City has brilliant history in turning out cage talent

Baltimore has spawned some great basketball talent over the years.

As in football and track, Morgan State College stands firmly in the upper echelon of the college cage game. Douglass, Carver and Dunbar have experienced periods of triumph in scholastic circles.

And on the semi - pro and professional level, there have been scores of outstanding individual performers.

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WHILE THE Athenian Big Five may be considered the forerunner of bigtime basketball in colored circles, the best - remembered local quints in all probability, are the Morgan aggregations of the late twenties and early thirties.

This was the period begun under the aegis of the late Charlie Drew and continued by Bill Taylor in the coaching chair.

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FULL BLOOM, however, came with the arrival of Eddie Hurt as coach and a contingent of brilliant young athletes headed by Ed (Lanky) Jones, Daniel (Pinky) Clark, Ernest (Cutie) Brown, Rap Wheatley, Jack Spencer, among others.

Hurt became heir to this fabulous vanguard of cage stars when he took over the Morgan reins in 1929.

The Bears of that era became the scourge of college quints throughout the East, and served as the lure for other fine basketball prospects from the scholastic ranks.

Lanky, now a New Jersey doctor, and his cohorts were later joined by the late William (Babe) Jones and Powell Sheffy.

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TWO OTHER brilliant Bear fives were to follow.

The contingent of Tom Conrad, Brutus Wilson, Otis Troupe, Skippy Gibson and Rufus Hackett won 47 straight games at one point.

They were succeeded by the aggregation of L a n Ford, Boo Brown, Cal Irvin, Dickie Burke and Tippy Day which went unbeaten in CIAA competition.

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AMONG THE better known Morgan stars of later years are Ernie Garrett, now a Philadelphia physician; the Washington brothers, George and Ernest, and Charlie Blaightful, homebred product.

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MEANWHILE, A clever assortment of independent stars had the city in a tizzy over their performances in the tiny gym at the Druid Hill YMCA.

Ev Butler, Bill Harris, Leonard Lyle, the late I k e Wright, Wes Hammond and Noonte Rice were persuaded by Fred Slade of Washington (DC) to pull away from the "Y" restrictions and hit the road to see what kind of cash they could pick up.

Thus was organized the Athenian Big Five, an organization which later acquired the services of Chippy Taylor, Scrappy Brown, Googies Poles, Chink Wyatt, Billy Baskerville and others.

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UTILIZING A Pennsylvania Avenue dancehall as their home court, the Athenians played host to most of the topline touring clubs of the day and held their own.

They enjoyed some success against the likes of the New York Renaissance, the South Philadelphia Hebrew Association (Sphas), the Original Celtics, Harlem Globetrotters, Pittsburgh Loendi, Chicago 40 Club, Atlantic City Vandals, etc.

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SHORTLY BEFORE organized pro basketball came on the scene in the shape of the Bullets, the city also served as home base for a semi - pro outfit called the Bruins.

This group included Sugar Cain, who had played with the Washington Bears on the professional level. Cain is now highly respected as basketball coach at Dunbar High School.

Among others on the Bruins roster were Billy Hall, Piggy Armistead, both of whom are native Baltimoreans now practicing medicine.

• • •

THEN CAME the Bullets to Baltimore.

Tdoay's fans are familiar with such names as Walt Bellamy, Gus Johnson, Jim Barnes, Wally Jones, Sihugo Green, Johnny Green, Wayne Hightower and others.

With the aid of these men, Baltimore twice came within reach of the National Basketball Association title, held for so long by the redoubtable Boston Celtics.

In 1963, the Bullets carried the great Los Angeles Lakers to seven games before losing the Western Division playoff. And last year, they again bowed in a crucial series with the Western champion Lakers.

LANKY JONES

Yokeley was born too soon

Laymond Yokeley is a bit more slow of foot now.

But then a man who has just marked his 60th birthday, isn't expected to be as quick of foot, and strong of arm as he was in the heyday of a career as a major league baseball pitcher.

The lasting impression one gets after visiting Yokeley's hoot black shop at 1528 Pennsylvania Ave. is that he was born too soon.

Oldtimers say, and they are supported by the record, had the former fireballing righthander been born at another time, he would be now enshrined in Cooperstown, N.Y., in the Hall of Fame.

