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Stereotyping the Black Athlete:  
A look at how racism has persisted through the Civil Rights Movement.

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## Abstract:

This paper argues that even though Black athletes gained numerous opportunities and became a much more visible part of the sports world because of the 1960s Civil Rights movement in national sports magazines, these opportunities do not mean that the use of racist stereotypes of the American Black athlete decreased. Through a systematic analysis of two national sports magazines in the 1950's and the 1970's this paper highlights how a selection of racist terms and phrases persisted through the Civil Rights movement. This persistence illustrates how deeply in-grained racism is in American society. There were some stereotypes that were altered because of the Civil Rights movement and in some way lead to the end of the stereotypes use by the media. Sports are often viewed as representative of the best of our society; this paper documents that in the case of racism, it can also be representative of the worst.

## Introduction

This paper will examine how racial stereotypes of Black American's were conveyed in national sports magazines in the 1950's and 1970's. The goal is to explore whether the Civil Rights movement was successful in reducing racial stereotypes and moving the United States towards a more equitable and racially blind society. In order to do this properly one first must understand what a racial stereotype is. A "racial stereotype" can be broken down into two defining terms. According to the Oxford Dictionary, racism (of which racial is the objective form) is defined as "the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races"<sup>1</sup>. This paper argues that representations of African-Americans continued to reflect racial distinctions in sports journalism, a field of media that remains predominantly white. The second term is "stereotype", defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception."<sup>2</sup> The brain uses preconceptions to "help simplify a complex social environment by quickly and efficiently processing incoming stimuli based on the presences of a few relevant characteristics."<sup>3</sup>

A simple example would be if a person who is seen too far away to distinguish their gender, but it is clear that the individual has long hair. This bit of information allows the brain to

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<sup>1</sup> Online Oxford dictionary,  
[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50195905?query\\_type=word&queryword=racial&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&single=1&sort\\_type=alpha](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50195905?query_type=word&queryword=racial&first=1&max_to_show=10&single=1&sort_type=alpha) <accessed 5/11/2009>.

<sup>2</sup> Online Oxford dictionary,  
[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50237236?query\\_type=word&queryword=stereotype&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=1&search\\_id=s8dB-qQCKBa-16196&hilite=50237236](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50237236?query_type=word&queryword=stereotype&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=s8dB-qQCKBa-16196&hilite=50237236) <accessed>.  
5/11/2009>.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Campbell, *Race, Myth and the News*, 15.

use a set of stereotypical assumptions about gender to make the determination that the person was a woman. The brain is taking in that small amount of information and using a set of assumptions such as, it is most common to see woman with long hair, it then quickly decides that the person is likely a woman without really getting any additional information. The brain's interpretation can be wrong, but as long as these structures and mental constructs that the brain uses to make these types of stereotypical assumption are based on experiences and are often correct the brain will continue to use them.

What makes stereotypes so difficult to counter or avoid is that everyone has them. They are sub-conscious assumptions that individuals cannot control and often are not even aware of. The brain is looking for clear distinctions that it can use to simplify the incoming information. This is one reason why racial and sexual stereotypes are so common. It is also what makes stereotypes particularly damaging because with the assumptions come expectations for that specific group that is being stereotyped.

There are a number of traits that American society has identified as typical of Black Americans as a group when looking within itself today. These traits include being poor, hostile, uneducated, athletic and rhythmic.<sup>4</sup> Many of these stem from traits that were tied into the "Sambo" and "savage" images of the nineteenth century. These images portrayed the common Black American of the nineteenth century as impulsive, dangerous, animalistic, intellectually limited, lazy, and carefree.<sup>5</sup> When comparing the two lists it is clear that there are a number of ideas that are represented in both lists. This illustrates how ingrained the stereotypes are in American society as well as how little has changed over the past two hundred years. Part of the

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Campbell, *Race, Myth and the News*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, Patrick B. "The Anatomy of Scientific Racism: Racist Responses to Black Athletic Achievement," in *Sport and the color line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins. New York: Routledge. 2004.

reason that these stereotypes have persisted stems from the fact that stereotypes are largely subconscious; as a result, they can be passed on from generation to generation easily. It also allows the stereotypes to filter into other parts of society such as the media and sports culture which allows them to become more entrenched.

Stereotypes also frame what we expect from a specific group like African Americans. This group is then expected to fit into society's predetermined expectations. With expectations based on past occurrences there is little room for change. These stereotypes condition everyone involved, leading White Americans, for example, to expect Black athletes to carry guns and get into bar fights. It also conditions Blacks to live up to the model. Another example that also focuses on athletes can be drawn from going to college. For many Black athletes, college is the way to become a professional athlete and so they may never really plan to earn a degree and graduate. In contrast, white athletes are expected to go to college for the degree even if they are able to go on and become a professional athlete.

