

**Discrimination and Diversity:  
The True Colors of University Athletics**

A Historical Background as Seen Through the Eyes of the Present  
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## I. Introduction

In 1968, *Sports Illustrated* printed an article featuring statements from the athletic director at the University of Texas at El Paso. His cold, disrespectful words pertaining to the subjugation of Black athletes were striking: “In general, the nigger athlete is a little hungrier, and we have been blessed with having some real outstanding ones. We think they’ve done a lot for us, and we think we’ve done a lot for them.”<sup>1</sup> Andiel Brown, a non-scholarship sophomore athlete who competes for the University of Oregon’s football team found the statement a sign of the times. “That’s just blatantly racist,” the Portland, Oregon native responded.<sup>2</sup> Brown, one of the many African American athletes to compete at the university level agrees that racism persists on the college campus, but has developed into a silent undercurrent of modern culture. Jermaine Randolph, a red shirt junior and offensive lineman expressed a different opinion of the *Sports Illustrated* quote. “I think what that means now is that African Americans had something to prove to white men because of the social stereotyping of the times. In order for them to do that, they had to work harder and thus appeared ‘hungry.’”<sup>3</sup> Randolph, who claims that he has experienced little discrimination at the University of Oregon campus, stated his objective as an athlete. “For us, performing heightens our position in society . . . in the past, Black people were performing for their dignity and respect.”<sup>4</sup> Diversity in university athletics has changed dramatically from the 1960’s to the present. Not only have rules, regulations, and academic accountability altered – the ratio of minority students has dramatically increased in sports collectives. Although many measures have attempted to

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Shropshire, Kenneth L. *In Black and White: Race and Sports in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1996. pg. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Interview. Andiel Brown. March 6, 2005. Eugene, Oregon. Online Interview.

<sup>3</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph. March 6, 2005. Eugene, Oregon. Personal Interview.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

ameliorate the existence of racial discrimination in college sports, current student athletes hold varying opinions about the role of race relations on campus.

## II. A Brief History of University Athletics

Fifteen men gather with well coiffed hair, ironed linen, and meticulously polished shoes. They are the Webfoots, the newly developed university football team, who has made headlines with their first game's success: "Football begins with 46-0 Victory in 1894."<sup>5</sup> University athletics began as a mild pastime to the rigors of academic pressure. Sports events emerged as a way to compete with local institutions, such as those in Corvallis and Puget Sound. Twelve years after the first football game, basketball developed as another male interest. According to the *Oregon Daily Emerald*, the university's student newspaper,

The early history of university basketball is not only shaky – it is also obscure. Students played the sport on campus as early as 1889, when the first boy's gymnasium was built, but all early competition was on a highly informal basis.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, athletics was not sponsored, nor was it funded by the university. Due to limited recruitment, undeveloped arenas, and other technicalities the future of such sports was unclear. In 1909, the men's basketball team lacked the necessary equipment to function as a group. "Because of highly inadequate gymnasium facilities and the lack of money the Oregon season was suspended and the program almost ended in total obscurity after only a few years of development."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Editorial. Special Edition. "A History of Athletics." *Oregon Daily Emerald*. Vol. 74 (1973). Section 1, pg. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Section 1, pg. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Section 1, pg. 4.

By 1910, the basketball team re-emerged with a seven man team that competed throughout the Pacific Northwest. The football department also made adjustments to their roster, increasing the squad to eighteen members - who in their team photo - appeared less refined and more muscularly developed than their predecessors.<sup>8</sup> In 1920, the University of Oregon team advanced to the Rose Bowl. Although they led in yardage and first downs, they were defeated 6-7. Due to the gradual improvements to university athletics, Oregon gained local and national attention, thus increasing sponsorship and support.

As the men's athletic department improved, pressure for women's sports increased. In 1899, an unidentified woman wrote "[n]ow that the foot-ball season is over and enthusiasm in manly sports is dominant, we co-eds may speak with some show of getting a hearing."<sup>9</sup> During the early twentieth century, women were given the opportunity to compete in unorganized sports, such as boxing, fencing, and basketball. Tennis also emerged as a university pastime, with a "Girl's Tennis Club" developing in 1909.<sup>10</sup> However, until the implementation of Title IX, women were less likely to be recognized in sports or to participate in a competitive nature.

