

## Oscar Robertson

The "Big O"

National Association of  
Basketball Coaches'  
"Player of the Century"

## HBCU Report

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# Oscar Robertson



## The “Big O”

### National Association of Basketball Coaches’ “Player of the Century”

By Michael O’Daniel

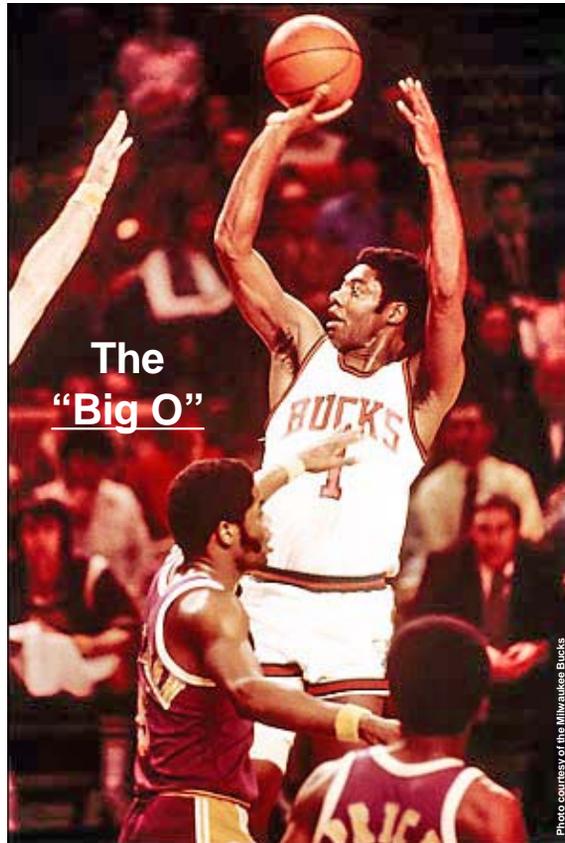
During the 2011-12 NBA season, two important anniversaries will be celebrated. The first is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1961-62 season in which Oscar Robertson averaged a triple-double for an entire season (double figures in points, rebounds and assists), a record unlikely ever to be broken. The second is the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oscar Robertson Rule, a legal settlement that forever changed the balance of power in professional sports.

Oscar Robertson has made an indelible impression on American society, both on and off the court. He is defined by much more than his records on the basketball court. He was not only a superb athlete, but he has been a civil rights pioneer – the Jackie Robinson of basketball, if you will – a labor leader, a social activist, a humanitarian, a mentor and teacher, and a business leader.

Arguably the greatest all-around player ever to lace up a pair of sneakers, Robertson was named the National Association of Basketball Coaches’ “Player of the Century” in 2000 for his achievements in both college and professional basketball. His nickname “The Big O” has been a worldwide “brand name” for decades.

At every level — high school, college, the Olympics and the NBA – 6’5” Robertson set new standards of excellence and changed the way the game was played. As the first big point guard, who could score from anywhere on the court, pass, rebound, and play stifling defense, he created the template for such players as Magic Johnson, Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and LeBron James. He is the NBA’s all-time leader in triple-double games for a career with 181 and a single season with 41, and in rebounds by a guard.

At the age of 23, in only his second NBA season, Robertson put together a season for the ages. In 79 games, he had 41 triple doubles as he led the Cincinnati Royals to their first winning season and first playoff appearance in four years. He averaged 30.8 points, 12.5 rebounds (leading his team), and 11.4 assists, bettering the previous assist record by 2 per game. In 19 games, he had 15 or more assists, with highs of 20 and 22. In 23 games, he pulled down 15 or more rebounds, topping 20 five times with a



high of 22. Without a 3-point shot, he scored 40 or more points eight times, with a high of 49. He was never out of double figures in scoring, and was held under 20 points only five times.

As the third and longest-serving President of the NBA Players Association, from 1965 until he retired in 1974, The Big O changed the game in the courtroom as well. In 1970, he filed a class action anti-trust lawsuit on behalf of his colleagues, seeking to prevent an NBA merger with the American Basketball Association until issues regarding the reserve clause, the draft, and other restrictions on player movement were resolved. “You can only keep people down for so long,” he commented later. “Sooner or later they will rise up.”