According to the official history of the defunct Negro American and National Leagues, Yokley was one of its brightest stars for 15 years—1926 - 41.

Although major league baseball had not lifted its color barriers (Jackie Robinson broke the ice in 1947 with the then Brooklyn Dodgers.) Yokeley's All - Stars could be counted on to drub the Major League All-Stars each year in post - season exhibitions.

• • •

A VISITOR to his shop recently asked the former speedballer what was his best year during a career ended before the Jackie Robinson Era began.

"I don't remember the year, but I won 40 games and lost three," he said while searching his memory.

Often compared to the venerable Satchel Paige who made it to the majors in the twilight of his career, Yokeley, like Satch, has dueled the master's and ended up on the long end of the score.

He did so, according to the record, while hurling against some of the most prolific bat swingers either league could produce.

Is he sorry he missed the major league?

"Not really. The only thing I think about a lot is how easy it is today compared to what it was when we were playing in our leagues.

"When I was pitching we traveled in broken down buses and cars, traveled day and night and had to play before getting a chance to rest.

"Today's players travel by air, live in the best hotels and motels and eat the best foods. When they take the field they are well rested, fed, and are ready to play."

Despite limited conditions, less than ideal travel and hotel accommodations he and his colleagues still managed to "play some pretty good ball," Yokeley says.

Reflecting on the lot of major leaguers today, he added:

"Man, if this had been the case when I was playing, I probably could have won 30 or 40 games a year."

The Baltimore Elite Giants, Homestead Grays, Black Sox, Kansas City Monarchs, and other Yokeley - era teams, today are strange names to many fans, were vital stepping stones which led to the exciting entrance of Jackie Robinson and a steady procession of stellar stars of the diamond.

Despite the lack of regret on his part, it is difficult to resist the urge to wonder what would have happened to Yokley — an adopted Baltimore son — had he not been born too soon.

Influence on tennis

If there are any "Baltimore, USA" readers who have felt pride in the accomplishments colored athletes have made in tennis, they may be reminded that this city played a major role in developing the game among tan players.

The American Tennis Association, which produced former world champion Althea Gibson and Davis Cup star Arthur Ashe, was organized at the behest of several local players, and the first national championships were staged at Druid Hill Park.

THE LATE Drs. B. M. Rhetta, F. J. Cardozo, William H. Wright and H. Stanton McCard headed up a move by their Monumental Tennis Club to organize a national net body.

These men worked along with Ralph V. Cook, P. D. Pennington, J. G. McRae, Ralph Reckling and Lucy D. Slowe, who later became dean of women at Howard University.

THEY WORKED out a merger with Washington's (D.C.) Walker Tennis Club, Philadelphia's Chatauqua Association, New York's Flushing Club and Chicago's Windy City Association and formed the ATA in 1916.

In August of 1917, the Monumental played host to the first national tournament at Druid Hill.

WHILE THE names of Dr. Rhetta and the Reverend W. W. Walker of Philadelphia are synonymous with tennis development among colored players, there are many who insist the greatest influence was wielded by Baltimore's own Dr. McCard.

From the efforts of these men, Miss Gibson's dreams at Wimbledon and Forest Hills came into later fruition. And the Ashe name became emblazoned on the world scene.

AMONG THE more recent names to be remembered in the Baltimore tennis story are:

Reggie Watts, the late William (Babe) Jones, Junky Wood, Doug Henderson, Warren Weaver, George Moore, Nellie Briscoe, the late Wahseola Mail and Daisy Jones.

And of recent vintage are the likes of City College ace Clyde Jeffers, Ann Koger, Sandra Pennington, Toni Harker, all products of the ATA's youth development program.

This same program was the source from which the Gibson and Ashe careers were sprung.

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LEONARD (Duck) GIBSON

Duck Gibson: maker of men

In any chronology dealing with the story of Baltimore sports, the late Leonard (Duck) Gibson must be recognized as a "maker of men."

Scores of successful personalities in the city and elsewhere can trace their roots to Douglass High School, where they received guidance from the longtime all-sports coach and athletic director.

• • •

TOPPING THE list, perhaps, is Federal Solicitor General Thurgood Marshall, who was an outstanding swimmer under Mr. Gibson's tutelage.

William (Mack) Payne, who currently is on leave of absence from the Douglass directorship, succeeded his illustrious teacher when Mr. Gibson was retired in 1960.

