than his fellow

Americans did, the African-American community proudly boasted of their appeal in France. [102] Regardless of the true nature of French racial attitudes, the black press embraced this viewpoint and promoted France as the embodiment of racial tolerance and diversity. [103] Leaving France to cross the Atlantic back to his homeland, Barksdale returned to a country in which he was known primarily as a 'Negro', and in which in many sections of the nation he found himself segregated and disenfranchised either by law or custom.

As the ship from Europe docked in New York City and the players walked down the gangplank, Rupp pulled Barksdale aside and tried to provide closure to their relationship. 'Big Don' remembers Rupp stating 'that it was a pleasure coaching [me] in his first experience working with a black player'. Rupp also 'suggested that if he could find a black player for the University of Kentucky he would'. In spite of the kind words at the end of the trip, Barksdale also admitted that his relationship with Rupp was very strained at times. [104] These comments and others, such as Rupp proclaiming to Barksdale in reference to Jim Crow, 'Son, I wish things weren't like that, but there's nothing you or I can do about it', reveal the uncertain relationship between the black star player from California and the white coaching legend from the South. [105] As the third leading scorer on the Olympic team, Barksdale received fair treatment from the coaching staff on the court in all likelihood because he may have been the best all-around player on the Olympic squad. Rupp wanted to win as much as anyone and, although winning was rarely ever in doubt in the Olympic tourney, 'Big Don' gave the American team a substantial advantage when he was on the floor.

Rupp's comments to Barksdale as the team went home indicate a respect for Barksdale's basketball abilities and his personal conduct. It also reveals reluctance on Rupp's part to make any effort to change the racial attitudes in Lexington and the South. Even though it is unlikely that any integrationist white leader in the South in 1948 would have had much success, very few people in Kentucky would have had the audacity to try and tell Rupp what he could and could not do, recruiting a black player for the Wildcats included. Rupp was a powerful man who elicited trepidation from anyone who opposed his views and activities. But while he had great power, Rupp still operated in a culture that had strict racial guidelines. Had he recruited black players in the post-war years, he may have paid a social price from the collective racism of the South that may have hindered the support and prestige of his beloved program. [106] Could Rupp have challenged segregation in Kentucky in 1948? He probably could have, but he and any black player in his program would have had to face difficult obstacles as the consequences of being pioneers. The fact is that he did not try to integrate Kentucky basketball during that era.

Rupp's legend as a racist grew posthumously, and it may be partially for this reason that Barksdale's remarks about his relationship with Rupp are so contradictory. In an interview with a Philadelphia journalist in 1984, 'Big Don' claimed that Rupp 'turned out to be my closest friend on the team'. [107] Yet in an oral history collected in 1991, Barksdale insisted that the relationship between the two was 'stormy'. [108] It could be that Barksdale waited until race relations reached a point at which the public would empathise with his imperfect relationship with Rupp. Another possibility is that Barksdale's views changed with the fading accuracy of his memories and the

deteriorating public perception of Rupp. The limited evidence makes assessing the relationship of these two gold medal winners difficult. While Rupp is never cited as saying anything about Barksdale to the news media, Barksdale never explained why he called Rupp his friend in one instance and then described their relationship as difficult in another. Rupp continued his remarkable coaching career after the Olympics, eventually collecting 876 wins and four national championships (including those in 1948 and 1949) before retiring in 1972. Despite Rupp's alleged appreciation for Barksdale, no black man wore Kentucky blue and white until twenty-two years after Rupp coached Barksdale in the Olympics. [109]

Nevertheless, Rupp and Barksdale never publicly feuded. In that sense, the 1948 US Olympic basketball team took a small and successful step towards racial equality in the United States by including Barksdale on the squad. The integrated track and field squad, led by black speedster Harrison Dillard, received some media attention before the Olympics. African-American trackster Alice Coachman, who won a medal in the high jump, received some attention afterwards. [110] But these and other black gold medallists did not garner nearly the fame of Jesse Owens in 1936, nor did they receive the attention received by Jackie Robinson in 1947. [111]

In retrospect, Barksdale's story was the biggest step the United States made towards racial integration in the 1948 Olympics. The USOC successfully fielded an integrated basketball team that represented a nation nowhere close to reaching just and uniform racial policies. Furthermore, this team won the gold medal, and did so with relatively little documented internal dissension. However, the media never clearly embraced it as a pioneering event, rendering Barksdale's breaking of Olympic

basketball's colour line only a small and quickly forgotten step among the many strides that mark the long struggle for racial integration in American sport and society.

