

# Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution

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“We see each other as men,” said Bill Russell, explaining the 1969 National Basketball Association championship of the Boston Celtics. “We judge a guy by his character.”<sup>1</sup>

Russell had just concluded his glorious career, winning his eleventh NBA title in thirteen seasons and ensuring his status as the greatest winner in the history of American team sports. His defensive mastery, moreover, transfigured the game’s patterns, compelling a faster and more athletic sport. But Russell’s legacy stretches deeper and wider. It concerns the emerging link between basketball and blackness, both in terms of cultural style and political import. It intersects with the achievements of the civil rights movement, the impulses toward racial brotherhood, and African-American self-pride. It touches upon Russell’s explanations of his team’s success: manhood and character.

Russell did not desegregate the NBA, but he integrated it. He became the first black superstar—the first to generate copious publicity, the first to alter the sport’s texture, the first to shape a team’s championship destiny. Moreover, in the midst of the civil rights movement, Russell presided over basketball’s model of successful racial integration. As the Celtics won title after title, Russell exchanged public praise and private loyalty with his white teammates and coach, and other blacks became critical cogs in the Celtics machine. He further embodied sport’s cherished values of selflessness, integrity, and intelligence in his perpetual triumphs over celebrated rival Wilt Chamberlain. In 1966 Russell became the first African-American coach of any professional American sport,

and as player-coach he led the Celtics to two NBA titles in three years. So Russell stood as basketball's premier barrier-breaker, the leader of his sport's crusade for racial equality.<sup>2</sup>

Russell defied any easy characterization as an integrationist in the historic mold of Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, or Jackie Robinson. He attacked the racial double standards of the sports establishment. He adopted a scowling, regal demeanor that contradicted expectations of black obsequiousness. He questioned the nonviolent strategy of Martin Luther King Jr. He denounced the racial climate of Boston. Well before the "Revolt of the Black Athlete" in the late 1960s, he challenged the liberal assumptions guiding black participation in sport. Unlike many Black Power advocates, however, he never embodied a greater rejection of American ideals and institutions. Instead he provoked the public to consider his complicated individuality—to see him as a man, to acknowledge his character.<sup>3</sup>

Russell thus became a unique touchstone of African-American pride. He succeeded within a racially integrated framework, but he never sacrificed his principles for mass adoration. He maintained an unapologetic black identity, even as the NBA grew into a viable commercial endeavor, driven, in part, by the Boston Celtics dynasty and the Russell–Chamberlain rivalry.

The sport's meaningful changes in the 1960s—a stylistic evolution, a commercial expansion, a new standard of team excellence, and a racial upheaval—transformed the meaning of basketball in American culture. These shifts forged a forum where the game's most respected figure could serve as its most visible public intellectual. Russell blurred the comfortable iconography that heroicized or demonized black athletes. He embraced American ideals yet articulated a personal anger at the nation's persistent racism, constantly prodding sports fans beyond the political status quo. Call it the basketball revolution—and place Bill Russell at its center.

Russell arrived in Boston with a national profile, a reputation for winning, and a sense of racial politics. He had just led the University of San Francisco to a fifty-five-game winning streak and national titles in 1955 and 1956. National magazines featured him, and coaches called his 1956 team the best ever. Moreover, Russell's teams augured the sport's racially integrated future: the Dons featured three black starters. The Harlem Globetrotters had historically attracted the prime black basketball talent. But Russell rejected Abe Saperstein's lucrative offer, later citing the impresario's racial paternalism and his own distaste for the Globetrotters' "clowning" routines. While transcending Sambo-style stereotypes, Russell also seemed a sporting patriot—according to popular myth, during a 1955 conference at the White House, Russell had promised President Dwight Eisenhower that he would play for the 1956 Olympic team. The star center did not join the Celtics until December 1956 because he was in Melbourne, Australia, leading the United States to an undefeated record and a gold medal.<sup>4</sup>

Anticipation for Russell ran so high that the *Boston Globe* likened it to the debut of iconic Red Sox slugger Ted Williams. Celtics coach Red Auerbach drafted Russell only after a complicated struggle to win assurance that Rochester would not select him with the first pick in the draft; Auerbach then traded his frontcourt star Ed Macauley and prize rookie Cliff Hagan to St. Louis for the second pick. When Russell and his new bride Rose arrived in Boston, it was front page news. Owner Walter Brown and guard Bill Sharman greeted them with a key to the city. Days before his debut, Russell signed a contract for \$19,500, the highest salary ever paid an NBA rookie at the time. The newspapers speculated about Russell's potential impact and quizzed his new teammates. "No basketball player in recent years has received so much nation-wide attention," proclaimed the *Boston Herald*. "No newcomer to professional ranks has ever been asked to launch his career under such pressure."<sup>5</sup>

