



Outside the Lines: African Americans and the Integration of the National Football League

Charles K. Ross

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Outside the Lines traces how sports laid a foundation for social change long before the judicial system formally recognized the inequalities of racial separation. Integrating sports teams to include white and black athletes alike, the National Football League served as a microcosmic fishbowl of the highs and lows, the trials and triumphs, of racial integration. Watching a football game on a Sunday evening, most sports fans do not realize the profound impact the National Football League had on the civil rights movement. Similarly, in a sport where seven out of ten players are black, few are fully aware of the history and contributions of their athletic forebears. Among the touchdowns and tackles lies a rich history of African American life and the struggle to achieve equal rights. Although the Supreme Court did not reverse their 1896 decision of "separate but equal" in the Plessy v Ferguson case until more than fifty years later, sports laid a foundation for social change long before our judicial system formally recognized the inequalities of racial separation. Integrating sports teams to include white and black athletes alike, the National Football League served as a microcosmic fishbowl of the highs and lows, the trials and triumphs, of racial integration. In this chronicle of black NFL athletes, Charles K. Ross has given us the story of the Jackie Robinsons of American football.

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