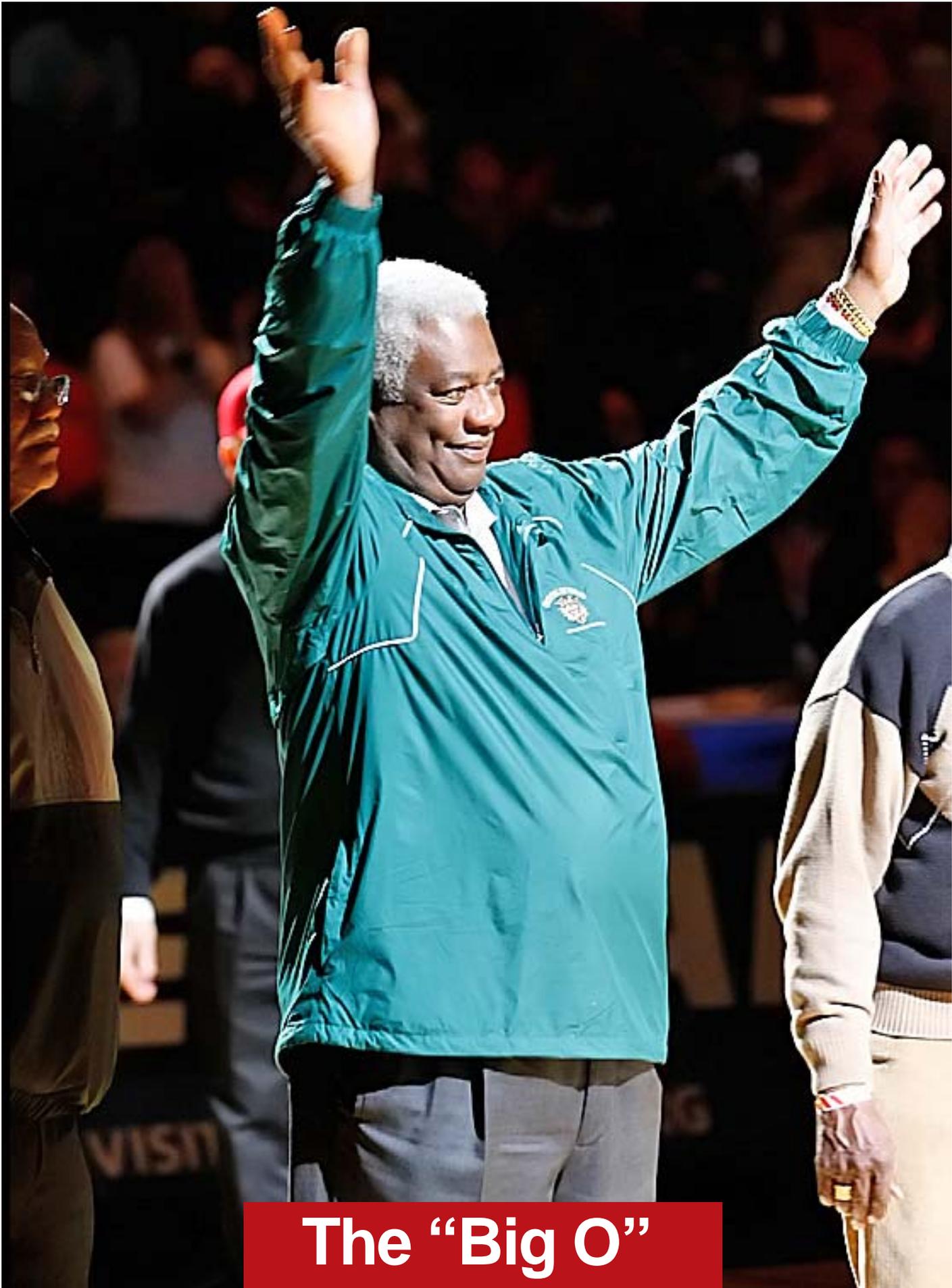
Thanks to a 1976 legal settlement known as the Oscar Robertson Rule, NBA players became the first to gain free agency, and four teams from the ABA were absorbed into the NBA. Instead of free agency destroying the game, as the owners had claimed it would, the settlement ushered in a new

era of growth and prosperity for the NBA that continues to the present day. However, Robertson has reaped none of the benefits, because to this day he remains excluded from opportunities to become an NBA coach or general manager.

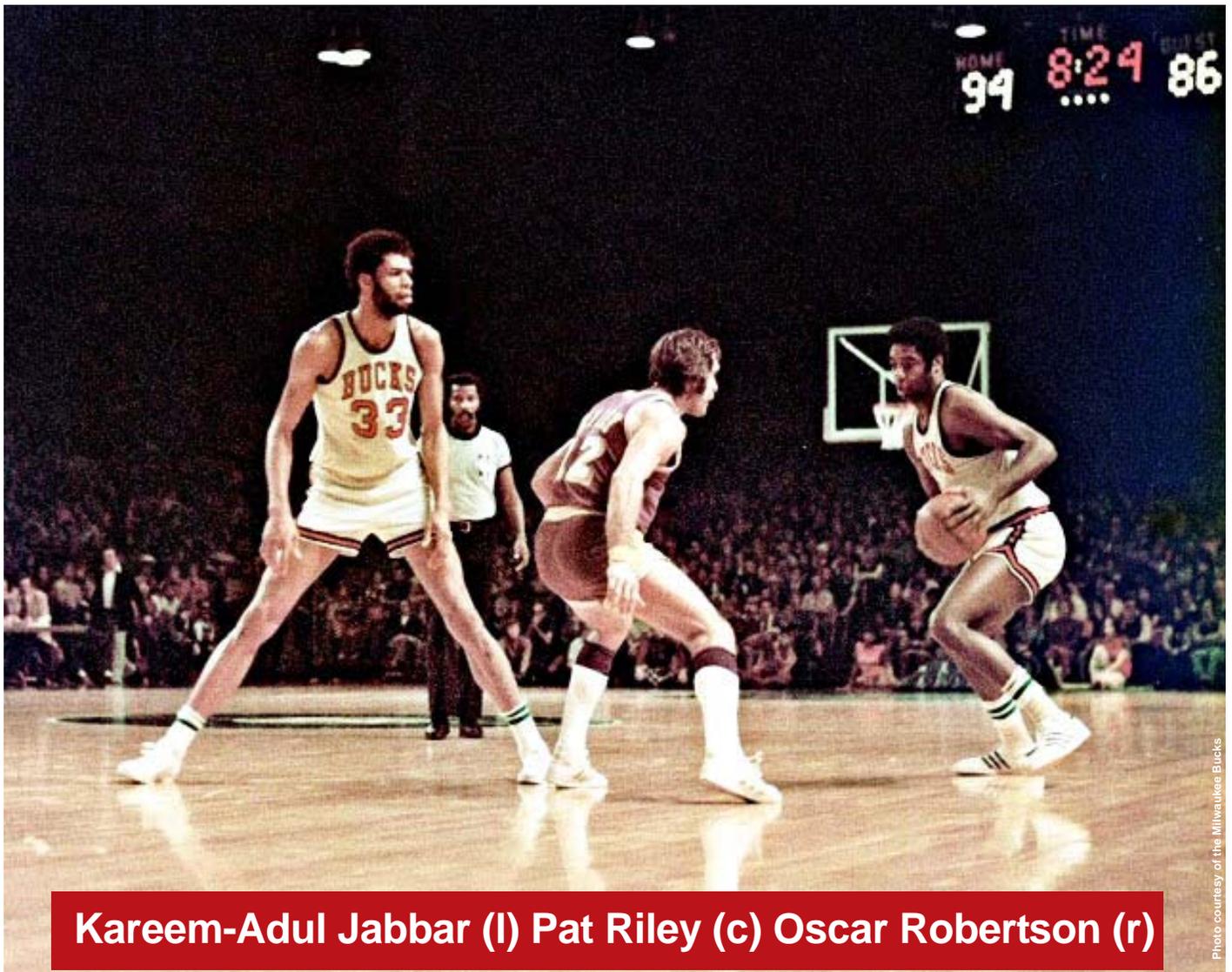
#### Early Days Shaped the Player and the Man