Four years later the US Olympic basketball team in Helsinki reverted back to pre-1948 custom, including not a single black player. [112] The 1952 team did include 1948 gold medallist Bob Kurland and fellow big man Clyde Lovellette, a star who was later accused of not passing the ball to black teammates throughout his ensuing NBA career. To be fair, Lovellette rarely passed the ball to his white teammates either in his standout career. [113] The young NBA opened its doors to black players only two years earlier, in 1950, and many of the best African Americans had given up their amateurism by jumping to the newly integrated professional league, preventing their inclusion on the 1952 American Olympic squad. In the 1956 Melbourne Games, University of San Francisco stars and future NBA legends Bill Russell and K.C. Jones re-integrated the American Olympic basketball squad. [114] In both 1952 and 1956, the US cage squads won the gold medal with ease. [115]

Interestingly, Barksdale's 1948 Olympic achievement had little immediate impact on the NBA, as the league maintained its strict racial code for two more years. Exclusively white professional teams offered contracts to many of Barksdale's teammates on the Olympic squad. None of the 66ers turned professional, not even Bob Kurland, who is regarded as one of the best early big men to ever play the game. They had great jobs with Phillips Oil that stretched the meaning of the term 'amateur'. Two other 'at-large' AAU players on the 1948 Olympic team, Ray Lumpp and Vince Boryla, signed with the New York Knicks shortly after the Olympics. Boryla, however, did not play until he graduated from the University of Denver. Kentucky's Kenny Rollins signed with

a Chicago team after the London games while the rest of his teammates finished their senior seasons at Kentucky by winning another national championship. After their graduation in 1949, these four other Kentucky Olympians joined an NBA start-up team called the Indianapolis Olympians and enjoyed two solid seasons in professional basketball. In 1951, three of the four Kentuckians pled guilty in college basketball's point fixing scandal and were barred from basketball. [116]

'Big Don', on the other hand, received no contract offers from NBA teams the year he helped the US to Olympic gold but did receive an apologetic letter from one NBA owner explaining that the league had an unwritten racial policy. Barksdale returned to play for the Oakland Bittners for three more seasons, winning an AAU national championship in 1949 against a few of his former Olympic teammates from the Oilers. He did not receive any offers to play for NBA teams until 1950 when he turned down a paltry salary – less money than he was making as a beer distributor in Oakland. In 1951, he accepted a more lucrative offer and became the fourth player to cross the NBA's colour line. In 1953, at the age of 31, 'Big Don' became the NBA's first black all-star. [117]

Barksdale played five heavily-scrutinised and injury-plagued NBA seasons in Baltimore – a segregated city that treated baseball's Jackie Robinson with virulent racism when he visited with his minor league team. [118] Barksdale remembers no treatment of that sort from fans in Baltimore, although, as his team's highest paid player, Baltimore's owners incessantly demanded more production from 'Big Don'. On road trips, he could not stay with the white players in the team hotel, and if Baltimore's opposing team had a black player, Barksdale was always assigned to guard him. Although most NBA teams

played in northern states, Barksdale received harsh treatment from fans when his Baltimore team toured the mid-South to play pre-season exhibition games. Suffering from an accumulation of injuries, Barksdale lasted only a few more years in the league, ending his career with the rising Boston Celtics in 1955. Boston's legendary coach Red Auerbach, who coached Barksdale in his final NBA seasons, confessed, 'Watching Don play basketball was like watching a ballet. He was past his prime when we got him, but you could still see the quality there'. [119]

Although Barksdale had an exceptional career in the NBA, he lost some of his best seasons because of the league's racial policy – an argument that could also be made for baseball's Jackie Robinson. Both athletes spent time during their physical peaks excluded from the top professional leagues. Robinson received more accolades and public attention for his feats in baseball than Barksdale did for his accomplishments in basketball. Had Barksdale taken a substantial pay cut to be the first African American in the NBA, his story may have been better remembered. His decision to stay in the AAU for an extra season may have been a factor in relegating him in to a footnote in the annals of American sporting integration, but even if he had become the first African American in the NBA he would not have received the attention Robinson did since baseball and not basketball then reigned as the undisputed national pastime.

In spite of the fact that in 1948 basketball stood in the shadow of baseball, Barksdale saw himself as a racial pioneer in the mould of Jackie Robinson. Barksdale claimed that he broke fourteen colour barriers in his life, both within and outside the realm of sports. [120] He asserted that his integration of the 1948 US Olympic basketball team was the one for which he hoped to be most remembered. Most historians, however,

have forgotten ‘basketball’s great experiment’ at the 1948 Olympics even though it occurred only a year after Jackie Robinson entered Major League Baseball.