Due to the constant evolution of collegiate sports, the University of Oregon created statements regarding their positions in funding, establishing, and maintaining sports programs. With the gradual development of increased participation, scholarship opportunities, and academic pressures for athletes, a revised report was published in May

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Section 1, pg. 5

<sup>9</sup> Article. "Women's Athletics at the University of Oregon Prior to 1920." Pertaining to a brief history of sports and recreation for female student athletes. Author unknown. Date Unknown. Coll. UA REF 1. Folder, "Athletics, A History." Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. pg. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pg., 2.

of 1969. The document contained the mission statement of its athletic department, which featured the sports of baseball, basketball, crew, golf, gymnastics, football, swimming, track and field, and wrestling.<sup>11</sup> The statement reads as follows:

The Athletic Department firmly believes in the principle that the members of its squads are attending the University of Oregon primarily to obtain the best education possible, and it urges its squad members to keep their educational goals well in mind.<sup>12</sup>

This claim, as well as topics such as scholarships and expectations were defined by the athletic department and approved by the administration. “No scholarships may be removed fro reasons of race, religion, color, creed, or for political or social activities.”<sup>13</sup> Although attempts to eradicate discrimination from the hierarchy of university sports was made, minority students still struggled through the grueling process of practice, class, and social pressure. Many students were unable to fulfill the task of integration into the Eugene society, let alone participate in a rigorous research university. In order to address these concerns, a Report of the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics to the Faculty was filed stating,

The relationship of intercollegiate athletic activities both now and in the long run, to the total educational program of the university and how we might best direct the athletic program in the light of this relationship are matters which need to be reviewed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Report. “Athletic Department.” Regarding the expectations and regulations of administration and student athletes at the University of Oregon. May 1969. Coll. UA REF 1. Folder, “Athletics, A History.” Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. pg. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pg. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Report. “Report of the Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics to the Faculty.” Regarding information of concern pertaining to university athletics.” March 4, 1964. Coll. UA REF 1. Folder, “Athletics, A History.” Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. pg. 2.

The importance of balancing sports with academics caused the university administration to re-examine the role the four-year athletic scholarship. President Clark believed that incoming college recruits should limit their first year of college play, in order to acclimate to the campus. On November 26, 1973, he issued a memorandum to the faculty stating that “[t]he athletic Director, the faculty representative, and I also opposed making freshman eligible for varsity competition, believing that they should have the first year to establish themselves academically.”<sup>15</sup> These and other motions have developed the University of Oregon athletic department into a highly competitive national force – both academically and athletically. Within years of rehabilitation, the division between competing athletically or performing academically have become mutually inclusive.

### **III. Role Models and Rule Breakers**

What defines a role model? Often athletes are featured as a model for performance and strength. To Jermaine Randolph, black athletes served as the impetus for his success as an athlete. With a full-athletic scholarship, the California native is able to attend an out-of-state university without having to worry about the drastic rise in tuition or the costs of mandatory fees. He believes that athletes who are respected on- and off-court are the most honorable. Of the many black athletes he admires, Randolph describes four of his favorites: Muhammad Ali, Jackie Joyner Kersey, Michael Jordan, and Clyde Drexler. “I like Ali, because he dominated the whole sport of boxing and was a political power. As for the others, they were all stellar athletes who overcame obstacles – the best in the world.” Like the traditional sports role models of the professional sports arena, the

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<sup>15</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph.

University of Oregon also featured many student athletes who broke barriers and excelled at their event or sport.

Two decades ago, an author from New York wrote to the University of Oregon Archives, requesting information about the history of the Black athletes at the College. His work tentatively titled “The History of the Afro-American Athlete” spurred Karen Stone, a staff member at the Archives, to compile a list including name, sport, position, and accomplishment. Although Stone claimed that the list was incomplete and featured limited information pertaining to female athletes, it united the success of Black athletes at the University of Oregon.

The first Black athletes featured in the document were Robert Robinson and Charles Williams, who were both quarterbacks in 1928.<sup>16</sup> According to the document compiled by Ms. Stone, Charles Williams was described by his coach John McEwan as “the toughest man I ever met.” The emergence of Blacks as quarterbacks during this time surprised Randolph. “It generally seems as if African American men were unable to have the prestigious positions. I’m only used to them as a linebacker, or lineman.”<sup>17</sup> Although minority athletes were scarce at the university, many of them achieved striking notoriety. In 1931, Joe Lillard competed for the University of Oregon’s football team, further becoming the first black student to play pro-football. However, his success soon turned sour when he was dropped from the Chicago Cardinals.