Oscar Robertson was born November 24, 1938, in Charlotte, Tennessee, the youngest of three sons of Bailey and Mazell Robertson. Four years later the family moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where he learned to play basketball on the dirt courts of the inner city, playing against his older brothers Bailey, Jr., and Henry and thriving in stiff competition from other neighborhood kids. He also refined his game through endless hours of individual practice, developing shots and moves that were far ahead of their time. As his high school coach Ray Crowe said, “The only way to get Oscar out of the gym was to turn off the lights.”

Robertson first began attracting attention at Crispus Attucks High School. Even though he was 6’3” and the best jumper on the team, Coach Crowe did not stick him in the pivot, as most other coaches in those days would have done. Instead, he let Robertson



The "Big O"



**Kareem-Adul Jabbar (l) Pat Riley (c) Oscar Robertson (r)**

play outside, where he could handle the ball, direct the offense, and explore many more different options for scoring.

Crowe ran a fast-break offense that was based on solid fundamentals at both ends of the court. Since Attucks would be playing against seven men (including the officials) instead of five, Crowe knew it was critical that the team build leads quickly. He also insisted that his players keep their cool under the most hostile circumstances. Attucks' gym was too small to function as a home court, so the team played all its games on the road in a time of rigid segregation.

As a sophomore, Robertson led Attucks to within one game of the 1954 State finals, losing to eventual champion Milan (on whom the movie "Hoosiers" was based). Over the next two seasons, Crispus Attucks lost only once, en route to a 45-game winning streak, two consecutive Indiana State titles and a national championship. Attucks was the first African-American school and the first Indianapolis school to win the Indiana State crown, and the first African-American school to win a national championship in any sport. Robertson was named "Mr. Basketball" for the State of Indiana in 1956, as well as National High School Player of the Year.

But the team's impact on the city of Indianapolis and the State of Indiana transcended basketball. Attucks' success helped bridge the racial divide. "It was a special time," Robertson said. "I've

always said that Attucks' winning probably meant more for the city than it did for the players. The city was able to understand that we were not a bunch of hoodlums or crooks or animals with tails. We were just kids."

#### College Records and Olympic Gold

It may sound incredible, but for all his accomplishments, Robertson was not heavily recruited by colleges to the same degree as star White players. Major colleges were just beginning to integrate their athletic teams, one or two players at a time. Robertson had his heart set on going to Indiana, but he and Coach Crowe were insulted by Hoosier coach Branch McCracken on their visit to the campus. Meanwhile, the University of Cincinnati (UC) was pursuing him actively, so he elected to go there, only 100 miles from his home.

At Cincinnati, Robertson played forward and led the Bearcats to the Final Four in 1959 and 1960. He was a three-time First-Team All-American, the first player to lead the NCAA in scoring three straight years, and the first to win National College Player of the Year honors three times. In 1998, the U.S. Basketball Writers Association renamed its men's College Player of the Year Award the Oscar Robertson Trophy.

His college days also tried his patience, because segregation was still very evident in Cincinnati, and the team would book road games in cities where Robertson and his one or two Black

teammates could not stay in hotels or eat with their White teammates. Robertson was courted by the Harlem Globetrotters, who had previously signed Wilt Chamberlain, but he resisted the temptation to turn pro early and remained in school.