In the midst of an era of profound transformation in American race relations, Barksdale and his white teammates came together to represent a racially divided and confused nation. They not only won a gold medal but proved that black and white athletes wearing red, white, and blue could coexist successfully on the hardwood floor. Barksdale’s racial pioneering with this team has distinct connections to both Jackie Robinson – the most well-known of all sports integrationists – and Adolph Rupp, a man who has come to embody (whether fairly or not) Southern racist attitudes in sport. Yet Barksdale’s story, despite being among two of the more famous figures of sport and race, never took hold in America’s collective memory. His story became known as simply one small step among many others on the tumultuous and lengthy path toward integration.

Notes

- [1] There is a vast amount of literature on Robinson and baseball’s great experiment. Starting with Tygiel’s *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, subsequent authors have caught on to the American obsession with this tale. Other works on this topic include, but are not limited to Allen, *Jackie Robinson*; Chalberg, *Rickey and Robinson*; Dorinson and Warmund, eds., *Jackie Robinson*; Falkner, *Great Time Coming*; Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*; Tygiel, *Extra Bases*; and Tygiel, *The Jackie Robinson Reader*.
- [2] A few of the chroniclers of racial integration in basketball mention some of the elements of Barksdale’s story but none of them provides an extended analysis of Barksdale and the 1948 US Olympic basketball team. For brief accounts of Barksdale’s role see Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*; Grundman, *The Golden Age of Amateur Basketball*; George, *Elevating the Game*.
- [3] Tygiel’s *Baseball’s Great Experiment* remains the finest work on the subject. Other histories have expanded the role of Robinson in the history of US race relations. Allen, *Jackie Robinson*; Chalberg, *Rickey and Robinson*; Dorinson and Warmund, eds., *Jackie Robinson*; Falkner, *Great Time Coming*; Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson*; Tygiel, *Extra Bases*; and Tygiel, *The Jackie Robinson Reader*.
- [4] *Daily Bruin* (UCLA), ‘True All-America lists Barksdale Third String’, 20 March 1947. Although Barksdale made the Consensus second-team All-America list, he was placed on the third team on the True list. Barksdale’s second-team Consensus all-American status from his 1946-47 senior season was a small step for African-American athletes, although he outplayed many players on the first- and second-teams. Three of the True first-teamers became his teammates on the Olympic squad; Charles Bricker, ‘Barksdale Led the Way’, *Boston Globe*, 30 January 1984. <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 7 September 2007. In this article Barksdale claims, ‘Pro basketball was just kind of a closed issue’; Thomas Bonk, ‘Barksdale, One of a Kind, Is One of Eight Being Inducted into UCLA Hall of Fame’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1987. <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 7 September 2007. While the NBA did not officially