The black press claimed that Lillard had been "Too Good For His Own Good" and that the "color of his skin had driven him out of the National Football

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<sup>16</sup> List. “Black Athletes at the University of Oregon.” Regarding a request by Arthur R. Ashe, Jr., a writer, to compile a list of Black athletes for his new book regarding the subject by Karen Stone. Coll. UA REF 1. Folder, “Black Athletes at UO.” Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. pg, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph.

League." In 1935 Coach Schlissler conceded that an unwritten rule barred blacks from the game for their own protection. Lillard, he said, had been a victim of racism.<sup>18</sup>

Although Black athletes have faced numerous obstacles due to social racism, they have also prevailed in countless measures. Other examples include Charles "Brown Bomber" Patterson, who in 1936 was the first Black basketball player in the Pacific Northwest and Shelby Golden who won the 1941 Northern Division Gold Championship for golf.<sup>19</sup>

The 1960 Olympics was a pivotal time for Black athletes at the University of Oregon, of the seven athletes sent to the international games, two were African American: Henry Jerome (100 meters) and Otis Davis (400 meters). Davis eventually won the Gold medal for his event and returned to Eugene's "Track Town" as a hero.

According to a video documentary regarding Hayward Field,

from its humble origins in 1895, to its present status as the nations finest track in the running capital of the world, Hayward Field has been a clear sample of man's continual search for excellence, sportsmanship, endurance, and Olympic comradery.<sup>20</sup>

Like track and field, football created a strong outlet for athletic achievement by Black athletes. In 1963, Mel Renfro a university half-back became an All-American and was labeled by the university publication Duck Dope as "the greatest football player in the country." Born in Texas and attending the University of Oregon, Renfro furthered his career by signing with the Dallas Cowboys. For each of the ten seasons he played, he

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, Thomas G. "Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League, 1934-46." As quoted in the *Journal of Sports History*. Professional Football Researchers Association. <<http://www.footballresearch.com/articles/frpage.cfm?topic=byondpal>>.

<sup>19</sup> List. "Black Athletes." pg. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Media Craft Associates. *The Legends of Hayward Field*. Film. 1993.



was selected to compete in the League's Pro Bowl and played in four Super Bowl games. Upon retirement he was elected to the NFL Hall of Fame in the late 1990's.

Amad Reshad, the Emmy-Award winning sportscaster and former NFL all-pro wide receiver, played for the University of Oregon under the name Bobby Moore. Moore, was a two-time All-American and also received the University of Oregon Pioneer Award. Unlike Reshad and Renfro, one university football athlete decided that he would rather focus on political action for a career instead of pro-ball. Ray Eaglin, who participated in university athletics during the 1960's was a central member of Eugene Oregon's Black Panther movement. Larry Carter, a student of the University of Oregon and current faculty member recalls Eaglin driving to the local fish hatcheries and stealing trout that was harvested. When caught by the police and charged with theft, Eaglin claimed that he was only distributing the "people's fish."<sup>21</sup> Although seemingly in constant conflict with the authorities, Eaglin arose as a strong member of the Black community at the University of Oregon, who was unafraid of his self identity and racial barriers.

#### **IV. Appearance and Athletics**

Of the many standards applied to athletes regarding their overall performance the university, appearance was a heated topic during the 1960's. According to the Athletic Department's 1969 Code of Conduct, "[s]tudent athletes are expected to maintain good grooming and appearance when representing the University of Oregon." Upon reading this statement, Jermaine Randolph formed his own interpretation of the topic, limiting the factors of appearance to clothing. He stated that "there is a combination of expectations. When you are playing a sport you want to be comfortable, but you still have to respect

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<sup>21</sup> Interview. Larry Carter. February 9, 2005. University of Oregon. Personal Interview.

the rules. You have to dress up in shirts and ties for away games.” However, when asked if he would trim his beard, or cut the one-inch Afro to a more agreeable length, he was found it unbelievable that any student would be asked to alter his or her personal racial style, strongly stating that “we are individuals and we have our own rights.” In fact, the current freshman class at the University has become popular figures for their trademark hair, featuring braided “corn rows,” perfectly styled waves, and outlandish Afros. Their trademark style is the result of the dedication of their outspoken predecessors and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s.

Like the activism of footballer Ray Eaglin, Black student athletes during the late 60’s became overwhelmed in the struggle for equality and identity. According to David K. Wiggins, author of *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America*, sports became a forum for expression and reform.