Robertson graduated from UC in four years with a B.S. Degree in Business in 1960. Then he co-captained, with Jerry West, the Pete Newell-coached, undefeated 1960 U.S. Olympic Gold Medal Team, often considered the greatest basketball team ever put together. The “original dream team,” made up of college and AAU players, sent 9 of its 12 players to the NBA, four of whom are now in the Hall of Fame. In 2010, the 50th anniversary of its triumph in Rome, Italy, the 1960 Olympians were inducted into the Naismith Memorial Hall of Fame along with the 1992 “Dream Team,” 11 of whose 12 members were NBA All-Stars.

### **NBA Stardom and the Triple-Double Season**

The Big O had a 14-year career in the NBA, beginning with the 1960-61 Cincinnati Royals, who made him their territorial draft pick. Moving from forward back to his natural position at guard, Robertson put up unparalleled numbers as a rookie and earned Rookie of the Year honors, as well as the first of three NBA All-Star game Most Valuable Player Awards (the others came in 1964 and 1969). Beginning with his rookie season, he was named an All-Star for 12 straight years. In 1964, he won Most Valuable Player honors, becoming only the second guard after Bob Cousy to receive that honor.

Robertson averaged a triple-double cumulatively over his first five seasons, including 1961-62, in which he averaged a triple-double for the entire season. He led the Royals to the playoffs in six of his ten seasons, from 1962 through 1967, but the Royals, even with a high-scoring lineup, could never get past the Boston Celtics for the Eastern Division Title, thanks, in part, to some head-shaking personnel decisions by the team's front office. In 1963, they took the Celtics to seven games, including a finale in which Sam Jones (47 points) and The Big O (43 points) combined for a playoff scoring record that still stands. In 1964, they were the only team to win a regular season series from the Celtics, but fell to Boston in 5 games in the Eastern Division finals. After 1967, the team missed the playoffs the next two seasons as veteran players retired or were traded, and were not replaced with equal talent.

### **A Championship at Last**

Following the 1970 season, The Big O was traded from Cincinnati to the Milwaukee Bucks, where he teamed with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then known as Lew Alcindor) for four straight playoff appearances and the Bucks' only NBA Championship in 1971. The 1970-71 Bucks were one of the most dominant teams in NBA history with a then-record 20 game win streak and a then-record 66 wins in 82 games. They led the league in scoring and were the first team to shoot better than 50% from the floor for an entire season. Then they went 12-2 in three playoff rounds, including a four-game sweep of the Baltimore Bullets in the finals. In game four, The Big O led all scorers with 30 points. At last, he had his championship ring, and the Bucks – then just in their third season - became the earliest expansion team in any professional sport to win a championship.

