

The Globetrotters Documentary

Written by Robert ID936

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Even sports fans with long memories might think of the Harlem Globetrotters as a joke team whose players dump buckets of confetti onto fans or lend their likenesses to Saturday morning cartoons, such as 1973's *Scooby Doo Meets the Harlem Globetrotters*.

"The Team That Changed The World" - a documentary that is airing on public television this month and next - offers another view. Filled with vintage footage and great interviews related to the team that began in Chicago in 1928, it makes the case that the Globetrotters were as important as Jackie Robinson to mid-20th-century African-American pride and civil rights.

Notable African-Americans, including Samuel L. Jackson, Barack Obama, John Chaney and Bill Cosby, describe their memories of the Globetrotters coming to town, often playing against - and always beating - white teams during a period of overt racial segregation.

The 60-minute film, narrated by Chuck D from the legendary hip-hop rap group Public Enemy, illustrates how crucial the team was to the early success of the NBA, even when the league was all white.

"The Globetrotters meant more to the NBA than the NBA meant to the Globetrotters," author Frank Deford says in the documentary.

As late as the 1950s, the Globetrotters were better known and drew bigger crowds than most teams in the NBA.

Hall of Famer Bob Cousy, the Boston Celtics' legend, recalls in the film that arenas would often hold doubleheaders featuring Globetrotters games followed by NBA games.

"They'd always play the first game, and when they were through, half the house would get up and leave," Cousy said.

NBA commissioner David Stern gives the Globetrotters - who have visited 117 countries - credit for spreading basketball's popularity worldwide.

In 1948, the Globetrotters, led by Marques Haynes and Goose Tatum, took on the fearsome Minneapolis Lakers, whose big man, George Mikan, was "the Shaq of his day," according to Phil Jackson, who has coached nine NBA championship teams. The Globetrotters won a fierce game, 61-59, on a last-second shot by Ermer Robinson.

In some ways, the world really did change after that. The Globetrotters defeated the Lakers

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again in 1949, and a year later, the NBA opened its doors to its first three black players, including former Globetrotter Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton.

"The players of the Harlem Globetrotters were similar to a lot of black men in that generation - people with enormous talent who couldn't always show their talent and suffered great indignity just to keep food on the table," Obama said. "The strength and determination of that generation just to survive laid the groundwork for people like myself who are able to serve in the United States Senate."

[Source](#)