- begin until the 1946-47 season, its predecessors in the NBL and other professional leagues and teams played by the rules of segregation. The NBA opened its door to African-American players in 1950-51. The AAU, on the other hand, allowed black players as far back as the 1930s. This league had a much wider following than the NBA in the 1940s because it covered a much broader geographical base. Moreover, the AAU served as a viable option for graduating college stars. While housed under 'amateur' status, AAU team owners gave their basketball players high-paying and cushy jobs for their hoops services. This luxury made the AAU arguably the most talented league of this time period.
- [5] Bonk, 'Barksdale, One of a Kind'.
- [6] *New York Times*, 'U.S. Squad of 14 in Olympics Named', 2 April 1948.
- [7] Rupp's portrayal in the recent Hollywood blockbuster about basketball and American integration, *Glory Road* (Walt Disney Pictures, 2006) confirms this diagnosis.
- [8] Many historians have written a great deal about race and sport, especially in this era. Tygiel, most notably, wrote *Baseball's Great Experiment*, about Jackie Robinson breaking baseball's colour barrier. See also Miller and Wiggins, *The Unlevel Playing Field*; Miller and Wiggins, *Sport and the Color Line*; Bass, *In the Game*; Kennedy, *A Course of Their Own*; Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*; Graham and Graham, *Getting Open*; and many others have written similar stories documenting the difficulties that African-American athletes faced as racial pioneers in their sports. This story about Barksdale serves to complement those tales and broaden the collective memory of this confusing time period.
- [9] 'United States Olympic Team: London 1948', Folder 'Games of the XIV Olympiad, London, England, general', Box 157, Avery Brundage Collection, Special Collections Microfilm, Paterno Library, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania (Avery Brundage Collection originals at University of Illinois Archives, Champaign, Illinois); *Kansas City Star*, (untitled), 2 July 1948. This roster of the players and their hometowns suggests that eight of Barksdale's thirteen teammates were from the South, and two of the five Northerners played for Kentucky.
- [10] Jon Scott, *Adolph Rupp: Fact or Fiction*, <http://www.bigbluehistory.net>, accessed 27 September 2007. This webpage is connected to the University of Kentucky's basketball page. The author, Jon Scott, has compiled 119 pages of information regarding Adolph Rupp and his views on race. Although I will not be taking the specific views of the author, he does include copies of newspaper articles with full citations that I use.
- [11] Kentucky, Louisville, and Baylor – all Southern schools – would not have had black players on their rosters in 1948. New York University, on the other hand, did have black athletes as early as the 1920s in football – see 'Football: Nov. 11, 1929' *Time Magazine*, Nov. 11, 1929, accessed at <http://www.time.com>. If their basketball team in 1948 had any black players, they were not stars and were not mentioned by their race in any media publications.*
- [12] 'U.S. Trials Drop N.A.I.B. Winner', *New York Times*, 5 March 1948; Maynard Brichford, 'Avery Brundage and Racism', p. 132. NYU replaced the National Invitation Tournament's champion, St. Louis University, because its players were not allowed to miss any more classes to participate in the Trials.
- [13] It is unclear whether or not Barksdale was the only African-American player at the Olympic Trials. Phillips and Denver did not have any black players, and it is unknown whether Brooklyn did or not. As YMCA national champions, Brooklyn did not have a good showing in their first round loss in the trials, and so little is known about their team or any of their individual players.
- [14] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee*, 143; Joseph M. Sheehan, 'Olympic Court Trials Pairings Set For First Round on Saturday', *New York Times*, 24 March 1948.
- [15] Louis Effrat, 'Oilers Defeat Kentucky in Olympic Trials', *New York Times*, 1 April 1948; *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 'New York Writers Acclaim Beard in Glowing Phrases', 1 April 1948.
- [16] Effrat, 'Oilers Defeat Kentucky'; Larry Shropshire, 'Cats May Get Another Shot At AAU Champs In Louisville Game July 10', *Lexington (KY) Leader*, 1 April 1948; Babe Kimbrough, 'Oilers Nose Out Wildcats, 53-49, In Final Game', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 1 April 1948.
- [17] Louis Effrat, 'Baylor Tops N.Y.U. in Olympic Trials at Garden, 59 to 57', *New York Times*, 28 March 1948.
- [18] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 117.