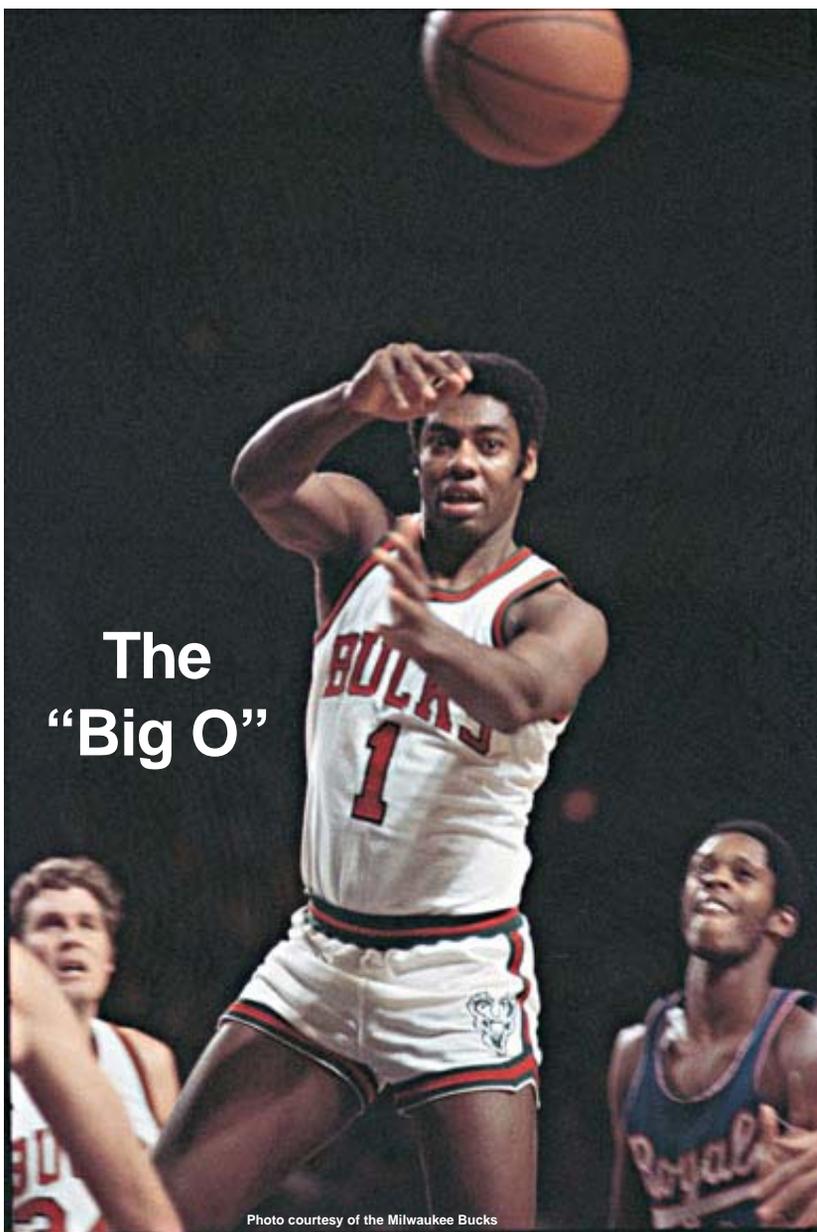


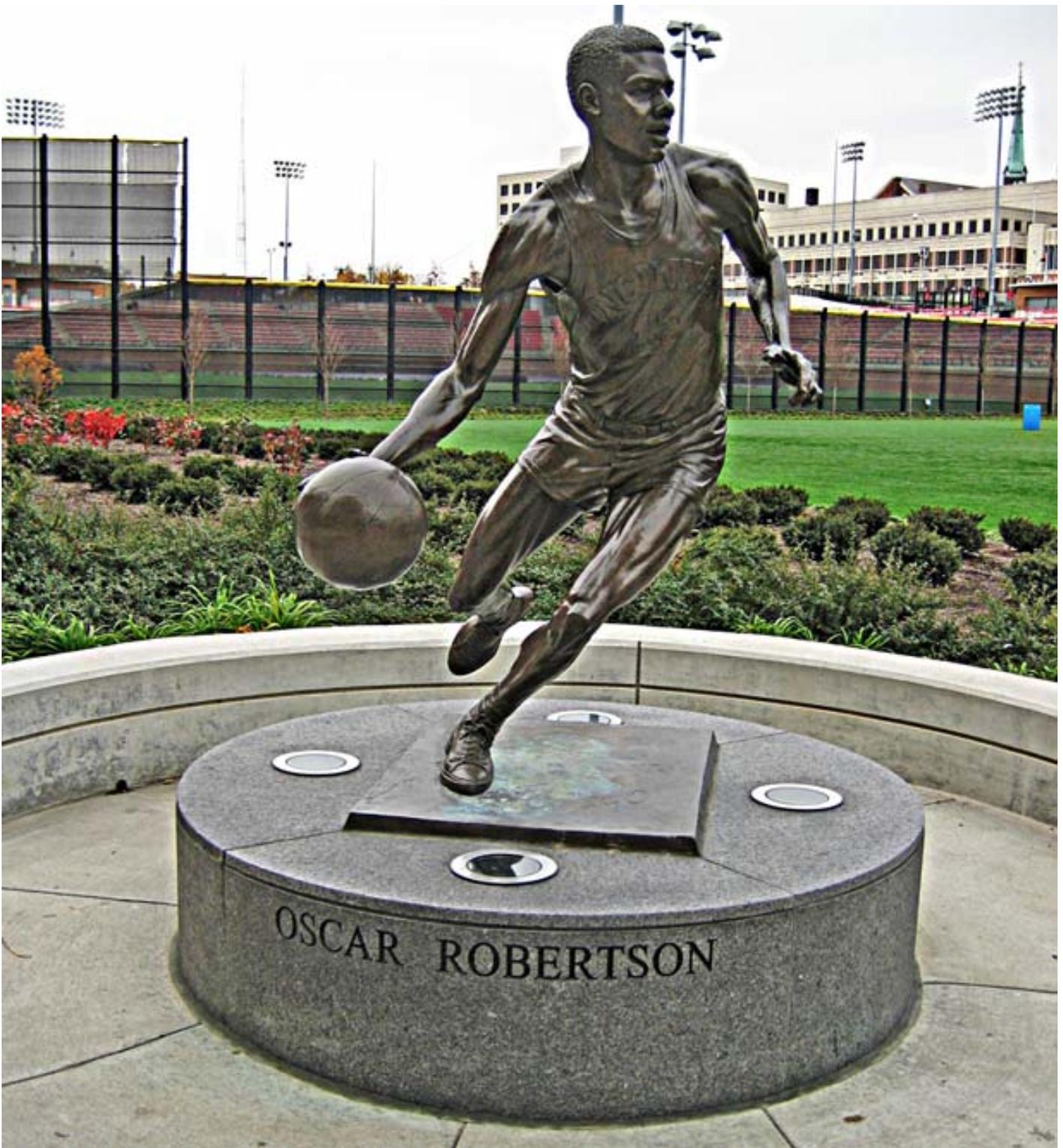
Photo courtesy of the Milwaukee Bucks

In the next two seasons, the Bucks were eliminated early in the playoffs, but in 1974, they took the Celtics to seven games in the finals — including a double-OT win in the 6th game, considered an NBA classic — after which The Big O brought his pro career to an end.

### **A Leader in Athletics, Academics and Business**

Robertson graduated in the top 10% of his class at Indianapolis' Crispus Attucks High School, earned his B.S. in four years at the University of Cincinnati, and was recently named one of the NCAA's top student athletes of all time. A street in his hometown of Indianapolis now bears his name, making him the first living person in that city's history to be so honored. He holds an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from the University of Cincinnati, as well as its' Lifetime Achievement Award for Entrepreneurship and its William Howard Taft Medal, the highest honor it bestows on an alumnus.

The Big O's business acumen was evident from the first year of his professional basketball career. He was one of the first players, if not the first, to be represented by an attorney in contract



negotiations, eventually securing a percentage of the gate receipts for himself as well as a no-trade clause.