He established an immediate influence upon the Celtics, and in time he reshaped the patterns of basketball. In his first game, on December 22, 1956, against the St. Louis Hawks, Russell substituted for Arnie Risen, and the Boston Garden shook with the excited roar of 11,052 fans, thousands more than the typical crowd. Though he played less than half the game, scored only six points, and looked awkward—all elbows and knees, like a huge string puppet in the hands of a clumsy child—he placed a palpable stamp on the game. He sprang off the floor and sucked in missed shots, grabbing sixteen rebounds in only twenty-one minutes. More than the number of rebounds, it was *how* he rebounded: collecting the ball off the glass and whipping an outlet pass in one motion, igniting a fast break and an easy two points for the Celtics.

And his defense! In retrospect, Russell played defense the way Picasso painted or Hemingway wrote stories—not simply with excellence, but changing the way people thought about the craft. During that first game against St. Louis, Russell covered the burly center Charlie Share but ranged all around the basket. Bob Pettit, the sublime Hawks forward, twice drove past his defender for presumably easy lay-ups. Twice Russell pounced, blocking the ball to a teammate. Ed Macauley, another tall and skilled St. Louis forward, dribbled around a pick and pulled up for an eighteen-foot jump shot. "There was no reason for Russell to be anywhere near me," he recalled. "He was someplace else guarding Share. So I went up for the shot and there was no problem. Except that Russell came out of nowhere and slapped that ball directly over my head." By the time Macauley landed and turned around, Russell was gliding to the opposite basket and stuffing the ball with two hands.<sup>6</sup>

That season Russell became a phenomenon. Curious fans filled seats in Boston and beyond. He almost tripled the average attendance in Fort Wayne, and he doubled the normal crowd in Syracuse despite a blizzard. Even in second trips to opponents' arenas, Russell attracted sellouts. "Bill Russell is the first real gate attraction the National Basketball Association ever had," declared Walter Brown, one month into Russell's tenure. Russell generated further fasci-

nation when Eddie Gottlieb, president of the Philadelphia Warriors, charged that he was “goaltending” and playing an illegal “one-man zone.” That accusation sparked testy public exchanges with Auerbach, who labeled Gottlieb’s moaning “sour grapes.” It also spoke to Russell’s revolutionary impact; in an age of talented offensive stars, Russell inspired awe and changed opponents’ strategy through his defense. His teammates funneled their men into the lane, where Russell could block shots. By early January 1957, Russell had also amassed astounding one-game totals of 34, 32, and 31 rebounds. “Russell is a dominant figure in the N.B.A.,” marveled the *Boston Globe*, after the center had played only nine games.<sup>7</sup>

Russell’s defense and rebounding engendered a larger stylistic transformation. In recent years, shooting percentages had risen, and the 1954 introduction of the twenty-four second shot clock had sped up the game. The Boston Celtics, led by the virtuoso backcourt of Bob Cousy and Bill Sharman, had been running and shooting quickly for years. Russell’s prowess refined that style. “When Russ came,” Cousy later reflected, “the game changed. Victory was predicated on rebounds and possession and he certainly supplied that.” Now the Celtics could operate their fast break with vicious efficiency, cutting downcourt as soon as Russell grabbed the rebound.<sup>8</sup>

But basketball’s offensive patterns changed for every team, not just the Celtics. Until Russell, if a player slipped past his defender, he could confidently assume an easy lay-up. After Russell, that confidence shattered. “Nothing’s sure when Russell’s around,” moaned Syracuse Nationals star Dolph Schayes. “Even if he’s not guarding you, he always manages to get near the hoop and put that hand in the way.” To attack, an offense had to stretch out horizontally and find open space for jump shots, and it had to expand vertically to minimize Russell’s dominance. By the 1960s basketball privileged athletes who combined speed, length, and leaping ability with all-around skill—such dynamic stars as Oscar Robertson, Jerry West, and Elgin Baylor.<sup>9</sup>