- [19] 'U.S. Squad of 14 in Olympics Named'.
- [20] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee 1948 Games*, p. 143; Basketball Hall of Fame, 'Inductees', <http://www.hoopahall.com/halloffamers/bhof-oswald-tower.html>, accessed 6 November 2007. Tower spent the majority of his career working on or with the rules of the game of basketball.
- [21] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 117.
- [22] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee*, 247.
- [23] *Ibid.*, 143. Chairman Wilke was from Denver, Secretary Tower was from Massachusetts, and Harry Henschel, a Jew, was from New York. Vice-Chairman Eugene Lambert hailed from Fayetteville, Arkansas and members Norman W. Shepard was from Davidson, North Carolina, Willard Greim was from Alabama, and Albert F. Whelple was from Baltimore; Roberts, "But They Can't Beat Us", 169-176. Graham and Graham, *Getting Open*, paints a slightly more positive picture of Branch McCracken than Roberts does, but not by much. They admit that it took great coercion from respected state administrators to get McCracken to accept Bill Garrett, their African-American protagonist, on his basketball team in the 1947-48 season.
- [24] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 117.
- [25] *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 'City Outdoing Self in Plans To Greet Victorious Wildcats', 1 April 1948. Both the *Lexington Leader* and the *Lexington Herald* were filled throughout that week with ads congratulating Rupp and his men. Rupp, Beard, Groza, University of Kentucky President, UK Alumni Association President, UK Athletic Director, and football coach Paul 'Bear' Bryant spoke at the celebration. Bryant did not last much longer at UK as it is rumoured that he envied Rupp's power and fame. At the University of Alabama, Bryant came to embody the same dyed-in-the-wool Southern policies of segregation in collegiate sport that Rupp did at Kentucky. Interestingly, Wallace 'Wah Wah' Jones of the 1948 Olympic basketball team and a two-sport star at Kentucky is the only player to have ever played for both Rupp and Bryant.
- [26] 'Thousands Jam Streets To Welcome Conquering Wildcat Team And Coach', *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 2 April 1948; Effrat, 'Oilers Defeat Kentucky'; 'Welcome Champs!', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 2 April 1948.
- [27] 'Beard Must Blitz For Cats To Trim Foe', *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 2 July 1948.
- [28] Burnett Hobgood, 'Cats, Oilers Look Forward To Exhibitions In Scotland', *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 10 July 1948; (University of Kentucky Library Archives); Austin Bealmeear, 'U.S. Olympic Cage Squad Expected', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 2 April 1948; 'U.S. Squad of 14 In Olympics Named'. This claim was made in New York and Kentucky newspapers, verifying the fact that it was said by Chairman Wilke. Oklahoma newspapers did not mention the comment, but it can still be inferred that everyone across the country knew of Rupp's talent as a coach and his power across the Blue Grass State.
- [29] 'Olympic Fives to Play Three Exhibition Games', *New York Times*, 30 May 1948; Kimbrough, 'Oilers Nose Out Wildcats'.
- [30] For comparative history of Jim Crow in various states including Kentucky and Oklahoma, see Brown, *The Jim Crow Encyclopedia*; Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*; Moran, *The Reign of Jim Crow*; George, *Life Under Jim Crow Laws*; and Kennedy, *Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A.*
- [31] Ray Park, 'Negro Ban at OU Held Legal, Schools of Law Ruled 'Equal' by Court', *Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City)*, 3 August 1948.
- [32] Oklahoma Historical Society, 'Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture', <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia>, accessed 14 July 2008.
- [33] *Ibid.*
- [34] Historians have spilled much ink in efforts to clarify the racial landscape in the late 1940s. While this paper only mentions a few of the monumental occurrences of this time period, many more are worthy of mention but fall outside the scope of this paper and the reason for the contextual historical references.
- [35] George, *Elevating the Game*.
- [36] The integration of collegiate athletic conferences that featured Oklahoma schools may not directly indicate integration of sports in Oklahoma. As stated above, many collegiate athletic teams that featured African Americans in this time period left their black players at home when they travelled to play against teams in segregated states. For more on the integration of college and professional

- sports, see Martin, 'The Color Line', 85-112; and Miller, 'Slouching toward a New Expediency', 5-30.
- [37] Scott, *Adolph Rupp*, www.bigbluehistory.net. Perry Wallace was from Nashville. He was the only black player in the SEC until his senior season when Auburn had one African American as well. The University of Kentucky, ironically, broke the colour line in football for the SEC in 1967, but the trailblazing player, a defensive end, was killed when his teammates gang-tackled him during an early season practice drill. Many of the pioneering SEC athletes faced tragic fates. Although Vanderbilt's pioneer became captain and all-SEC by his senior year, he commented later that if he had the choice, he probably would not have done it again because of all the abuse. He went on to become quite successful as a lawyer and professor at American University. The scars of Auburn's first black basketball player stayed with him after his collegiate career, as he jumped off a building and killed himself a few years later. Similarly, Kentucky's first black basketball player struggled later in life and is currently serving time in a California prison on his fourth rape conviction.
- [38] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*. The comparisons between Barksdale and Robinson throughout this paper are in reference to Tygiel's book.
- [39] Ibid.
- [40] Don Barksdale, interview by Margaret Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale', L.A. 84 Foundation, 1991; ed. Shirley S. Ito, <http://www.la84foundation.org>, accessed 6 November 2007; Ron Thomas, 'The First Black All-Star in the NBA/How Berkeley's Barksdale Worked His Way to the Top', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 February 1987; <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 7 September 2007; Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'; Alan Ward, 'On Second Thought', *Oakland Tribune*, 18 February 1948; <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>, accessed 6 November 2007. Ward claims that Barksdale had 'professional offers galore' at this point in time, but that Barksdale 'has no hankering for the pro game'. This is the only source that mentions Barksdale as having multiple offers. My speculation, based on multiple sources, is that if he had any suitors (which is more than likely), then they were unwilling to pay him what he was worth. He had some lucrative business ventures in Oakland and was probably unwilling to give those up for a smaller salary playing professional basketball.
- [41] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 61, 350.
- [42] For biographical information on the two men, see the previous note.
- [43] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 125.
- [44] Ibid., 114-115.
- [45] Emmons Byrne, 'The Bull Pen', *Oakland Tribune*, 16 January 1948; Grundman, *The Golden Age*, 60.
- [46] *Bartlesville (Oklahoma) Morning Examiner*, 'Negro Players Would Help OU Says Cage Coach', 10 January 1948 (Oklahoma State Historical Society Archives).
- [47] Kastner, *Bunion Derby*.
- [48] Byrne, 'The Bull Pen'.
- [49] Russ J. Cowans, 'Barksdale Had Two Shots At Olympic Team', *Chicago Defender*, 31 July 1948; <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 7 November 2007; 'U.S. Must Rely Upon Negro Stars For Victories In The '48 Olympics', *The New York Amsterdam News*, 26 June 1948; Emmons Byrne, 'The Bull Pen', *Oakland Tribune*, 16 February 1948; <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>, accessed 6 November, 2007.
- [50] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 117, quotes Barksdale as making this claim.
- [51] Ibid., 119; Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 194-95. Tygiel acknowledges that Reese played golf with Robinson much like Thomas mentions that Baylor's Robinson went to movie theatres with Barksdale.
- [52] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'; Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 118.
- [53] *Kansas City Star*, (untitled), 2 July 1948.
- [54] Grundman, *The Golden Age*, 118.
- [55] Smallwood and Phillips, 'Black Oklahomans and the Question of "Oklahomaness"', 50-51. The authors explain that members of the five 'civilised' tribes of Oklahoma practiced slavery similar to that of the whites in the South before the Civil War. They explain that whites accepted Natives from these tribes, and they both practiced strict segregation after the Civil War.
- [56] Bonk, 'Barksdale, One of a Kind', p. 1.

