13 Is A Lucky Number

There are 13 tan players in big league basketball. All eight of the NBA teams have been integrated at one time or another. At the present time, seven of the eight teams have colored players on their rosters.

By Sam Lacy

Unlike baseball and football, big league basketball is 100 percent for integration.

The major leagues of baseball have two teams, the Boston Red Sox and Detroit Tigers, which never have taken the field for a regular season game with a colored player in the lineup.

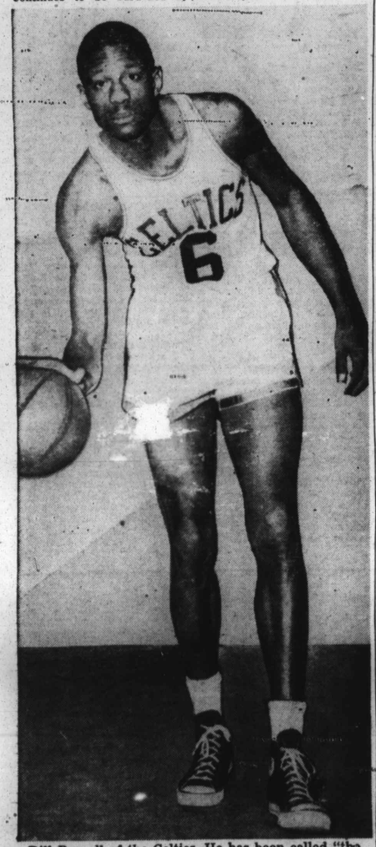
However, the Tigers recently obtained infielder Ossie Virgil in a trade with the New York Giants, leaving the Red Sox as the only non-integrated club in the National and American leagues.

The National Football League, by the same token, continues to be burdened by the Washington Redskins as the lone citadel of lily-whiteism on the pro gridiron.

All eight teams in the National Basketball Association have been integrated at one time or another, and seven of the eight have tan players in the regular lineup today.

The St. Louis Hawks have an all-white roster at the moment, but as recently as last year the Mound City quint had Willie Naulls and Jesse Arnelle.

Willie, now with New York, played 16 games before being traded by the Hawks. Jesse saw service in 32 games while there prior to a trade with Fort Wayne.



Bill Russell of the Celtics. He has been called "the greatest defensive center the game has ever known."

Today, there are 13 tan athletes on the rosters of the eight NBA clubs. They represent 14.7 percent of the league's player personnel as against 11 percent in pro football and 8.8 percent in big league baseball.

Bill Russell is easily the most publicized of the lot. In fact, Bill shares with teammate Bob Cousy and the St. Louis Hawks' Bob Pettit the distinction of being the league's best-known athlete.

The former San Francisco All-American is credited by NBA statistics with attracting 78,549 cash customers in his first swing around the circuit last year.

This was the highest one-trip attendance total in the history of pro basketball.

Veteran writers, officials and observers rate the 24-year-old, 6-foot-10 star "the greatest defensive center the game has ever known."

Russell proved it last year—his first in the pro loop—by grabbing an average of 19.6 rebounds per game, an all-time record.

* * *

THOSE STUDENTS of the game who have seen Bill in action hasten to defend him against any suggestion that he lures people because he's a freak — a sort of modern day giant whose superiority lies in his ability to tower over the opposition.

Russell is a big fellow in our every day world, but at 6:10 in the pro basketball circuit he is just one of the crowd.

Wally Dukes stands an even 7 feet. Ray Felix is an inch taller than Bill at 6:11.

So, it is obvious they grow 'em big in the play-for-pay loop, and that his height is not what makes Bill unusual.

* * *

RUSSELL'S BRILLIANCE is couched in his keen sense of timing, his tremendous leg drive and his surprising speed.

Timing is the most important asset for retrieving the ball off the backboard, the art referred to as rebounding.

No matter how tall a player may be, he has to jump at just the right moment if he is to recover a ball in the wild scramble beneath the basket.

Russell's reputation as a defensive genius stems primarily from his uncanny knack of blocking opposition shots.