Russell’s effect upon Philadelphia Warriors center Neil Johnston captures his broader impact. Johnston was 6’ 8” and could not jump high, but he delivered a trademark line-drive, half-hook, half-runner with metronomic accuracy. The perennial All-Star had led the league in scoring three times. In his first game against Russell, he did not score for forty-two minutes. The next game, Johnston had one field goal in the first half. With every right-handed, low-trajectory flip by Johnston, Russell sprung up and raised his left hand with lightning-quick reflexes. “I figured I could block nine out of 10 of them,” Russell later recalled. Russell even conceded the shot at times, keeping Johnston from making adjustments, yet knowing that he could block it whenever necessary. Johnston could thrive in the earth-bound, patterned play of the 1950s, but the Russell Revolution drove him out of the league. He retired in 1959.<sup>10</sup>

As professional basketball became a more appealing spectacle, it also grew into a more viable commercial endeavor. By the time Russell entered the league,

the NBA had achieved a basic stability. The flourishing post-war economy and consumer culture opened new opportunities for professional sports leagues. Major League Baseball was experiencing growth, and the National Football League was an emerging financial success. After the 1949 merger of the Basketball Association of America and the National Basketball League, the NBA gradually consolidated from seventeen to eight teams. The professional game attracted new fans, especially after a 1951 point-shaving scandal in college basketball. In 1954 the NBA adopted a twenty-four second shot clock, which sped up the game's pace. By then sports fans acknowledged the NBA's superior brand of play, and few college stars now opted to play in the industrial basketball leagues overseen by the Amateur Athletic Union.<sup>11</sup>

Yet when Russell debuted, critics commonly derided the NBA as "bush league." It deserved the label. On-court scenes of screaming coaches, incompetent referees, and brawling players marred its reputation. The league had only eight teams. None were further west than St. Louis; they were absent from such major markets as Chicago or Detroit; and three were in small-potatoes cities dotting the industrial belt: Rochester, New York; Syracuse, New York; and Fort Wayne, Indiana. The regular season existed only to keep the league afloat, as six teams made the playoffs. The paternalistic owners possessed little vision, but they dominated labor relations: many players made under \$5,000 a year, and a nascent Players Association had to beg for such concessions as a twenty-game limit on the exhibition season.<sup>12</sup>

The NBA was also a white league. During the 1956-57 season, Russell was the single black player on the Celtics, and only fifteen African Americans appeared on NBA rosters that year. Here, too, Russell initiated a sea change in the character of professional basketball. Although a handful of African Americans had played in the NBA since 1950, Russell became the first black basketball hero on a national scale. Arriving in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the NCAA champion and Olympic gold medalist walked in the footsteps of sport's great racial ambassadors. Track and field's Jesse Owens had won four gold medals in the 1936 Munich Olympics, striking a symbolic blow against Germany's Nazi regime and its racist ideology. Boxer Joe Louis had emerged as not only a black folk hero, but also a symbol of American democracy after his celebrated bouts against Max Schmeling. Baseball's Jackie Robinson had joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947, winning white hearts and minds as he re-integrated the national pastime. These stars accepted a responsibility to represent the entire race, project humble dignity and patriotic enthusiasm, and engender a spirit of racial goodwill. Russell offered this same icon of black possibility.<sup>13</sup>

The rookie center earned the respect of his teammates, a personal enterprise with political overtones. He carried both immense pride and sensitivity. He had won NCAA titles, a gold medal, and the roar of appreciative crowds, yet he still suffered the stings of Jim Crow during road trips to the South, or of

taunts like “baboon” or “nigger” from spectators. He consciously decided to maintain a proud distance from his teammates. “I would not be unfriendly,” he later wrote, “but at the same time I did not want the reputation of being just a laughing, joking Negro.” Fellow rookie Tom Heinsohn recalled a time of personal racial enlightenment. He admired Russell’s comportment, and he sympathized when Russell declined a meal in a St. Louis coffee shop, knowing that he might be denied service. The new center also sidestepped the traditional rookie hazing of verbal abuse and carrying bags, responsibilities absorbed by the good-natured Heinsohn. “When you have a player who is setting attendance records all around the league,” explained Cousy, “you tend to think twice before you send him down to the corner for a coke.”<sup>14</sup>

Russell adapted his game to accentuate his teammates’ strengths, which scorers such as Cousy, Sharman, and Heinsohn appreciated. Russell provided rebounds and defense, the missing pieces in the puzzle. The Celtics won their first NBA championship during his rookie year, prevailing in a thrilling double-overtime seventh game in the final series against St. Louis. Experts predicted that Boston would repeat the next year, and they almost did. But early in a rematch final series against St. Louis, Russell tore tendons in his right ankle. With Russell sidelined, Bob Pettit scored fifty points in the series-clinching game. (Those 1958 St. Louis Hawks were the last all-white NBA champion.) By the next year the Celtics had re-established their supremacy, sweeping the Minneapolis Lakers in the finals. The players and coach Red Auerbach celebrated their selfless spirit, sparked by Russell. “Practically everything we do is predicated on Bill’s rebounding,” marveled Cousy.<sup>15</sup>