- [57] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 118-119. Barksdale tells Thomas that he sensed hostility early on and that he retaliated using his sharp elbows as weapons within the rules of the game. Neither Robinson nor teammate R.C. Pitts remembers either happening. Nevertheless, 'Big Don' confessed that it became easier for him the more he got to know his teammates.
- [58] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 170-71.
- [59] Ibid., 119. The story is as told by George Durham, publicity director for the team.
- [60] Bonk, 'Barksdale, One of a Kind', p. 1. The argument could be made that Barksdale could have walked up the stairs to the sixth floor hotel room, but the reason he wanted the rubdown was to loosen up and relieve stress from his already overworked body. Walking up six flights of stairs for a rubdown may not have been worth the effort.
- [61] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*. Tygiel makes the claim that baseball's integration pioneers received different treatment at different hotels in different cities depending on their skin tone. Thus, many Caribbean and Latino players with lighter skin received better treatment than those with darker skin.
- [62] Bonk, 'Barksdale, One of a Kind', p. 1.
- [63] Thomas, 'The First Black All-Star in the NBA'. Red Auerbach, Barksdale's coach with the Boston Celtics claims that, 'He was a great athlete, had tremendous quickness, he shot pretty well, rebounded well, ran the court well ... Barksdale was like a greyhound'; Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 110-111. Barksdale claims that he was a very good rebounder and a great leaper, but had hands that were too small to palm the basketball. Bill Russell, another black pioneer in the NBA, compares Barksdale to Scottie Pippen.
- [64] Alan Ward, 'On Second Thought', *Oakland Tribune*, 2 April 1948.
- [65] See archives of the *Atlanta Daily World*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and *Oklahoma Eagle*.
- [66] Cowans, 'Barksdale Had Two Shots'.
- [67] These claims are made based on Thomas' and Grundman's books, and on the fact that college basketball had yet to settle the feud of priority between the NCAA and NIT tournaments.
- [68] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee 1948 Games*, 143.
- [69] Hal Middlesworth, 'Barksdale Aids Phillip 66ers Beat Kentucky', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 1 July 1948; 'Phillips, With Barksdale Defeats Kentucky, 60 to 52', *Bartlesville* (Oklahoma) *Morning Examiner*, 1 July 1948 (Oklahoma State Historical Society Archives).
- [70] Babe Kimbrough, 'Oilers Defeat Cats In Series-Opener', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 1 July 1948. 1948 Olympic Basketball File, Adolph Rupp Folder, University of Kentucky Library Archives, University of Kentucky Library, Lexington, KY (hereafter 'University of Kentucky Library Archives').
- [71] 'Kentucky Quint Edges 66ers in Second Overtime, 70 to 69', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 3 July 1948. In this game, a fan let off a firecracker just before the horn at the end of the first overtime, halting all the players before time actually ran out. The same thing happened at the end of the second overtime, but Kentucky's Joe Holland continued to the basket through the noise and hit the game winning lay-up before time expired. The *Oklahoman* notes that the second firecracker 'had a doubtful effect on the outcome'.
- [72] Babe Kimbrough, 'The Morning Line', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 4 July 1948 (University of Kentucky Library Archives).
- [73] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 119-120. This anecdote only appears in Thomas' book. I have not been able to find any other corroborating information that this story actually happened and that it played out in this way. However, Thomas conducted eyewitness interviews, a very credible method of investigation.
- [74] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'; Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 118.
- [75] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, 170-71.
- [76] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 121.
- [77] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'. It should be noted that of all people on the Oilers team, Gordon 'Shorty' Carpenter would be considered the most 'Southern' of all (he was from Ash Flat, Arkansas – a city of about 1,000 residents that is more than 50 miles from any city with 50,000 residents), and therefore the most likely to harbour racial resentment against Barksdale.
- [78] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 124
- [79] Ibid., 123, quotes Durham as making this claim.