This he does with unerring accuracy close to the goal, and quite often with discouraging effectiveness away from the basket.

He uses his disarming speed to position himself and his leg drive to perform the blocking feat.

A reader will better understand the Russell prowess in this respect, when it is disclosed the great Celtic sophomore has high jumped 6 feet, 9¼ inches!

* * *

JONES, 24-year-old roommate of Russell with the Celtics, had to possess something special to be the only rookie to break into the world champions' lineup this year.

Sad Sam was the No. 1 draft choice of the Boston club last May, no doubt impressing owner Walter Brown and coach Red Auerbach with his fine record at North Carolina College.

In his four years with the CIAA's high-flying Eagles, Jones tallied 1,710 points for a 17.7 per game average.

Stokes and Ricketts were both All-America selections while in college at St. Francis and Duquesne, respectively. Maurice is 24, Dick is a year younger.

Stokes set a league record for rebounding last year with 1,256 to eclipse the previous high of 1,164 by Bob Pettit.

Aside from winning "rookie" honors in 1956, Big Mo, as his teammates call him, starred for the West in the annual East-West All-Star game in 1957, and was named to the NBA All-Star team at season's end.

AS THE season reached its halfway mark Cincinnati Coach Bob Wanzer rated Ricketts "our best defensive player."

An accomplished rebounder—he was second only to Stokes last year — Dick is a fine playmaker and considered all over the circuit as a "dangerous" man with the set shot from outside.

Lloyd, at 29, is one of the two "oldtimers" among the tan pros.

"The Cat," as he is known by teammates — because of his speed and grace — is in his sixth season, all with the Nats.

Earl is a graduate of West Virginia State College, and stands 6 feet, 6 inches.

* * *

HOPKINS WAS a "sleeper" among the Nats' draft choices in 1956, being plucked from the graduating class of virtually unheard-of Grambling University in Louisana.

One of the fastest big (6-8) men in the NBA, "Little Abner," as he is called has a fine two-handed jump shot and a knack of playing the boards.

At 22, Hopkins is looked upon as one of the league's most promising stars of the future.

* * *

TWO TANSTERS — Naulls and Felix — figure prominently in the plans of the New York Knickerbockers. Both were All-Americans during their college days.

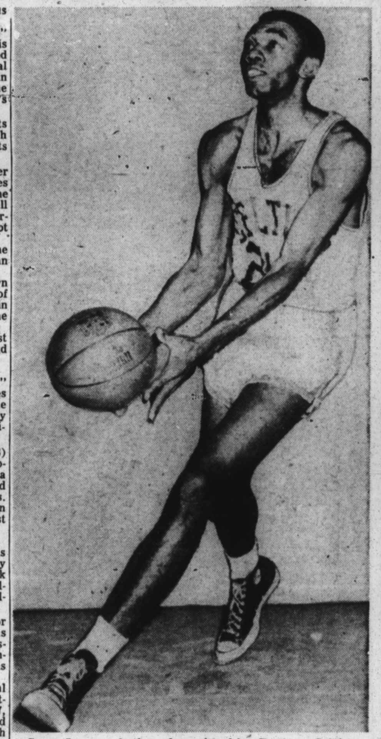
Willie, 23, is very fast for his 6 feet, 6½ inches. He was the first player in UCLA history to top 600 points in a single season, bagging 661 in his senior year.

At the Holiday Festival tournament in 1955, Naulls outscored Russell, 71 points to 67 for three tourney games and 19-17 in the playoff, though Russell and his San Francisco five won the title.

Felix is 27, stands 6-11 and was an All-America pick from Long Island University in 1953.

Ray is in his fourth season with the Knicks and fifth in the NBA, having played a year with the ill-fated Baltimore Bullets. He was voted top rookie honors when he broke in with the Bullets.

Fleming is a third year man with the Lakers. Ingram is in his first season at Minneapolis.



Sam Jones of the championship Boston Celtics team. He is the only rookie to break into the big time this season.