When society hears about athletes that fit these models, the societal stereotypes are reinforced; these occurrences often receive more prominent attention as a result. Tyler Hansborough illustrates this point very well. After being named the national player of the year, Tyler returned to school instead of declaring for and entering the National Basketball Association. Carmelo Anthony, Marcus Beasley, Calvin Johnson, and Rickie Weeks are all rising stars as professional athletes. They are also all Black athletes who left college before earning their degrees. Weeks and Johnson have both expressed the desire to go back and earn a degree, but it doesn't change the fact that they are feeding the societal stereotype. In contrast, an athlete that challenges these stereotypes is often overlooked by the media.

This paper argues that while the Civil Rights movement was successful in reducing discrimination and in the process changed how Sportswriters perceived and presented Black athletes the movement failed in any efforts to eliminate racism or the even the use of racial stereotypes. This is done through a contextual analysis of two national sports magazines from the selected eras on both sides of the movement. Again, the Civil Rights movement did create a change and because of that there was an increase in opportunities for Black athletes; however, the stereotypes about Black athletes remained. By looking at how writers used racist stereotypes when talking about Black athletes, it can be demonstrated that racist views of athletes did not end with the civil rights movement, even as the Civil Rights movement pushed to end racial discrimination. This proves that the increase in opportunities for Black athletes as a result of Civil Rights movement does not have the direct impact of ending the use of racist stereotypes in society. During Civil Rights movement many were able to challenge these of the stereotypes. The result of this process was that some stereotypes were altered because of the movement.

The paper will briefly review the impact that the Civil Rights Movement had on society and set the stage for the changes seen from the 1950s in comparison to the 1970s. Then using primary sources this paper will examine featured and in depth articles of both eras. This examination will look for the racist stereotypes identified from societal use. A systematic sample of articles in the sports magazines *The Sporting News* and *Sports Illustrated* during alternate years in the 1950s and 1970s will be used to identify the stereotypes that are applied to athletes. In sports magazines athletic stereotypes are used to describe all athletes regardless of their race. These stereotypes apply to all athletes because writers and readers see the athletes as first as athletes, and then continue to see other characteristics like race and gender. One example appears in *The Sporting News*, it discusses how a number of athletes, both White and Black have

united against the sportswriters. They are described collectively as athletes in this article.<sup>6</sup> The most prevalent stereotypes will be broken down into five categories: laziness, impulsiveness, dangerous, intellectually limited and the formal identification of the athlete as being “colored” or the use of other synonymous terms. The articles of the 1950s and 1970s were searched for the use of stereotypes that fit within the five categories that have been identified. Then this paper will review how the stereotypes appeared in these articles and if the stereotypes changed or were eliminated.

## Historiography

This paper looks at the impact that Civil Rights had on the perception of racism in sports. Racism is often linked closely to discrimination because people believe that as long as the opportunities are available that racism is not present. The paper draws on secondary sources from three different fields. Together these three areas frame the topic of research. Each area provides a particular perspective on the issue of sports and racial stereotypes. The three areas of secondary literature are sports and racism, journalism and racism, and racism in American society.

Racism in sports is the first area that was examined because it provides the closest connection to the topic of this paper. Racism in sports has been a topic that historians have been looking at since the 1920s, after Joe Jackson became the first Black heavy weight boxing champion of the world after defeating a white opponent. Then the topic began to grow after Jackie Robinson became the first Black to break into Major League Baseball in the 1940s. Then with the Civil

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Orr, “Must Writers Learn to Duck? Sensitive Players Waving Fists,” *The Sporting News*, April 24, 1954, 21.

Rights Movement there was a real explosion in research on the topic. The comparison of the 1950s and the decades preceded the 1950s with the 1970s and those decades that followed came out shortly after there was documentation and evidence to use. There has been a lot of work done on this topic, racism in sports, but most of the research that looks at magazine sources has been done with a quantitative approach looking more at the number of articles and their proportion to the number of Black athletes in sports. These findings reveal that there is often still an issue with the amount of coverage given to Black athletes. This relates to the idea that discrimination is the way to determine the presence of racism.

Some of the books from the area that have provided information are: *The classic: the history of the NCAA basketball championship, 1939-1978* by Ken Rappoport. It looks at the attitudes of society towards the NCAA basketball tournament which includes the Texas Western team. Texas Western was the first team to started five African Americans, something that people believed would lead to an undisciplined and leaderless team, resulting in a failed season.