- [80] Ibid., 122-23.
- [81] Larry Boeck, 'Oilers, Behind 10 Points, Rally to Tip U.K. 56-50', *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 10 July 1948 (University of Kentucky Library Archives).
- [82] Burnett Hobgood, 'Cats, Oilers Look Forward To Exhibitions in Scotland', *Lexington (Kentucky) Leader*, 10 July 1948 (University of Kentucky Library Archives).
- [83] Babe Kimbrough, 'The Morning Line', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 11 July 1948, (University of Kentucky Library Archives).
- [84] Hobgood, 'Cats, Oilers'. The team played games from July 22-25 at Paisley, St. Andrews, Perth, and Edinburgh.
- [85] 'U.S. Olympic Cagers Puzzle Scots', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 23 July 1948. In this first game, the players chose up their own sides and played rather informally, not even keeping score. The crowd numbered 5,000 and the court was a skating rink with makeshift goals. 'Cage Team Led by Bob Kurland Beats Cliff Barker's Blues In Exhibition Tilt', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 24 July 1948. The article explains that the White team of Kurland, Vince Boryla, Jackie Robinson, Alex Groza, Jesse Renick, and R.C. Pitts, beat the Blue team of Cliff Barker, Wallace Jones, Lew Beck, Barksdale, Ray Lumpp, Gordon Carpenter, and Ken Rollins, 57-42 in front of 3,000 fans. 'Kurland Leads Winning Five In Exhibition', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 25 July 1948. The White team of Kurland, Rollins, Lumpp, Gordon, Boryla, and Barksdale beat the Blue team of Groza, Beard, Lew Beck, Renick, Jones, and Barker, 45-44 in front of 3,000; 'U.S. Olympic Cagers Close Scotland Tour', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 27 July 1948. The Blue team beat the whites 62-60 in front of 12,000 in this game. The Blues were led in scoring by Boryla and the Whites by Robinson, but other teammates' totals were not reported.
- [86] 'Argentines Hold Favored U.S. Cagers To 59-57 Triumph', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 4 Aug 1948. U.S. star center Bob Kurland sat out against the Argentines – a move that the coaching staff thought contributed to the close game. Consequently, this was the only game Kurland missed.
- [87] 'U.S. Five Defeats Czech Team', *New York Times*, 3 August 1948; <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 4 December 2007; 'Argentines Hold Favored U.S.; Olympic Cagers Triumph', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 5 August 1948; 'American Cagers Win Again; Draw Uruguay in Tourney', *Lexington (Kentucky) Herald*, 7 August 1948; 'Kurland Paces Olympic Cagers to 63-28 Win', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 10 August 1948; Allison Danzig, 'United States Routs Mexico and Gains Finals', *New York Times*, 12 August 1948; Benjamin Welles, 'U.S. Basketball Squad Scores Easy Victory Over France', *New York Times*, 14 August 1948. Box score from the United States' initial preliminary round game against Switzerland was obtained from looking at an overall box score and subtracting the known numbers from other games. The United States, as a team, beat Switzerland 86-21, Czechoslovakia 53-28, Argentina 59-57, Egypt 66-28, and Peru 61-33.
- [88] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee*, 144.
- [89] 'Kurland Paces Olympic Cagers'; Danzig, 'United States Routs Mexico'. The United States won this game 71-40, as Barksdale and two of the other three at large players did not suit up.
- [90] 'U.S. Cagers Outclass France, 65-21, Win Olympic Crown', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 14 August 1948; Danzig, 'United States Routs Mexico'.
- [91] Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*; Bonk, 'Barksdale, One of a Kind'; Thomas, 'The First Black All-Star in the NBA'; Ward, 'On Second Thought', *Oakland Tribune*, 2 April 1948.
- [92] This daily publication is not to be confused with the *Oakland Post*, a black newspaper founded in the 1960s.
- [93] Earl Ruby, 'Rupp and Browning Agree On Three Cage Combinations To Use Against Olympic Foes', *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 30 July 1948 (University of Kentucky Library Archives).
- [94] Bushnell, *Report of the United States Olympic Committee 1948 Games*, 247. Bushnell explains that the US flag bearer should always be flanked by a woman and a Negro to show American egalitarianism. If this is the case, then it would have been plausible that Barksdale was only included on the basketball team to further the perception of equal opportunity.
- [95] It is unknown why Ray Lumpp, at-large player from New York University, who practiced with the Kentucky team, sat out of both the quarterfinal and semi-final games.
- [96] 'U.S. Cagers Outclass France'.
- [97] Murray Olderman, 'Between You "N" Me', *Playground Daily News*, 17 October 1968; <http://www.bigbluehistory.net>, accessed 27 September 2007.