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AMONG OTHERS who felt the influence of the revered Duck are Judge Robert Watts and former Judge John Hargrove, educators Ernest (Cutie) Brown, Powell Sheffy, John (Junky) Wood, Reggie Watts and Charles Brown.

Doctors Billy Hall and Piggy Armistead, insurance broker Rufus Hackett, Police Boys Club official Dickie Burke and recreation supervisor John Faulkner.

• • •

ALSO Doug Henderson, Warren Weaver, Box Harris, Madison Garrison, R a p Wheatley and Art Bragg, the last named a California probation officer.

These are a mere handful of former Douglass athletes who have carved their niche with the help of training received at the hands of the man known affectionately by so many as "The Duck."

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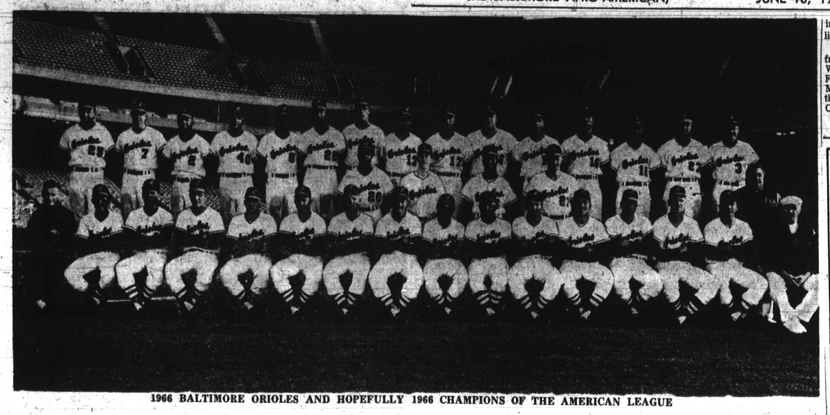

1966 BALTIMORE ORIOLES AND HOPEFULLY 1966 CHAMPIONS OF THE AMERICAN LEAGUE

Oldsters see Frank Robinson as 'Johnny-Come-Lately'

If today's youngsters one day hear some of their elders shuff off Frank Robinson as "a mere Johnny - come-lately," they should be reminded that it is no intention of the oldtimers to be irreverent.

Frank, who came to the Orioles last winter and since has helped to weave dreams of a pennant in Baltimore, is proving to be tremendous ball player — easily the best tan performer the local American League Club has ever possessed.

• • •

BUT THERE are those who insist that older Baltimore saw quite a few colored diamonders who were almost as good, if not as good, as Frankie Boy. And Brooks, too, and Boog and Steve and Stu and Sam.

They played with and against the now defunct Baltimore Elite Gaints — and before them, the even older Baltimore Black Sox.

• • •

IN THE "halcyon" days of Jim Crow — before Jackie Robinson and the Dodgers — the Negro National and Negro American baseball leagues displayed some outstanding colored talent. And right up along with the top aggregations and athletes were the Sox of the twenties and the Elites of the thirties and forties.

As a matter of fact, the Elite Giants brought colored championships to Baltimore. They won a title in 1939, their first year in old Bustle Field and repeated ten years later in 1949, when they went on to win what amounted to the world championship, of colored baseball by beating the great Homestead Grays in their own version of the World Series.

• • •

ROY CAMPANELLA, who was a 3-time winner of the most valuable player award in the National League, was a member of the 1939 club. And Junior Gilliam and Joe Black were in the lineup of the championship team of 1949.

Gilliam and Black later won rookie-of-the-year honors in the majors, and the former last year became the first tan player-coach in the history of organized baseball, as a member of the world champion Los Angeles Dodgers.

• • •

ALSO ON the Elites of the late thirties and early forties were such colorful personalities as Jim West, Sammy Hughes, Bill Hoskins, Felton S. Snow, Henry Kimbro, Bill Wright, Andy Porter, Jonas Gaines, Bill Byrd and Bizz Mackey.

Kimbro, Byrd and Snow remained around long enough to be assets to the 1949 winners. They were joined by a host of names which conjure memories for the older residents.

These included: Pee Wee Butts, George Scales, Bob Romby, Bill Lockett, Eggie Clark, Bob Robinson, Ed Finney, Johnny Robinson, Leon Day, Johnny Washington and Hoss Walker.