Another of the books that was reviewed was *In Black and White: Race and Sports in America* by Kenneth Shropshire, 1996. *In Black and White* provided some ideas of where many of the stereotypes associated with Black athletes in America came from; one being slavery and the “Sambo” image addressed earlier and how it has changed over time. The book addresses how Black athletes were not seen as team players because they were lazy, or shameless self-promoters of their own individual talents. These were things that people thought would ruin teams like the Texas Western team. This helped reveal what the common stereotypes were in sports.

Racism in Journalism is the second subject that was used to frame the research because it is important to know and understand how racism is portrayed in the magazines, a form of media

that is crucial to this paper. Magazines are different from newspapers and books in their format which changes how magazines report their information. A magazine is a weekly publication so it has to focus on more than just stats and box scores because they are reported in newspapers that are printed daily. However, magazines, because of the limitations of their length, are not able to provide the depth which a book can. Therefore, Magazines must report more detail than a newspaper but still stick to basic facts without providing the depth of analysis a book can. As a result, the articles in magazines are a bit of a hybrid between the other two types of journalism.<sup>7</sup>

*Sports Illusion, Sports Reality* by Leonard Koppett argues that journalists have used racial stereotypes in the media. Koppett goes on to discuss some of the way that journalists have used stereotypes. This is important because it shows that what the paper is examining does exist and how these stereotypes can be found in the sports magazines. Koppett also provides his own reasons for why the stereotypes are used in the media.

*Race, Myth, and the News* by Chris Campbell is a book that looks at some of the myths that have surrounded race in the news. Many of these myths are based on some truth, but have been distorted in some way. This book also confirms that stereotypes are present in the media and provides another view on why the stereotypes are presented in journalism, something that Koppett's book addressed.

Racism in society is the third area examined it provided a broad perspective on the sources of racial stereotypes and racial discrimination seen in sports and the media. Initial societal feelings about Black came from the "Sambo" image associated with slavery that led to Blacks been seen as being big, dumb, lazy and carefree.<sup>8</sup> This provides the context for the use of stereotypes that were applied to Black athletes because they were Black. This really hurt Black athletes because

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard Koppett. *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality*. 125-127.

<sup>8</sup> Lee D. Baker. *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*.

it was undermined the expectation that all athletes struggle to win for the team. The societal stereotype set expectations that were contrary to the expectations society had for its athletes. Working as a team was a critical part of being a part of a sports franchise, so Blacks were not always given a chance to be a part of these teams. Many also thought that they would not be intelligent enough to understand the game well enough to play at a high level. One shift in ideas that has occurred in the research has been from Blacks being poor leaders and not having the leadership skills to the idea that white athletes were not willing to follow the Black athletes, which would explain why they were seen as such bad leaders. In these salutations it was not an issue of their skills, but the people they would be playing with putting up much of the resistance they faced. This shows how many societal factors were working against Black athletes because they were Black.

*From savage to Negro: anthropology and the construction of race, 1896-1954* by Lee D.

Baker is another book that helps show how society created the racial image of Blacks in America. Then it looks at how the overall society viewed the race as something outside itself. Blacks were separated and seen as different and inferior because of the savage image that came with them when they were bought over the ocean. Common stereotypical images that are drawn from this idea that Blacks were savages are that they tend to be more impulsive and even dangerous. These are two more characteristics or traits that are seen as detrimental to society. This lead these traits to be excluded from sports, as sports are a societal construct that is suppose represent and present to the society its greatest qualities. Sports embrace the ideals of hard work, teamwork, and dedication to overcome obstacles and achieve something that the typical individual cannot do alone.

In conclusion, there is not much that looks at how racist stereotypes changed in the media after the Civil Rights movement within the sources. Many see the increase in opportunity and the frequency that Black athletes are seen by the public as a sign that racism is declining, without looking to see if the racist attitudes persisted. When the increase in frequency can actually help to further in grain the numerous stereotypes associated with Black athletes if they appear in the articles that the public is reading. This is why this paper will look at how racist stereotypes have changed as a result of the Civil Rights movement.

## The Civil Rights movement

This is a brief overview of the Civil Rights movement to provide context for the research of this paper. The Civil Rights movement began the mid 1950s and technically ran through the mid 1970s. It started in 1954 when Brown vs. Board of Education ruled that the educational standard “separate but equal” was unconstitutional. The majority of the key events and legislation occurred in the 1960’s; for this reason, this paper will focus on the decades immediately before and after. It was in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed essentially ending all remaining Jim Crow laws. The 1960s were also known for the action that various groups were taking in an effort to attempt to end racial discrimination.