Today, Robertson is one of the nation's leading small business owners, with interests in document management services, specialty chemicals, and media. He serves as President of OR Solutions and Orchem, Inc., Fairfield, Ohio; and as general partner in Oscar Robertson Media Ventures, El Cerrito, California.

He is a leading advocate for minority business owners and often takes part in leadership development seminars. He remains an international ambassador for the game of basketball, and is much in demand as a speaker, teacher and clinician.

In 1992, he was one of five founders of the National Basketball Retired Players Association, dedicated to improving pension benefits and medical care for an earlier generation of players. He served as the Association's first President from 1992 to 1998.

#### **Records, Honors and Community Involvement**

In addition to The Big O's all-time records in triple-doubles, he was the first player to lead the NBA in scoring average and assists average in the same season, and the only guard ever to lead his team in rebounding.

He led the league in free throw percentage twice and assists six

times. His career record of 9,887 assists stood for 17 years. His 26,710 points and 25.7 points per game average rank him among the NBA's all-time leading scorers.

His complete records are on the Career Statistics page at [www.thebigo.com](http://www.thebigo.com).

Robertson was elected to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1979, his first year eligible.

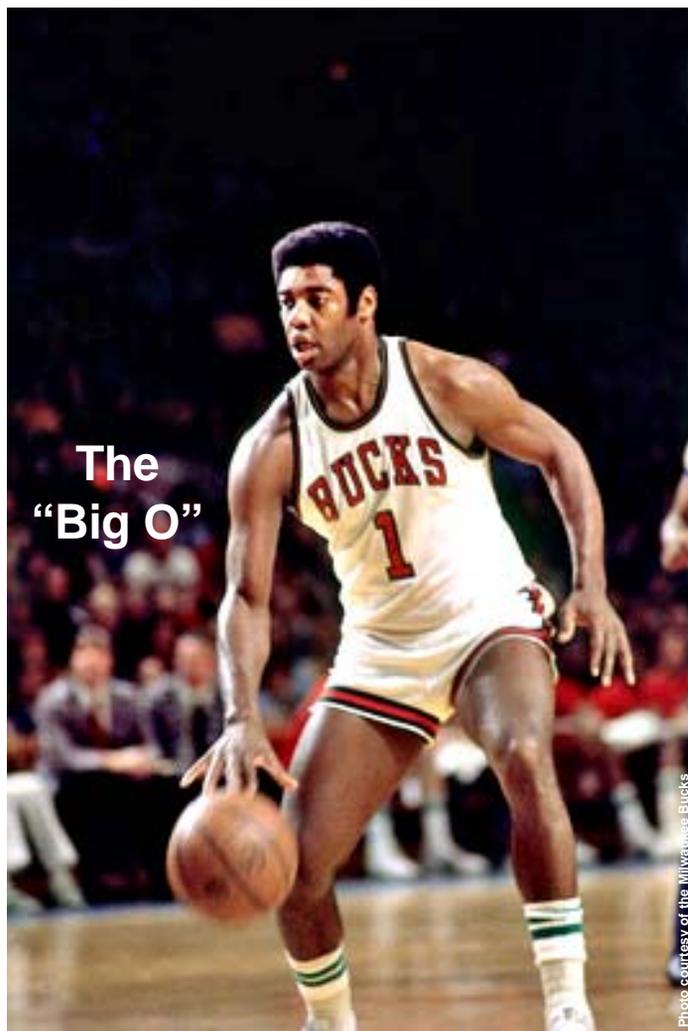
He was one of the first five inductees into the NABC's Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame in 2006.

In 2009, he was inducted into the International Basketball (FIBA) Hall of Fame. In 2010, he was enshrined in the Naismith Hall of Fame a second time, as co-captain of the 1960 U.S. Olympic Gold Medal Team.

Since his playing career ended, The Big O has been active not only in business, but as a broadcaster and author. He is the author and publisher of "The Art of Basketball" (Oscar Robertson Media Ventures, 1998), the definitive guide to fundamental skills development for boys and girls of all ages, and the host of [www.thebigo.com](http://www.thebigo.com). His autobiography, "The Big O: My Life, My Times, My Game," was published by Rodale Press in 2003, and is now in paperback with University of Nebraska Press. He has contributed eight bylined essays to The New York Times and one to TIME Magazine, as well as a game-by-game blog to nba.com during the 2005 NBA Finals.

Robertson and his wife Yvonne, who he wed in 1960, reside in Cincinnati, Ohio, and have three daughters, Shana, Tia and Mari. In 1997, The Big O performed the assist of a lifetime when he donated a kidney to his daughter Tia, who was suffering from lupus. Since that point, he has been an outspoken advocate for health and wellness, kidney disease prevention and organ transplantation on behalf of the National Kidney Foundation.

He is also involved in numerous other charitable and community activities. Throughout and following his career, he has taught or mentored hundreds of youngsters on his own and through various youth organizations. The Oscar and Yvonne Robertson



Scholarship Fund at the University of Cincinnati annually provides assistance to deserving minority students, and the Robertsons also serve as co-chairs of UC's \$1 billion capital campaign.

Michael O'Daniel ([thebigo@thebigo.com](mailto:thebigo@thebigo.com)) began covering the NBA as a journalist and statistician in 1958.

