By Sam Lacy

The Silent Minority Try

Magic Johnson

So much adverse publicity hovers over the lives of black former athletes that it seems to be extremely important on occasion for us to focus on the scores of one-time stars who do not belong among the dope-dealers, burglars, etc.

Actually, the "good guys" outnumber the "bad guys" by a wide margin in virtually all walks of life and years-after sports is no exception.

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Media folk, however, seem to consider it more exciting to report on the negatives — especially if blacks are involved — so the "good guys" invariably become the unheralded (thus silent) minority.

Of course, some attention has been given big names of the past: Bill Russell, K. C. Jones, Willis Reed, Al Attles, Larry Brown, "Deacon" Dan Towler, George Nock, Bernie Casey, Mike Bass, Curt Flood, Jim "Mudcat" Grant, Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson, to name a few.

Russell, the former Boston Celtics star, captain and coach, is visible as an on-air sports commentator. He also is a fixture in TV commercials.

K. C. Jones, another former Celt, maintains a steady basketball connection, coaching in the NBA (Bullets, Celtics, Lakers, Warriors) and in college ranks (Brandeis).

Reed, who captained and coached the New York Knicks, now directs the basketball program at Creighton University.

Attles, the one-time A and T Aggie standout, has made a career in the NBA coaching ranks. In his 13th year as boss at Golden State, Attles is currently well over 500 career victories. With the retirement two years ago of New York's Red Holzman, he is pro basketball's oldest mentor (in point of service).

Larry Brown and Mike Bass, ex-Redskins, are highly respected in the brokerage business. Former NFL stars Dan Towler, George Nock and Bernie Casey have made their mark —ex-Ram Towler as a pastor in a Los Angeles church, Nock and Casey as accomplished artists who have exhibited to acclaim.

Flood and Grant have remained active as major league baseball braodcasters. Ashe heads a thriving

Rachel Robinson

Al Attles

sports equipment corporation, and Gibson operates from a broad base in public relations in her native New Jersey. Both are former world tennis champions.

William "Sugar" Cain, who went from an outstanding collegiate and pro basketball career into teaching where he produced a long series of high school championship teams, now continues his contribution to youth development from a world of darkness.

Though sightless since the mid-seventies, Cain proudly lends his name to a thriving scholarship program conducted by the Urban Services Agency in Baltimore.

And, while Jackie Robinson has been dead now for more than 10 years, his mushrooming "Jackie Robinson Management and Development Corporation" continues under the astute leadership of his widow. Rachel Robinson, who pulls the strings on this gigantic operation (in the United States and Africa), also maintains, without fanfare, a well-funded program that serves inner city youngsters of all races in Harlem and Brooklyn.

Add to these the names of one-time Colt great George Taliaferro and former Chicago Bears sensation Gale Sayers, and a good cross-section of success stories has been attained.

The former is currently the executive aide to the chancellor at Indiana University and the latter holds a similar position at the University of Kansas.

Gale Sayers

All these people survived in an era when the "news" was flooded with alleged black-athlete involvement in rapes, shootings, drug-peddling and burglaries during the sixties and early seventies.

And today, the atmosphere has changed very little, if at all. Major attention is given the negatives: generally ignored are the positive contributions.

The NBA's Atlanta Hawks, for example, have a roster sprinkled with potential success stories.

George Johnson and Rudy Macklin are off-season bankers; Rory Sparrow who holds an engineering degree, works summers in the master control room at WTBS in Atlanta, and Dan Roundfield and Mike Glenn are respected stockbrokers.

In Los Angeles, Laker star Earvin "Magic" Johnson conducts long-distance direction to the "Action Reading" program to which he devotes an appreciable portion of his basketball earnings. The program is installed at the Main Street Elementary School where Johnson's education began in Lansing, MI, and is designed to help students between the ages of 4 and 16.

Also extremely generous with the millions he earns as a baseball player with the Yankees, is Dave Winfield who has a "Dave Winfield Youth Club" in each of nine major league cities.

James Lofton, Green Bay wide receiver, spends much of his off-season energy — and money — in support of many Wisconsin charities, including Urban League programs and the state's Mental Health Association.

Dallas Maverick Jay Vincent employs between 40 and 50 indigents in a unique recording and taping business he maintains in his Lansing hometown.

In the meantime, Jay and older brother Joe collaborate in writing music for a "Five Star" band they formed nine years ago when the young NBA rookie was a drum devotee and background singer.

Of all the stories connected with these past and present athletes, though, the most heartwarming in the eyes of this writer is that of Mike Glenn.

In an earlier reference, the 27-year-old Atlanta Hawks guard is an off-year stockbroker. But Glenn is more than that; he is a warm, caring individual.

Glenn conducts a summer camp each year on Long Island. It is a special camp. It's for deaf youngsters.

Though he has never suffered any hearing difficulties, Mike explains: "I grew up almost like a deaf kid, except I could talk.

"My father was the basketball coach at the Georgia School for the Deaf. His younsters taught me sign language and gave me an unforgettable lesson in perseverance and compassion.

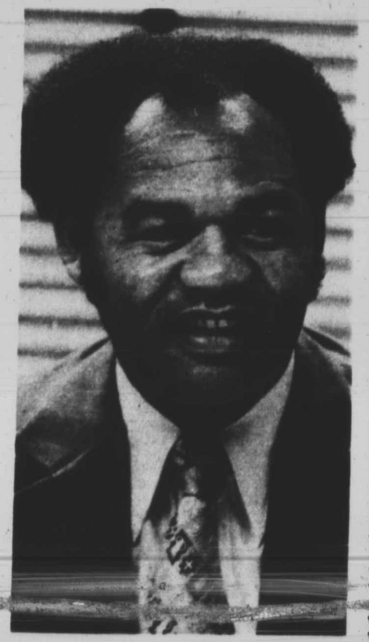
"I shared a lot of experiences with them and I became aware of how much they were shut out of things; normal, every day things other take for granted.

"When I finished (Southern Illinois) school and turned pro, I recalled how we used to watch TV basketball games together and shared admiration for the great athletes on the screen.

"The summer camp idea was born (at his own expense) and I've had great response from fellows like Ray Williams, Mitch Kupchak, 'Tree' Rollins, Mike O'Koren and others.

"They've visisted the kids and it has meant so much for the youngsters to be able to 'sign' the player's names on their fingers.

"You can almost read it in their faces: 'This athlete who I've seen on television, who I really worship, is reaching out to me.'"



George Taliaferro