## The 1950s

The 1950s were a time when racist views against Blacks were still very strong. The Jim Crow laws were still in place and just beginning to be challenged in the courts. The Jim Crow

laws were based on the idea of separate but equal. The sports field had just begun to challenge that idea as it began to look for more talented players in the quest to win: the ultimate goal of any professional sport. Jackie Robinson had recently broken the major league baseball color barrier and was proving to be a great athlete, having won rookie of the year honors his first year and the Most Valuable Player award in his second season. His success was something that gave hope to many Black athletes as they hoped to get their chance to showcase their skills.

However there were still a number of stereotypes that surrounded the Black population. Many of these stereotypes were developed during slavery and were things that society thought would continue to prevent blacks from being successful. Until Jackie Robinson, all major Black athletes that had obtained some measurable success had only competed in individual sports. Boxing was one sport where Black athletes were competing since having been integrated at some level since the beginning of the 1900's. Another sport that allowed Black athletes to compete was track and field where Jesse Owens had remarkably triumphed at the Berlin Olympic Games in front of Adolf Hitler. Hitler's views of the Aryan race being superior were not secret and formed yet another obstacle that Owens had to overcome at the Olympic Games. Without any examples of good team players, media began to believe the stereotypes. The media then began to expect of Black athletes to be poor team players. This was reason enough for many teams to not give Black athletes the opportunities to succeed. In addition Black athletes were rare enough in sport in general that they were seen as novelties at times. Other Black athletes that found themselves in situations that were more difficult to get the chance to compete because those who were successful seen as novelties.

## Laziness

Many articles covering Black athletes in the 1950s quoted the athlete or trainers talking about days off.<sup>9</sup> In many cases the athletes are talking about taking some amount of time off to rest, recovery and usually relax a little. However, a pattern develops as the trainers tend to be against rest, telling the athlete that they need to be working out more to make sure they are as prepared as their opponent. Trainers who have worked with white boxers often tell their Black athlete how the white boxers did not take much time off. Sid Bell, Beau Jack's trainer, is quoted telling Beau that he needed to work out the next day in order to be ready for his next fight. This was a fight that was not even scheduled yet.<sup>10</sup> When it is consistently presented as the Black athlete wanting more time off to relax, it can be taken in one of two things; the trainers are pushing too hard or athletes are being lazy. Most of the writers were white took the side of the trainers were also white, because they are suppose to know how to push the athletes while still giving them enough time off to recover.

Another example that appeared in the 1950s was when covering Floyd Patterson sportswriter Paul O'Neil talks about how, "He was not a stupid boy – his IQ was average – but he virtually refused to talk. He also refused to learn – at 12 he could not read."<sup>11</sup> This example actually connects two different stereotypes. By emphasizing that his IQ was average and stating he was not stupid the author is reiterating the common societal stereotype that Blacks are intellectually limited and stupid. This illustrates how hard it really can be to fight stereotypes, because as O'Neil attempts to avoid using the societal stereotype of African Americans being

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Kane, "Who's Fightin' Who," *Sports Illustrated*, April 16, 1956, 46-49.

Martin Kane, "The Man the System Could Not Beat," *Sports Illustrated*, December 10, 1956, 8-14.

<sup>10</sup> Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, "Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don't Know Who," *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Paul O'Neil, "Meet the Next Heavyweight Champion," *Sports Illustrated*, January 30, 1956 19-21, 53-54.

less intelligent as a whole group he reinforces the stereotype of Black athletes being lazy. Both of these examples help reinforce the already in-grained stereotype of black athletes as lazy, as society so all African Americans. This was done in both *Sports Illustrated* and *The Sporting News*.

## Impulsiveness

Impulsiveness is something that is seen in many young athletes as the first become professional athletes. They often have a new large source of income and begin spending money. This appears to be a more common theme among young Black athletes who appear to buy anything and everything according to some of the articles that are published. In one article written by Joanne Jackson Bratton about Johnny Bratton for *Sports Illustrated* she uses the following quote to describe Johnny:

“I was just getting ready to graduate from high school, but Johnny had quit school and was on his way. He had a black Cadillac and he had traveled all over the country. A little later he gave the black Cadillac to his two brothers and bough a white Cadillac convertible for himself. Not many 18-year-old boys have Cadillacs that they earned themselves, but even that wasn’t big enough for Johnny. His white Cadillac had a record player built into the glove compartment and on the side of the car it said ‘Honey Boy’ in big gold letters.”<sup>12</sup>