- [98] Cindi John, 'Four Decades of Race Law', *BBC News Online*, 13 December 2005, accessed at www.bbc.co.uk on 24 June 2009.
- [99] Earl Ruby, 'English Fans Hound Kurland for Autographs', *The Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 6 August 1948. This article mentions Kurland being booed and jeered by fans because of his height.
- [100] Earl Ruby, 'Sightseeing Trip to Paris Next for Olympic Cage Kings', *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), 15 August 1948; Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'; 'Don Barksdale', *Ebony*, December 1949, pp. 31-34.
- [101] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for the lead on this information. For more on Marshall 'Major' Taylor, see Balf, *Major*, and Ritchie, *Major Taylor*.
- [102] 'Don Barksdale', *Ebony*, December 1949, pp. 31-34.
- [103] Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*; Stovall, *Paris Noir*.
- [104] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'.
- [105] Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'.
- [106] Arthur Daley, 'Sports of the Times: From Old Kaintuck', *New York Times*, 17 December 1948; <http://www.proquest.umi.com>, accessed 6 November 2007. Daley maintains that Rupp wields enough power and persuasion that he has his pick of the litter when it comes to recruits. It is also documented that Rupp often replied very angrily to Wildcat fans that questioned his judgment on certain issues such as race.
- [107] Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'.
- [108] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'.
- [109] Scott, *Adolph Rupp*, www.bigbluehistory.net.
- [110] These claims are made from a thorough study of sports articles in the *Chicago Defender*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Oklahoma Eagle*.
- [111] I speculate that Dillard, Coachman, et al. did not garner the fame that Robinson and Owens did because African Americans had already won medals in track and field. Robinson and Owens accomplished incredible individual feats in the face of explicit racial resistance.
- [112] *The Official Report of XV Olympiad*, 691.
- [113] Thomas, *They Cleared the Lane*, 141-145.
- [114] *XVI Olympiad*, 373.
- [115] Statistics and photos from these games can be found at www.usabasketball.com.
- [116] Costa, 'An Olympian's Oral History: Don Barksdale'; Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'. Although Barksdale never gives specifics about the offers his Olympic teammates received, internet research shows that most of his teammates did eventually play professionally. Oilers Bob Kurland and Lew Beck played out their careers as amateurs but, in all likelihood, received contract offers. Oiler Jesse Renick retired from playing after the Olympics and went on to coach the 66ers. 66er Gordon Carpenter played amateur ball for one more season and then got into coaching, much like Renick. Baylor's Jackie Robinson continued with his collegiate career after the Olympics and it is not known whether he ever played professionally.
- [117] Thomas, 'The First Black All-Star in the NBA'.
- [118] In *Baseball's Great Experiment*, Tygiel notes that during Jackie Robinson's first season in the Brooklyn Dodgers' organisation, he played for the Triple A Montreal Royals in the International League. Baltimore also had a team in this league, and it was the city in which Robinson received the harshest treatment from racist white fans.
- [119] Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'; Thomas, 'The First Black All-Star in the NBA'.
- [120] Bricker, 'Barksdale Led the Way'. In this article, Barksdale claims to have broken fourteen racial barriers, but does not elaborate on which ones.

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