If you are one of those persons who sound off about the lack of class in basketball as played in the predominantly colored colleges, take care lest you show your ignorance.

The ridicule which so often accompanies mention of games in the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, Midwestern AA, etc., is grossly unfair.

Proof is to be found in the fact that, of 13 tan players in the NBA (pro cage league), six are from colleges regarded as "colored schools" before the integration edict.

Thirty-three-year-old Nat (Sweetwater) Clifton is the dean of the group. Now in his seventh year, he is a product of Xavier University, New Orleans.

Earl Lloyd, who hails from West Virginia State, is next oldest of the six. He's in his sixth season with the Syracuse Nats.

The other four are in their rookie campaigns. They are:

Sam Jones of the world champion Boston Celtics, from North Carolina College; Woody Saulsberry of the Philadelphia Warriors, from Texas Southern;

Bob Hopkins of Syracuse, from Grambling University, and McCoy Ingram of the Minneapolis Lakers, from Jackson College, Mississippi.—SAM LACY.

Ed Fleming, 24, stands 6-feet-3, and McCoy is 26, at 6-feet-8.

* * *

INGRAM, whose first name McCoy makes him a natural for the nickname "Killer," caught the eyes of Laker scouts with a brilliant career performance in the armed forces.

At Jackson College, as a freshman, he broke into an otherwise all-senior lineup and became a fixture the remainder of his collegiate days.

Immediately, he was discharged in January, 1958. Ingram was signed to a Minneapolis contract.

* * *

OLD MAN of the tan contingent is Nat Clifton, who acquired the odd tag of "Sweetwater" in his early days with the touring Renaissance and Harlem Globetrotter quints, because of his insatiable taste for soda pop.

Nat is 33 years old, stands 6-feet-6, and is known around the pro circuit as quiet fury.

Because of his tremendous strength, Clifton rarely comes out second best in the rebound scrambles. And, typical of men who rile slowly, Nat is a veritable demon when he thinks an opposing player is encroaching on his nature.

Four fights in seven years in the NBA have all been Clifton wins.

AFRO Magazine Section

THE AFRO-AMERICAN, MARCH 29, 1958 PAGE 1



WILLIE MAYS

The Greatest

● Ty Cobb, regarded by many as the greatest player who ever lived, says of Willie: **"He's the only man in baseball I'd pay to see play."**

● Leo Durocher, who played on the New York Yankees of Babe Ruth & Co., contends: **"Willie's the best ball player I ever saw in my life."**

● Captain Pee Wee Reese of the Giants' most bitter rivals, the Los Angeles Dodgers, admits: **"I don't see the American League, but I do see the National, Willie's the best over here; he has no equal!"**

● Game-of-the-day broadcaster Rex Barney, who sees all the teams and players each summer, declares: **"Willie's No. 1. Try naming one other player and you'll find that there's at least one thing he does that Mays does better."**

By Sam Lacy

Ted Williams will earn $130,000 for playing baseball this summer. Stan Musial will will receive $100,000, and Mickey Mantle will get an estimated $72,000.

But the best ball player of all won't make as much as any of them.

In fact, the San Francisco Giants will pay Willie Mays only half of what Williams will get from the Boston Red Sox.

Mays is signed to a contract to perform his wondrous deeds for $65,000.

* * *

FEW PEOPLE will begrudge Williams, Musial and Mantle their fabulous salaries, least of all this writer.

Yet it seems only the natural thing to wonder about the differential, and in doing so, to examine the relative merits of the players in question.

First, however, it should be thoroughly understood that Williams, Musial and Mantle are recognized here as great ball players.

Ted and Stan have established themselves as two of the finest hitters in the long history of baseball — ranking, and admirably so, with the likes of Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Rogers Hornsby, Hans Wagner, etc.

But no one can deny that, except for their work with the bat, neither Williams nor Musial possesses more than ordinary talents elsewhere on the diamond.

Both are run-of-the-mill as fielders, slow afoot and, actually, defense liabilities in their throwing arms.