Although never approaching the degree of activism evident among some members of their community, and not always prepared for the rigor or consequences of racial protest, black athletes in unprecedented numbers became participants in the civil rights struggle.<sup>22</sup>

At the University of Oregon, “the hair issue” became a striking example of racial tension on campus between athletes and the administration. The event “exploded early in December, on the day of the season’s first basketball game for the freshman squad, to be played at Clark College in Vancouver, Washington.”<sup>23</sup> Freshman basketball coach Frank Arnold seemed distraught with two of his team members, Bill Drake and Bob Moore who sported large, Afro-style hair. In accordance with the University’s Code of Conduct

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<sup>22</sup> Wiggins, David K. *Glory Bound: Black Athletes in a White America*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997. pg. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Metzler, Ken. *Confrontation, The Destruction of a College President*. Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1973. pg. 90.

regarding “appearance,” Coach Arnold demanded that both athletes cut their hair before their game in Washington. Incensed, the players appealed to the Faculty Committee on Intercollegiate Athletics. In response, President Johnson convened a meeting with Arnold, members of the Black Student Union, and 15 uninvited Black students who he welcomed as guests.<sup>24</sup> In an attempt to appease the concerns of both the athletic department and the students, Johnson suggested that another coach, Nick Jones would replace Arnold for the event.

Unlike the altercation at the University of Oregon, Oregon State University (OSU) suffered a racial discrimination incident to a larger extent. In 1969 Coach Dee Andros, lovingly known as “The Great Pumpkin” met by chance with Fred Milton on the university campus.

Andros, while obviously not realizing it at the time, sparked a campus uprising by telling Milton to shave off his mustache and Vandyke beard by the following Monday or be dismissed from the team.<sup>25</sup>

Milton refused his Coaches demand and was removed from the team. On February 24, the Black Student Union of OSU retaliated by saying that their membership, including athletes would boycott classes and athletic functions until a resolution was determined.<sup>26</sup> President Jenson publicly stated that “We believe that at Oregon State University we have kept the channels open. . . I pledge myself and I pledge to you to do what I can to see that there is no discrimination on this campus.”<sup>27</sup> However, a large schism emerged between the athletic department and that of the BSU. “Substantially outnumbered and with far fewer resources than their antagonists, the BSU realized the importance of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pg. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Wiggins, pg. 134.

<sup>26</sup> Wiggins, pg. 135.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

expanding their power base.”<sup>28</sup> This power base included the student presidents of both Oregon State and the University of Oregon, as well as the Black athletes of Oregon.

Dave Roberson, a football letterman from the University of Oregon, brought the house down when he announced that black athletes at Oregon had voted unanimously not to take part in athletic contests with Oregon state until the present conditions had been resolved. <sup>29</sup>

After heated debates and student struggle, the dispute was resolved. Although neither side was content with the final outcome, the Black students at Oregon State and Oregon proved that they were effective in uniting their resources and expressing their rights as African Americans. After the incident, Oregon State was drastically effected in their next year’s recruitment when, “[n]ot surprisingly, there were no black players in Antros’s 1969 recruiting class. Black high school football stars had been warned not to attend Oregon State and they heeded the advice.”<sup>30</sup> The persistent actions of the Black community facilitated reforms in other outlets of athletics and scholarship as well.

## **V. Black Student Demands**

When asked his perception of Black athletes at the University of Oregon during the 1960’s Larry Carter replied, they were “used as always.” This perception caused members of the Black Student Union to appeal to President Arthur Flemming in a document entitled “Grievances and Demands of Black Students on the University of

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<sup>28</sup> Wiggins, pg. 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Wiggins, pg. 145.

Oregon.”<sup>31</sup> Of the many grievances outlined by the organization, athletics was of major concern. Three main sub-points define the concern of minority students’ role in university athletics and are featured as follows:

- A) The inappropriate academic counseling given Black athletes by their coaches.
- B) The attitude of looking upon Black athletes as "Black Gladiators," and nothing more, by their coaches.
- C) The deficiency in the scholarships given Black athletes, which does not insure the completion of their education after their athletic eligibility has expired.<sup>32</sup>

Because no documentation has been found that justifies a resolution to these three points of concern, I presented these grievances to four current Black student athletes and asked them to expand on their perception of the topics.