It is common for many young athletes not just Black athletes to spend their money impulsively, the part of this article that gets the reader’s attention is the title, “Lament of a Fighter ‘The Wasted Years’”. The connection of the opening paragraphs and the title together explain how all the time Johnny spending his money doing whatever he wanted were wasted. His impulsiveness has left him with nothing that Johnny valued. Johnny was not the only Black

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<sup>12</sup> Joanne Jackson Bratton, “Lament For a Fighter: ‘The Wasted Year,’” *Sports Illustrated*, July 9 1956, 28.

athlete who was described as impulsive; there were many other that can be found to show the pattern.<sup>13</sup>

## Dangerous

In the 1950s the stereotype of Black athletes being dangerous primarily focuses around the threat of physical violence. This is something that was often expressed covertly; a large majority of the articles that feature Black athletes in the 1950s were covering boxing.<sup>14</sup> This is because boxing was one of the few sports that were open to Black athletes. Still, it does not change that the overall image tied to these athletes is being big black men throwing hooks and trying to knock his opponent unconscious.<sup>15</sup>

The sport of boxing was a dangerous one so anyone who was a professional boxer would be seen as being dangerous. Black boxers were often portrayed as more dangerous than white boxers; the articles typically focused more on knock out records than overall win-loss records. Another different was that their boxing style was described as being less graceful and more focused on inflicting damage to their opponent's body. This is a tendency that is not universal; some Black boxers were in fact described as very graceful. Floyd Patterson was a boxer that fit in both categories. One sports writer described him as someone who "fights with the expressionless eye and violent gracefulness of a large cat hunting its dinner."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, "Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don't Know Who," *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Other sources include: Paul O'Neil, "Meet the Next Heavyweight Champion," *Sports Illustrated*, January 30, 1956 19-21, 53-54.

Joanne Jackson Bratton, "Lament For a Fighter: 'The Wasted Year,'" *Sports Illustrated*, July 9 1956, 28-31, 60-64.

Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, "Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don't Know Who," *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 19.

Martin Kane, "Sugar Calhoun," *Sports Illustrated*, July 2, 1956, 58.

Martin Kane, "The Jackson-Patterson Fight" *Sports Illustrated*, June 4 1956, 32-34, 68.

Martin Kane, "The Fight that Changed Two Faces," *Sports Illustrated*, September 1, 1958. 12-13, 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> Paul O'Neil, "Meet the Next Heavyweight Champion," *Sports Illustrated*, January 30, 1956, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Paul O'Neil, "Meet the Next Heavyweight Champion," *Sports Illustrated*, January 30, 1956, 20.

## Intellectually Limited

In one of its first issues *Sports Illustrated* ran an article entitled, “MAYBE SOMEBODY DID ROB ME BUT I DON’T KNOW WHO” a direct quote from Beau Jack, the boxer the article featured. The article talked about how Beau had gotten his start in boxing and had become a successful fighter. He eventually “fought his way to a championship fight and should have a half a million”<sup>17</sup> dollars in prize money. Instead all he has is a small rundown road stand that he operates, shown in a picture and an annuity worth \$10,000. As the article continues it reveals how limited Jack’s education is through a variety of quotes that reveal his grammatical errors. A few examples include “I don’t yet know what was the matter with me. But Montgomery just seemed able to fight harder and better than me. So he won my title away from me”<sup>18</sup> and “I am not out of the Garden<sup>19</sup> yet that night also when Henry Armstrong himself comes to me.”<sup>20</sup> After reading these sentences a reader is going to believe Beau Jack has the education of an elementary student.

Even though Beau is a retired boxer that had what many would call a successful boxing career, he does not appear to be ready for anything more than the life of a professional boxer. His inability to speak and write properly will disadvantage him greatly when he looks for a job. That is part of the reason he runs his road stand, because it was something he learned he could do himself. The article then closes with the title quote, “If I was robbed, I don’t know who robbed

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<sup>17</sup> Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, “Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don’t Know Who,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 19.

<sup>18</sup> Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, “Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don’t Know Who,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 29.

<sup>19</sup> This makes reference to the Madison Square Garden arena in New York, known for hosting large sports events.

<sup>20</sup> Beau Jack as told to Charles Samuels, “Maybe Somebody Did Rob Me But I Don’t Know Who,” *Sports Illustrated*, November 29, 1954, 29.

me.” This quote shows the reader that Beau Jack did not learn to track his money or even determine if he was being paid fairly when he was boxing.