* * *

MANTLE, on the other hand, gives the New York Yankees excellent hitting, tremendous speed and throwing power. He is undoubtedly the nearest rival Mays has as the whole ball player.

It is around these two 26-year-old centerfielders that opinion consensus gathers whenever baseball experts become involved in discussion of the best player in the game.

This the experts are want to do along about now, in spring training bases from Miami, Fla., to Phoenix, Arizona.

The major league training camp is the annual meeting place of a wide variety of baseball minds.

It is here that leading writers of the nation assemble, and it is in the spring camp of the big league club that many of the oldtime greats of the game are to be found touching up on their nostalgia.

* * *

OLDTIMERS, veteran reporters, umpires, club officials and players spend countless hours — sharing experiences, anecdotes and opinions.

Invariably, the talk gradually reaches a head on the subject of the best ball player of today. And invariably, the candidates are quickly narrowed down to two names: Mays and Mantle. Or Mantle and Mays.

More narrowing and only one is left: Mays.

* * *

THE SPORTING NEWS, which is rightfully proud of its designation as the Bible of Baseball, conducted a recent poll to determine the "most exciting" player in the game.

Asked to vote in the poll were the top writers covering the 16 major league teams, and Willie was the winner in a landslide.

Twelve of the 16 named Mays first. Typical of the comments accompanying their ballots were those by Dan Daniel of New York, Shirley Povich of Washington, and Edgar Munzel of Chicago.

Daniel, whose writings in the World Telegram and Sun, have consistently been pro - Joe DiMaggio, pro-Tommy Henrich, pro-Casey Stengel and, in general, pro-New York Yankees, was expected to follow the pattern and be pro-Mantle.

But here's what Dan said: "The most exciting ball player of today, the most exciting in years, is Willie Mays.

"Because he is so spectacular," Daniel continued, "Willie is accused of being a 'showboat.' But what would be showboat tactics in others is just a case of doing what comes natural for the versatile Mays."

* * *

POVICH, two-time winner of the National Headliners Award for sports writing, wrote: "The man who can do more things better and in more spectacular is accused of being a 'showmanner than any other player is Willie Mays.

"Ted Williams is the most exciting at bat, Mickey Mantle can be when he hits the long ball or drags a bunt, Minnie Minoso has a sort of helter-skelter excitement about his play.

"But for the almost-guaranteed exciting performer whether

(Continued on Page 2)

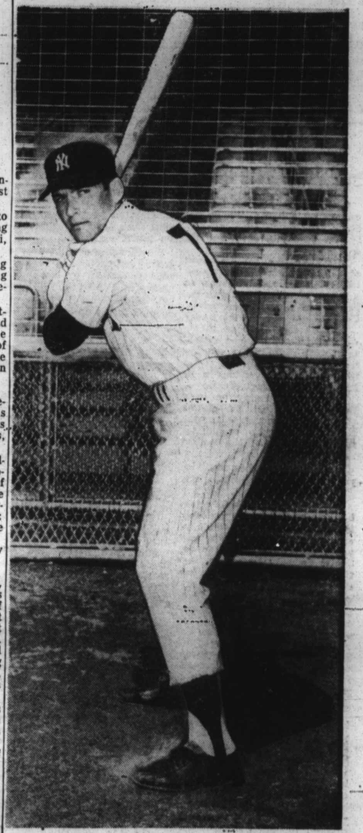
Sightseers Sight

The other afternoon a Royal Gray Line bus pulled off the Expressway into Portola Drive in San Francisco, and came to a stop in front of the house at 175.

The driver then went into a spiel about the young man who resides there, emphasizing that this is the greatest baseball player the Bay Area has ever boasted.

Although the conductor, in his zeal, may have forgotten that San Francisco had been (and still is) the home of the famous Joe DiMaggio and of the great Lefty O'Doul, a big star of 25 years ago, the sightseers devoured his every word.

Today, the home of Willie Mays of the San Francisco Giants, is a regular stop on the No. 1 tour of the Gray Line Co.



MICKEY MANTLE