The success of the Celtics raised Russell’s profile, but he remained something of an enigma. Despite the initial fascination, a barrier remained between Russell and Boston fans. Especially compared to the diminutive, flashy, and white Bob Cousy, Russell seemed aloof. Even with Cousy, the Celtics struggled to maintain a fan base: Boston reporters often feuded with Auerbach, and hockey’s Bruins attracted thousands more spectators despite an inferior record. Russell believed he was unappreciated, and his disenchantment with the sporting public escalated with public slights. In 1958, the players voted him Most Valuable Player in the league, but the writers left him off the All-League first team. That off-season in Dallas, he abandoned an exhibition tour after promoters tried to house the black players in segregated quarters; when the local guide tried to apologize, Russell spat at him.<sup>16</sup>

In an age when black athletes and entertainers often represented African-American life to the broader public, Russell seemed particularly sensitive to image politics. He displayed humility about his offensive skills. He lauded his teammates and opponents. He insisted that his stellar defense depended as much upon his intellect as his athleticism. He also demanded recognition of his individuality. “I don’t want people to stereotype me ever,” he said. The image of a ghetto hustler involved driving a Cadillac, so he drove a Chrysler. The fashion

among hip black men was tight suits with short sleeves and pant legs, so Russell wore custom-made oversized suits with extra-long arms and legs. He also wore a beard—a thick goatee, often trimmed along the moustache and fuller under the chin. Few athletes then wore facial hair. Russell knew that it made him different, and he knew that it made people uncomfortable. “Maybe it’s just my own little revolution,” he later shrugged.<sup>17</sup>

By the turn of the decade Russell had changed his sport and opened new political avenues for the black athlete. But his legacy depended upon two developments in the 1960s. One was the civil rights movement, which challenged Russell and forced a unique public self-definition. The other was the arrival of the greatest single threat to Boston’s and Russell’s supremacy: a giant named Wilt Chamberlain.

Even before Wilt Chamberlain joined the Philadelphia Warriors in 1959, he and Russell possessed a firm bond in the public mind. They never faced each other in college, but they were the sport’s two preeminent centers, and both were black. “I’d sure like to meet that Chamberlain,” quipped Russell at the 1956 NCAA championships in Kansas City. “People have been calling me Wilt the Stilt ever since I got here.” Chamberlain was so tall, so strong, so fast, and so skilled that his college recruitment had been national news. After Russell graduated, Chamberlain became college basketball’s first genuine celebrity, subject to enormous media attention, including frequent comparisons to Russell. Celtics owner Walter Brown certainly perceived Chamberlain as a threat; he charged that the NBA should bar Chamberlain because “he has proselytized [sic] himself at the University of Kansas,” taking illegal payments. Chamberlain’s style, physical force, and individualist ethic—he skipped his senior year to earn \$65,000 with the Harlem Globetrotters—seemed poised to turn the NBA upside down.<sup>18</sup>

The initial Russell–Chamberlain clash on November 7, 1959, inspired unprecedented passion for professional basketball, and it established patterns that marked their future rivalry. The Boston Garden sold out months in advance. Scalpers hawked three-dollar tickets for ten dollars. Even as the crowd admired Chamberlain’s physical force, it watched Russell challenge every play in the pivot—getting a hand in Chamberlain’s face, flicking at the ball, and once blocking a shot straight down. Chamberlain had never faced such an agile defender, and he tried adjusting with some awkward flat-footed hook shots. He outscored Russell 30–22, but the Celtics won 115–106. Every subsequent rematch aroused greater publicity. Chamberlain smashed statistical boundaries that year, averaging 37 points and 27 rebounds a game. But Russell’s Celtics won 8 of 13 regular season games and 4 of 6 playoff games. “Wilt Chamberlain may be fabulous, fantastic, and phenomenal, but Boston’s Bill Russell is solid,” argued the *Boston Globe*. “For that reason the Celtics are in the National Basketball Assn. final as defending champions.” They beat St. Louis for their third title in four years.<sup>19</sup>