Regarding the “inappropriate academic counseling” Jermaine Randolph believed that students are receiving ineffective methods of academic support. He responded that “I feel that we are one of the least represented students on campus. I do see a substantial increase in support, but I still feel underrepresented.”<sup>33</sup> The University of Oregon has taken great measures to assist students academically through their tutoring program. Each individual athlete is assigned an advisor and student tutors for each of their classes. Mandatory “study hall” hours are also recorded and term grades are monitored. In this aspect both Andiel Brown and Eric Mitchum, the university’s star Junior hurdler, support the assistance program.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Letter. “Grievances and Demands of Black Students on the University of Oregon.” Pertaining to necessary university reforms and diversification of campus by Johnny Holloway. April 8, 1968. Office of the President. Box 2. Division of Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403. pg, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pg. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph.

<sup>34</sup> Interview. Eric Mitchum. March 6, 2005. Eugene, Oregon. Online Interview.

In response to the idea of “Black Gladiators,” there was striking differences between the responses of scholarship and non-scholarship athletes. Both Randolph and Mitchum believed that athletes are being recognized for their success as a scholar and outside accomplishments as well as the triumphs in their sport. Mitchum believes that the good athletes receive more attention, because they are successfully progressing the athletic program. However, he feels that less-developed participants are given less attention, but “that is no different with the White athletes.” Brown and Wes Lloyd (also a member of the track team) feel more subjugated to the entire athletic system. Andiel Brown states that it is difficult to reach the coaches expectations. “Some of the coaches want more improvements.”<sup>35</sup> Lloyd focused less on the personal aspect of the athlete, but more on the institutional structure of the university. “People just want to get paid. They don’t care about the athlete.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Randolph, Brown, Mitchum, and Lloyd reflected upon the strengths and weaknesses of the current scholarship system. According to the Junior lineman Randolph, the university tries to “give a fair amount” of scholarships. He feels that student athletes who are provided tuition remission are reaping the benefits of an education that they might not have received without a sports career. However, he feels that the time commitment between school and sports conflicts with the traditional four-year college experience. “I can’t finish in four years,” he says. “Not even with Summer school.” Like Randolph, Eric Mitchum seemed supportive of the scholarship process. Due to recruitment and his financial assistance, he moved from Chicago to Eugene and is able to experience a different culture

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<sup>35</sup> Interview. Andiel Brown.

<sup>36</sup> Interview. Wes Lloyd. March 12, 2005. Eugene, Oregon. Online Interview.

Overall, the conditions at the University of Oregon have greatly improved since the 1960's. Although there may always be undercurrents of racism or aspects of inequality, the Oregon collegiate system is taking great measures to support their athletes and the diversity of the team.

## **VI. Conclusion: The Voices of the Present**

In a time where minority athletes outnumber their White teammates, the question arises: what role does diversity play in modern collegiate sports? According to Jermaine Randolph, race is equal on the 2005 football team. "Everybody is here to do a job." He believes that the reflection of a person is not based on race but on the "content of the character." When asked if he had anything to prove in terms of race, he stated that "sports are so diverse now, that it's common to have so many different cultures, there are so many talents in the world." In fact, his team made history by recruiting the first Sikh in college football history, Nuvraj Bassi. Due to the current tensions in the Middle East, it is Bassi who now feels racial discrimination. According to Randolph, while the team was touring El Paso for the 2004 Sun Bowl, a comedian named Freddy Soto used Bassi in a sketch, comparing his turban to that of Osama Bin Laden. "Not only did our team support Nuvraj, so did that of our rivals who were also present at the event."<sup>37</sup> Internal support within teams has become the new social structure for minority students. When asked if there was a strong Black community at the University of Oregon, Wes Lloyd chuckled, "No, but there is in the athletes."

As for racial communities on the University of Oregon campus, both Randolph and Brown agree that there is a lack of support groups and outlets for minority students.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph.

Brown, active in many extracurricular events states that, “I think that we are a lot more spread out than we should be. It is a shame when we go campus and feel nervous to speak to one another.”<sup>38</sup> However, all of those interviewed agree: conditions have improved and diversity is now accepted. “Seeing the demands from the Black Student Union was shocking,” Randolph responded. “I knew it was there, but I never gave it much thought.”<sup>39</sup> The actions by the students of the 1960’s have paved the way for future athletes to enjoy the competition of sports and the demands of academics without the concern and pressure of overt discrimination.

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<sup>38</sup> Interview. Andiel Brown.

<sup>39</sup> Interview. Jermaine Randolph.