## Formal Distinction of Race

This was something that was very common in the 1950’s. When introducing an athlete the sportswriters would state his race specifically if he was not white like the sportswriter. This could be done in a number of ways. Phrases like “colored boy” and “young negro” appeared frequently in articles about Black athletes. In an article in *The Sporting News* that appeared in 1954 about Tom Alston a six-foot-five baseball player, it is said; “the young Negro towers six-foot-five”<sup>21</sup> and the manager said “we have a real ball player in this colored boy.”<sup>22</sup> Both quotes were placed within the first four paragraphs of the article leaving no doubt that Tom Alston was a Black athlete. Later in the article the writer goes on to use the terms “colored” and “negro” an additional three times in case it was not already clear to the reader.<sup>23</sup> This is just one example of how sportswriters made it clear that Black athletes were different from white athletes and in the process teaching racism to the readers<sup>24</sup>. Again racism is just the belief that all members of each race possess something that is specific to a single race.

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<sup>21</sup> Frederick G. Lieb, “Six-Foot-Five Tom Alston Gains Stature as Redbird,” *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1954, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick G. Lieb, “Six-Foot-Five Tom Alston Gains Stature as Redbird,” *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1954, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick G. Lieb, “Six-Foot-Five Tom Alston Gains Stature as Redbird,” *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1954, 19-20.

<sup>24</sup> For additional examples read: Paul O’Neil, “Meet the Next Heavyweight Champion” *Sports Illustrated*, January 30, 1956 19-21, 53-54.

Frederick G. Lieb, “Six-Foot-Five Tom Alston Gains Stature as Redbird,” *The Sporting News*, March 17, 1954, 19-20.

Jack Orr, “Crop of Newcomers regarded as Best Since the War,” *The Sporting News*, April 21, 1954, 5.

Ken Smith, “Speed Fails to Produce, Giants Add Power Man,” *The Sporting News*, May 24, 1950, 17.

Roger Birtwell, “Colored Players Clinching Strong Place in Game,” *The Sporting News*, February 6, 1952, 3.

## The 1970s

The 1970s brought in a new era following the Civil Rights movement. This new era offered many more opportunities for Black athletes as well as recognition for what they were achieving in sports. Sports were one area of society that had quickly expanded to include African Americans in comparison to other areas like business. This was something that was noticed by the media as Black athletes suddenly began to receive more and more coverage. This increased to the point where the coverage became disproportional to the actual number of Black athletes in sports. This resulted Black athletes appearing as the majority of athletes in many sports. However it cannot be assumed that racism had been eliminated just because Black athletes saw increase in opportunities that were available and were appearing in more and more articles. Some of the stereotypes, like laziness, that were seen in the 1950s had changed during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. This change did not mean that the stereotypes were gone. With stereotypes being subconscious thoughts that many sportswriters had grown up, stereotypes would be hard to eliminate completely. Additionally with the expansion in the number of sports articles many more people were being repetitively exposed to the racist stereotypes that made their way into the articles.

### Laziness

Laziness was not the same issue for Black athletes in the 1970s. This stereotype underwent a transformation during the Civil Rights movement. With the disproportional amount of articles on Black athletes in magazines, society began to believe that Black athletes had more

talent and used this to explain the rapid success of Black athletes in sports in the 1970s. Talent became the reason that Black athletes were successful in sports.<sup>25</sup> The hard work that was associated with past professional athletes was being twisted. Black athletes were still seen as lazy because it was thought that their talent carried them. They would only work hard enough to be successful and then coast. Society had decided not to believe that Black athletes worked as hard as the white athletes. White athletes now became workout warriors as they tried to retain positions on sports teams.

## Impulsiveness

This is another stereotype that is changed by the Civil Rights movement. Sportswriters attempt to avoid making racist comments in a number of articles in the 1970s. There is an increase in awareness which shows the impact that Civil Rights movement had, however the use of stereotypes was not eliminated. Shortly after the Civil Rights movement *Sports Illustrated* prints an article titled, "Bring on the Boomer" in the early 1970s. The article covers Robert Stanford Brown a football player nicknamed Boomer. In the opening paragraph the writer attempts to make it clear that Brown is not just another big dumb Black athlete despite his height and weight. Brown stands 6'5" and weighs nearly 300 pounds making him an intimidating figure. The writer instead highlights his education and talks about how Brown has earned his Master's in Education Administration. Sharnik, the writer includes how hard Brown has worked and how he has been one of the best players at his position for a number of years. All of this

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Kram, "Discord, Defied and Deified," *Sports Illustrated*, October 5, 1970, 26-33.

Dick Moore, "Negro Athletes Boosting Caliber of SWC Teams," *The Sporting News*, December 12, 1970, 8.

Murray Janoff, "Scholar Bradley 'Having Fun' in Tough NBA," *The Sporting News*, January 10, 1970, 5.