• • •

BECAUSE of these teams, elder Baltimoreans had the opportunity to see some of the all-time greats of the game perform. And witnesses will attest that baseball was the bigger loser for having withheld recognition of their ability until it was forced, by Branch Rickey, to do so.

This was the era of Jackie Robinson, who earned Hall of Fame stature; Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson, who should have, and scores of others.

To name a few: Josh Gibson, Oscar Charleston, John Henry Lloyd, Martin Dihigo, Blue Perez, Cool Papa Bell, Buck Leonard, Sam Bankhead, Howard Easterling, Frank Duncan, Double-Duty Radcliffe and Vic Harris.

• • •

EARLIER, there had been a fine assortment of ball players on exhibition at an enlarged backyard in Westport. That is where the old black Sox cavorted with such ardnosed athletes as Layhon Yokely, Crush Holloway, Googles Poles, Scrappy Brown and Dick Lundy in ero roles.

Yokely and Holloway still reside here and are conducting their own business establishments.

Others to be remembered from the era are Snowboat Ware, Mack Eggleston, Frank Warfield, Country Mason and Leffy Smith. Also the Taylor brothers — Ben, C. I. and Candy Jim.

• • •

AND EARLIER still, a Black Sox contingent that starred Frank (Doc) Sykes, Blaney Hall and Bun Hayes supplied thrills for the strawhat set of Southwest Baltimore.

Doc Sykes, who was famed as a spitball pitcher while an undergraduate at Howard University, is now a Baltimore dentist.

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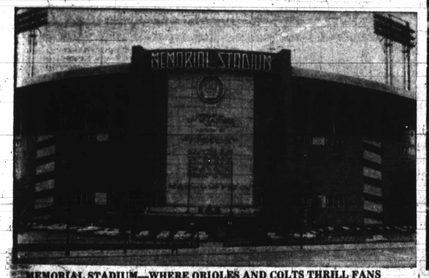
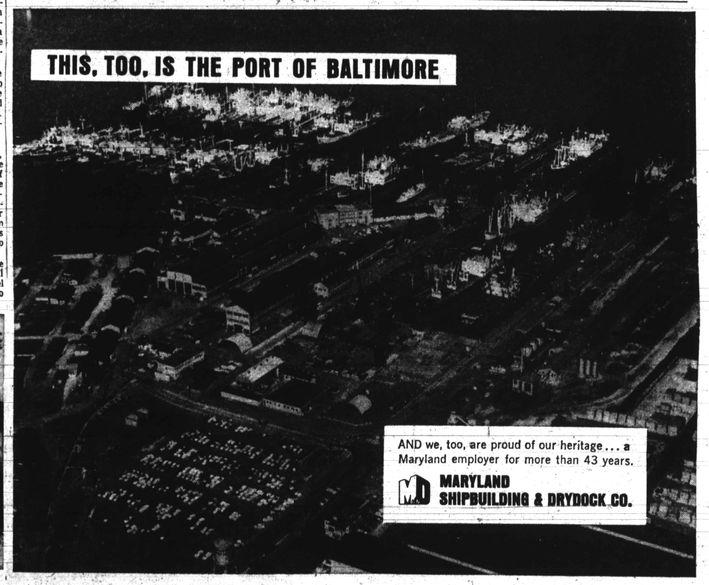


MEMORIAL STADIUM—WHERE ORIOLES AND COLTS THRILL FANS



CRUSH HOLLOWAY
JOHN BECKWTH

Two mainstays of Baltimore Black Sox team of late twenties and early thirties. Holloway, currently proprietor of a local tailor shop, spent several years after retirement as a player umpiring in Negro National League.

Members of the Western Police Community Relations Committee packed 4,000 21-inch red Harlon stockings for needy children Christmas of 1965. With the aid of 125 students from Morgan, Coppin, Lake high schools and 10 elementary schools, the big job was done in two hours.

• • •

St. Johns AME Church was organized in 1855. The first location was on the corner of Pratter and Orchard Sts. where members made three houses into one to form the church.

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St. Johns AME Church was destroyed by fire on March 3, 1945. The church was rebuilt at a cost of $175,000, mortgaged and paid for by 1948.

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Trinity AME Church purchased the church at Biddle St. and Linden Ave. in 1881.

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