

Boycott of the 1965 American Football League All-star game

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Lessons From 1965's Football Boycott Against Jim Crow

Was This Their Freedom Ride?

The STAND



This scene was evident as the American Football League scheduled its annual All-Star game for Saturday, January 16, 1965, to be played at Tulane Stadium in New Orleans, Louisiana. This contest came just ten days after the city had hosted the first completely integrated Sugar Bowl game without incident. Syracuse, whose roster included eight African American players, lost to Louisiana State 13-0 in that game.

They were aware that New Orleans was hosting the game to demonstrate to the American Football League and the National Football League they [New Orleans] could support a football franchise.

The tone was set Segregation and Jim Crow were just ending, and the city desperately wanted a professional team.

The American Football League was the only league at the time to truly embrace the African-American athlete as an equal on the field with white players.

The AFL players were assured by Dave Dixon, head of the group sponsoring and promoting the game that the city was safe and there would be no problems.

Little did they know those aspirations would received a major setback in the days to come as the AFL All-Stars began to arrive at the airport.



Here are some of the things that had happened: All of the Negroes had trouble securing cabs from the airport to their hotels; one group was stranded there for more than three hours. Another group had been dropped off eight blocks from their destination. Once in the city the cab problem continued.

Abner Haynes asked to go to a certain nightclub and instead was taken to another one a mile away that is a hangout for perverts.

Many players were refused admittance to nightspots.

Ernie Ladd, Dick Westmoreland and a couple of others had been turned away from one Bourbon Street club by a man who indicated he had a gun.

Ernie Warlick was tongue-lashed by a lady who objected when he hung his coat near hers in a restaurant.

All the players, it seemed, had been exposed to varying degrees of indignity.

"We were disrespected as men," Haynes remembered. "We were not here because of color;

we were here because of talent. Why should we go out there and put our lives on the line for people who don't appreciate us?

All 21 African American players who were scheduled to suit up discussed in great detail the treatment they had received and with a vote decided to walk out on the All-Star game.

"The majority ruled. Warlick explained we felt we couldn't perform 100% under the current circumstances," "Actually this came as a complete surprise to us. We were led to believe that we could relax and enjoy ourselves in New Orleans just like other citizens."

Some players were more vocal than others about the adverse conditions and discriminatory practices experienced in New Orleans. In the end Warlick and other black All-Stars, came together. Finding the situation unacceptable, the players decided that they would not play in the All-Star as long as it was to be hosted in New Orleans.



The players acted alone and took a stand. They got support from their white teammates, including Jack Kemp, the Buffalo quarterback who headed the American Football League Players Association. Kemp, Mix, and the other white players put their careers on the line, as did the African-American players. They could have all been fired for their actions.



“We had no leverage,” Haynes said. “We weren’t playing for money, but we were playing for progress.

As the black athletes made it clear that they were heading home, league officials and the game organizers had a decision to make. Would the game go on without the nearly two dozen players who walked out?

The next day, on Monday, Jan. 11, AFL commissioner Joe Foss announced that the game would be moved to Houston and played at Jeppesen Stadium.



The stand the AFL and its players took against the city of New Orleans was unprecedented. It ultimately brought about change that was necessary in order for the city to get a NFL franchise. That came to fruition two years later when the league granted New Orleans a team.

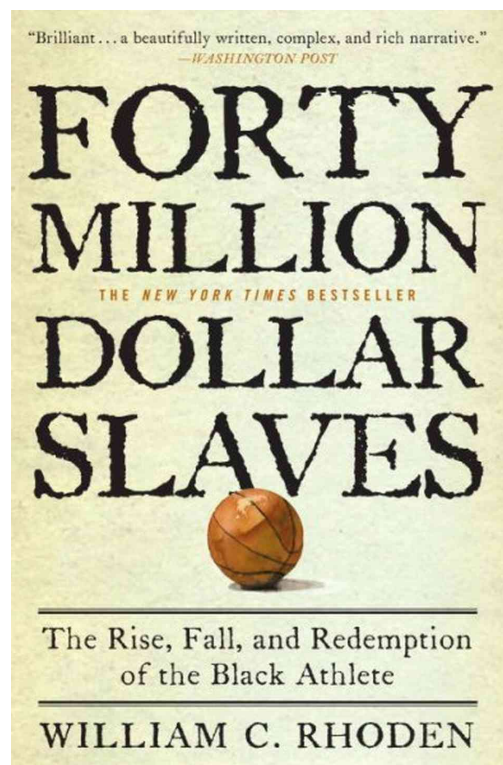
The boycott was clearly a milestone event that went beyond the world of sports and was more a reflection of American society at the time. It helped shine a spotlight on Congress’s ability to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and proved that if America was to desegregate, the culture needed to change its mindset and adopt a more progressive view of the human race as quickly as possible.

What has happened with the Clippers in 2014 should serve as a reminder that in unity and solidarity the players have the ability to effect change. We as fans need to exercise our power as well just imagine

A barren arena, vacant locker room and empty bench would certainly get our point across.

From Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe, African American athletes have been at the center of modern culture, their on-the-field heroics admired and stratospheric earnings envied. But for all their money, fame, and achievement, says *New York Times* columnist William C. Rhoden, black athletes still find themselves on the periphery of true power in the multibillion-dollar industry their talent built.

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