William Leggett, "Little Joe Makes Big Reds Go," *Sports Illustrated*, August 14, 1972. 22-23.

done without mentioning Brown's racial background, a clear change from what was seen commonly in the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> This is a good improvement other than the title, as "Boomer" can give the reader ideas of an incredible hulk like figure. Sharnik can be given a pass on this one because it the nickname that Brown uses.

However on the very next page the subtitle reads, "Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse" two phrases that would like make anyone think dangerous and impulsive.

Later, in the article Sharnik gives the reader an example of the impulsiveness and violent nature of Brown from a time he lost his cool.

"In 1966 the Eagles played St. Louis and Brown was match against Joe Robb, a wily journeyman defensive end. To compensate for the mismatch, the Cards<sup>27</sup> stunted all afternoon, and Brown kept getting caught in the confusion. Midway through the game. The Boomer was in a fury. After several holding penalties on Brown, Robb eluded him and dumped the quarterback. When he did it again, the Boomer tried to kick him."<sup>28</sup>

The things that readers are going to likely take away from the article are the title and subtitle describing Brown and the vivid description of Brown losing this temper in the heat of the moment. This is the information that the readers use to reinforce the established stereotypes.

## Dangerous

This was a stereotype that remained unchanged by Civil Rights movement, and in some ways may have been strength by the movement. The militancy that the public saw in some Black Power groups became something that intimidated them. Society struggled to separate the

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<sup>26</sup> Morton Sharnik, "Bring on the Boomer: Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse," *Sports Illustrated*. September 18, 1972, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Cards is used to refer to the Cardinals. In 1966 the two teams involved in this game were called the Philadelphia Eagles and the St. Louis Cardinals.

<sup>28</sup> Morton Sharnik, "Bring on the Boomer: Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse," *Sports Illustrated*. September 18, 1972, 84.

average Black American from the aggressive activist they had come to see in the 1960's. It also led society to expect Blacks Athletes to be more power hungry like the groups seen in the movement instead of previous decades.

The story of Curt Flood, a black baseball player who is using the courts to fight against being traded is told in an article published in *Sports Illustrated* in 1970. Past players had little power over this type of situation. Now Flood as a Black athlete was pushing for more power. Flood wanted the players to have more control over where they would even play. The article is presented from the view point of the new St. Louis manager Richie Allen and owner August Busch. The article stated that Allen was upset with the issue surrounding the player's demands. The writer reports Allen's view and tries to turn the public against the athletes. By stating that what the athletes and Flood in particular were being greedy, as if being a professional athlete and making a great deal of money was not enough. It is also reported that now the players are talking about going on strike, something that will really impact cardinal<sup>29</sup> baseball fans.<sup>30</sup>

The stereotype of "dangerous" can also be seen the same way it was in the 1950s. Black fighters again dominated the boxing ring.<sup>31</sup> Champion after champion appeared to a large black man. Boxing in the 1970's was headlined by names like Muhammad Ali, Joe Frazier and George Foreman, a group of athletes that are still talked about as some of the toughest boxers in history. They were commonly described as extremely aggressive and with some were further described as "looking for a fight" even outside of the ring.

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<sup>29</sup> The St. Louis baseball team had just been renamed the cardinals.

<sup>30</sup> William Leggett, "A Bird in Hand and a Burning Busch" *Sports Illustrated*, March 23, 1970, 18-22.

<sup>31</sup> Also read: Mark Kram, "On the Throne Behind the Power," *Sports Illustrated*, September 27, 1976.

Harvey Aronson, "Clancy's Gym is Danny's Turf," *Sports Illustrated*, March 30 1970, 40-44.

George Plimpton, "Man in the Mirror," *Sports Illustrated*, November 23, 1970, 81-85, 93-96, and 101-102.

Black athletes could also be conveyed as dangerous like “Boomer” Brown was in articles. Someone that had a short temper and when they lost their self-control become violent. “Bring on the Boomer” was published in the September 18<sup>th</sup> issue of *Sports Illustrated* in 1972. It features Robert Brown, standing 6’5” and 280 pounds. Anybody this size in the 1970’s would have been seen as intimidating. In the article Brown is quoted as he criticizes how his quarterbacks and coaches have called plays and then the writer notes that, “when the shame is great, even Brown will lose his cool.”<sup>32</sup> In another example the writer wrote, “Midway through the game, The Boomer was in a fury. After several holding penalties on Brown, Robb<sup>33</sup> eluded him and dumped the quarterback. When he did it again, the Boomer tried to kick him.”<sup>34</sup> This is what stands out from the article, a massive Black athlete with a short temper, one that cannot even remain under control in a game. This makes it easier for the reader to overlook the sections that develop Brown’s character. How he used football to earn his degree from the University of Nebraska and eventually his M. E. A. from Pennsylvania. How he has tried to instill values in his children to be great and how he has worked to give back to communities including his hometown.<sup>35</sup>

## Intellectually Limited

In sports magazines in the 1970s education is an issue that does not come up for Black athletes in the same way as the average Black American. This stereotype shifted to focuses more directly on the intelligence of the Black athlete. This was done because college sports became

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<sup>32</sup> Morton Sharnik, “Bring on the Boomer: Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse,” *Sports Illustrated*, September 18, 1972, 84.