#### ACCOLADES

**"Oscar was one of basketball's great leaders, and his life is one of basketball's great stories. He was unafraid, unabashed, and unmatched in everything he did. There will never be another like him." – Bill Russell**

**"He played the game like he invented it. Oscar was James Naismith in tennis shoes. He did what he wanted to do." – Bob Boozer**

**"Oscar Robertson was never a rookie. He was the measuring stick for how a player should play. He is a man for the ages." – Jerry West**

**"Oscar knew you were open before you knew you were open." – Wayne Embry**

**"Oscar Robertson was the most fundamentally flawless player I ever saw." – Coach Pete Newell, University of California 1959 NCAA Champions and 1960 Olympic Gold Medal Team**

**"People just don't have any idea how good Oscar was. The numbers are ridiculous. If you're getting 30 points and double-figures in rebounds as a point guard and 10 assists a game, that's sick. He is the greatest athlete in the history of sports in this country who has been overlooked in terms of his greatness." – Rick Barry**

**"Every time I get on a basketball court, I'm chasing Oscar Robertson's legend. He set the standard for guys like me. I can only hope, when I'm done playing, that I've come close to what he's accomplished." – Jason Kidd**

**"He is so great, he scares me." — Celtics Coach Red Auerbach.**

**"He obviously was unbelievable, way ahead of his time. There is no more complete player than Oscar." – Jerry Lucas**

**"He was the greatest player I have ever seen, period." – Wayne Embry**



# Oscar Robertson's Bio

Jersey No. 14, 1  
Position Point guard

## Personal Information

Date of birth November 24, 1938  
Place of birth Charlotte, Tennessee  
Nationality American  
High school Crispus Attucks  
Listed height 6 ft 5 in (1.96 m)  
Listed weight 220 lb (100 kg)

## Career Information

College Cincinnati (1957–1960)  
NBA Draft 1958 / Pick: Territorial / 1st Cincinnati Royals  
Pro career 1960–1974  
League NBA

## Career History

1960–1970 Cincinnati Royals  
1970–1974 Milwaukee Bucks

## Career Highlights and Awards

- o NBA Champion (1971)
- o NBA Most Valuable Player (1964)
- o 12x NBA All-Star (1961–1972)

## Career Highlights and Awards

- o 3x NBA All-Star Game MVP (1961, 1964, 1969)

## Career Highlights and Awards

- o NBA Rookie of the Year (1961)
- o 9x All-NBA First Team (1961–1969)
- o 2x All-NBA Second Team (1970–1971)
- o 2x Helms Foundation College Player of the Year (1959, 1960)
- o 3x UPI College Player of the Year (1958–1960)
- o 2x USBWA College Player of the Year (1959, 1960)
- o 3x *Sporting News* College Player of the Year (1958–1960)
- o 3x Consensus NCAA All-America First Team (1958–1960)
- o NBA 35th Anniversary Team
- o NBA 50th Anniversary Team
- o #14 Retired by the Sacramento Kings
- o #1 Retired by the Milwaukee Bucks

## Career NBA Statistics

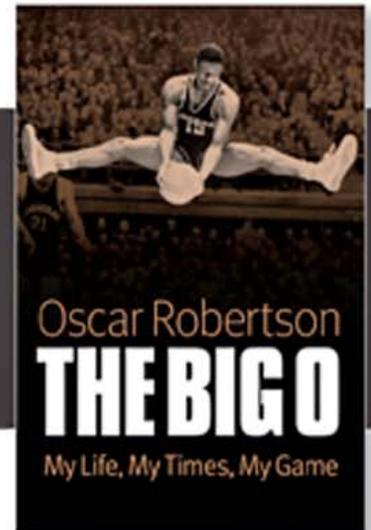
Points 26,710 (25.7 ppg)  
Rebounds 7,804 (7.5 rpg)  
Assists 9,887 (9.5 apg)

## International Medal Record

- Pan American Games:  
o Gold 1959 Chicago Team Competition
- Olympic Games:  
o Gold 1960 Rome Team Competition

“Oscar Robertson is an incomparable superstar. He is also a thoughtful man and a man of vision. If you want insight into what formed Oscar in the crucial years of his youth, look here. It's a great book.”

—KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR



The Big O is the story of how the NBA, as we now know it, was built; of race in America in the second half of the twentieth century; and of an uncompromising man and a complex hero.

“Oscar was one of basketball's great leaders, and his life is one of basketball's great stories. He was unafraid, unabashed, and unmatched in everything he did. There will never be another like him.”

—BILL RUSSELL

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## American Urban Radio Networks Announces The 2011 SBN Sports Black College All-American Team

for details of members of the All-American Team, go to:  
[www.bstmllc.com](http://www.bstmllc.com), or  
[www.blackportsthemagazine.com](http://www.blackportsthemagazine.com)

## INAUGURAL HBCU ALL-STAR GAME



Three Days of Events  
Dedicated to Showcasing  
& Celebrating Historically  
Black Colleges &  
Universities'  
All-Star Basketball Talent