<sup>33</sup> Joe Robb was a defensive lineman for the Philadelphia Eagles in 1966. He was lined up to play against Brown in the game. In the article he is described as a journeyman past his prime, but with experience.

<sup>34</sup> Morton Sharnik, “Bring on the Boomer: Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse,” *Sports Illustrated*, September 18, 1972, 84.

<sup>35</sup> Morton Sharnik, “Bring on the Boomer: Strong Impulses and a Short Fuse,” *Sports Illustrated*, September 18, 1972, 78-84, 87.

more important. College was a place for athletes to showcase their talent to professional scouts. Part of being a college athlete is going to college this meant the Black athletes had to make grades in addition to learning the playbook. This was difficult for many black athletes that did not receive a good high school education. Of those Black athletes that did receive scholarship not many took advantage of the opportunity to earn a college degree.<sup>36</sup> Brown, who got his degree and went on to earn his Masters degree, was seen as the exception. This was the case because a number of young athletes left college early to play professional sports. This is what reinforced the stereotype of limited intelligence. This stereotype was reworded to say that Black athletes only go to college to get into professional sports. This implies the Black athletes are not even interested in getting an education perhaps because they lack the intellect to complete the work required to earn a college degree. The mind creates this distortion and that is what is seen in the articles written by the sportswriters in the 1970s. Even as they make a more consciences effort toward equality there are a number of challenges that must be overcome.

## Formal Distinction of Race

The formal distinction of race is something that does appear to change as a result of the Civil Rights movement. In the 1970s, especially the late 1970s, it is no longer common for sportswriters to say that an athlete is a “negro” or a “colored boy”. There are a few examples of this lingering in the early 1970s. The article by Dick Moore is one example that appeared in *The Sporting News* that was titled, “Negro Athletes Boosting Caliber of SWC Teams.”<sup>37</sup> It is a major part of stereotyping that was removed by the time the Civil Rights movement concluded. The

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<sup>36</sup> Curry Kirkpatrick, “Get Da Shoodah, Said Faddah,” *Sports Illustrated*, February 21, 1972, 14-15.

Peter Carry, “Because a Steering Wheel Didn’t Tilt,” *Sports Illustrated*, February 28, 1972, 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> Dick Moore, “Negro Athletes Boosting Caliber of SWC Teams,” *The Sporting News*, December 12, 1970, 8.

racial background of the athlete was no longer forced upon the reader while they read sports articles. This change could be explained because it was something that stuck out more and was something that editors could point at as something at over stressed race in the article. The readers were still able to determine the racial background of an athlete even without it being placed at the forefront of the article through the other stereotypes associated with Black athletes.

## Conclusion

With stereotypes being subconscious thoughts they are something that can very easily filter into other parts of our society such as the media and sports cultures. Our stereotypes of Blacks in society often frame what we expect from them in other areas. They are expected to fit into the mind's predetermined expectations, and those are the things that are looked for to reassure the mind that it is right. This contributes to why the stereotypes of the 1950s persisted through the Civil Rights movement and into the 1970s. Sports writer's use of these stereotypes in the 1950s conditioned Americans to expect Black athletes to be aggressive, impulsive and to get into bar fights. It also led to the expectation that if offered a scholarship to go to college a Black athlete would accept the scholarship with the idea of becoming a professional and never really planning to graduate and earn their degree. While white athletes were expected to finish their degrees even if they went on to the professional level and be model citizens. When hearing about an athlete that fits these models expectations are reinforced and more in-depth cover and discussion tends to be presented. In contrast if there is an athlete that challenges these ideals there is much less cover. Hints of the stereotypes of the 1950s that persisted in the media through the Civil Rights movement can still be seen today. There was recently a Black athlete at

the University of Florida State who was awarded the Rhodes Scholarship, a very prestigious award, but coverage was minimal and ended after about a week. Whereas Adam “Pac man” Jones and all his legal troubles are headlines for months and discussed by so many people. This is further evidence that some of the stereotypes have been in-grained enough to persist more than fifty years after being seen in the media of the 1950s.

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