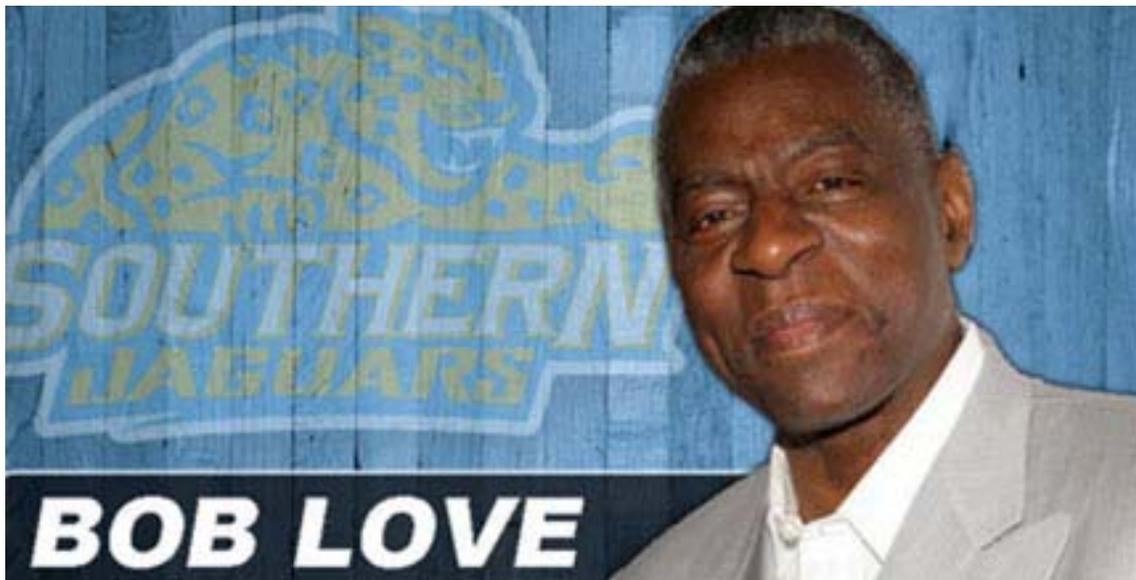
The top-22 players from NCAA Division I and II schools in the CIAA, SIAC, MEAC, SWAC and other HBCUs will be selected to participate.

In addition to the HBCU All-Star Game, professional scouts and collegiate coaches will challenge players in three days of an NBA-style combine, skill-building practices and scouting interviews.

The inaugural HBCU All-Star Game will be played in Atlanta, Georgia on April 6, 2012, at Morehouse College's Forbes Arena. The HBCU All-Star Game is a showcase of the top talent among HBCU men's basketball seniors.

For more information, visit us on the web at [www.HBCUAllStarGame.com](http://www.HBCUAllStarGame.com).

## Jaguars Retire Former All-American Love's Jersey



Southern University Athletics honored the legendary career of former basketball All-American Bob "Butterbean" Love with a jersey retirement ceremony at halftime of the men's game against Grambling. The Jags went on to defeat the Tigers, 72-59.

"We are extremely honored to celebrate the ground-breaking achievements of Bob 'Butterbean' Love," said Interim Athletics Director Sandy Pugh. "Love's contributions, both on and off the court, serve as a constant source of inspiration for not only our current student-athletes but our department as a whole."

"His journey encourages us to pursue greatness even in the midst of difficult times."

Love's No. 41 jersey will become only the third jersey retired in Southern men's basketball history, and will hang in the F.G. Clark Activity Center's rafters alongside the late Bobby Phill's No. 34 jersey.

"After surveying our program's history, we decided that we needed to retire Bob Love's jersey, not based solely on his great career at Southern," said Head Men's Basketball Coach Roman Banks, who is also Love's godson. "Bob was a class act off the court, and was the first NBA player to come from Southern, all while dealing with a severe speech impediment, which he overcame."

Love, a native of Bastrop, earned All Southwestern Athletic

Conference honors from 1963-1965. Love also earned NAIA All-American honors during his illustrious career at Southern. He went on to play 11 seasons for the Chicago Bulls in the NBA, and currently ranks as the second leading scorer in Bulls history behind only Michael Jordan.

"I am deeply honored that the University decided to retire his jersey during my tenure because he has influenced me as a person and a coach," said Banks. "He has been there for me even in my younger days as a player, and has continued to be there for me professionally as an assistant coach and a head coach and for me and my family."

The three-time NBA All-Star has been inducted into the N.A.I.A., Basketball Coaches, Illinois, Helms and Louisiana Hall of Fames. But Love is widely respected for overcoming a debilitating speech impediment, to become a motivation speaker, an author and the Bulls Director of Community Affairs, a post he's held since 1993.

"I think the value of his jersey being retired makes a statement to all student-athletes that despite all inefficiencies, you can strive to be the best and achieve greatness," said Banks.

"I think the time is right because he can express himself in his own words, and I can remember once when he was not able to do that."

## Bell Receives All-National Team Honors

Alabama State University (ASU) outside hitter Maya Bell was selected to the Second-Team Third annual Cobra Magazine All-National Volleyball Team.

Bell, a 5'9 freshman, received this honor for her performance during the 2011 season. She tallied a total of 577 kills, along with 57 service aces and 234 digs. Bell ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the Nation in kills and 12<sup>th</sup> for her service aces.

Cobra Magazine's purpose is to celebrate the success of volleyball players of African as well as Samoan and Tongan descent in hopes of encouraging young girls of these ethnic groups across the country to pursue the sport of volleyball. "I am excited for Maya," Head Volleyball Coach Penny Lucas-White said. "This is a great honor for Maya, she has really performed well this season and I am very pleased with her. I hope that she continues her success throughout the rest of her playing years here at ASU."