Chamberlain posed an epic challenge, requiring Russell to summon new depths of pride and energy. Once, after Chamberlain scored 49 points, Russell entered the locker room and cried. But Russell realized that Chamberlain lacked a killer instinct. The Colossus already suffered from the burden of unreasonable expectations; fans griped when he failed to deliver Kansas an NCAA title, and he publicly whined when opponents triple-teamed him or delivered cheap shots. Sensitive and lonely, he even “retired” after his rookie year, only to sign another contract and lose some respect around the league. So Russell chose to feed him barrels of honey, praising him at every opportunity. “He could be the greatest basketball player of all time,” he said in 1959. “No one comes close to Wilt,” he said in 1960. “Wilt is the greatest,” he said in 1963. Without denigrating his own value, Russell satisfied Chamberlain’s ego by sometimes allowing easy baskets, especially at the end of games with the Celtics comfortably ahead. He also struck up a friendship, and they entertained each other on road trips. The result: Chamberlain never built a personal animus against Russell, and Russell summoned more competitive intensity when it mattered most.<sup>20</sup>

The Russell–Chamberlain rivalry laid a foundation for the league’s growth. “Never before have so many people taken an active interest in professional basketball,” marveled *Sport* during Chamberlain’s rookie year. “Suddenly, housewives and college coeds who generally avoid athletic events with a passion are taking sides in this battle between the giants. The names of Chamberlain and Russell have given new life to the game, even to the world of sport.” The media delighted in their clashing ethics: Russell the team-oriented winner, Chamberlain the individual force. Chamberlain was the Babe Ruth of basketball—not only registering incredible statistics, but also performing deeds of awe-inspiring greatness. In 1962 he scored 100 points in one game, and he averaged over fifty points a game that season. His monstrous threat only elevated Russell. If not for Russell, wrote Jim Murray, “the game of basketball would right now be being slowly digested by Wilton Chamberlain, a public monument somewhere between Mt. Rushmore and the Empire State Building.”<sup>21</sup>

Players and coaches debated about the centers, too. The consensus favored Russell. Stars such as Bob Pettit and Jerry West considered Russell’s devastating psychological impact upon scorers. Russell himself painted basketball as a chess match, emphasizing his clever mastery of opponents. His fellow Celtics championed him most, often at Chamberlain’s expense. Basketball depended upon team play. Russell made his teammates better; Chamberlain forced his teammates to adapt to his talents. Red Auerbach insisted that Chamberlain “has not had the profound effect on the thinking and theories of professional basketball that Russell had as a rookie. The NBA was prepared for Chamberlain by the advent of Russell.”<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, even after Chamberlain’s arrival, the Celtics kept winning championships and forging an NBA dynasty. They again dispatched the St. Louis Hawks in the 1961 NBA Finals, and they beat the Los Angeles Lakers in 1962



and 1963. Chamberlain's Warriors moved to San Francisco in 1962; they lost to the Celtics in the 1964 Finals. The Celtics beat the Lakers again in 1965 and 1966. Every season occasioned new judgments about their historical greatness, new encomiums to their unrivaled speed, skill, defense, conditioning, and chemistry. Boston embodied modern basketball. "The Celtics were always kind of America's team," reflected Don Nelson, who joined the team in 1966. "You either hated 'em or you loved 'em, but you respected 'em and you followed 'em, and when they were on, everybody wanted to watch because they knew it was good basketball."<sup>23</sup>

The Celtics predicated their success upon team defense, especially after Bob Cousy retired in 1963. They pressed their opponents to force mistakes, and they guided the ball into the lane, where Russell awaited. On offense, they depended upon fast breaks. In half-court sets, they ran only seven basic plays. Rarely did a Celtic rank among the top ten NBA scorers, but the team always led the league in rebounds. The system demanded constant defensive effort and a sacrifice of individual ego, but the players embraced it. Red Auerbach respected his players. In huddles and practices, they suggested strategy or defensive match-ups. On the court, countless individual decisions shaped variations of their seven plays. The team's unquenchable competitive spirit sprung from this ethos of democratic cooperation.<sup>24</sup>

The Celtics also established a public image as a family—a family committed to excellence. "This group of athletes has developed a pride in performance the equal of any sports team ever assembled," applauded the *Boston Herald* in 1964. "It has meshed individual ability into cooperative effort to acquire winning consistency beyond anything ever established." Owner Walter Brown oversaw the Celtics like a benevolent patriarch. The players' wives frequently appeared together in public. Russell himself had an image as a family man: he married his college sweetheart, bought a home in suburban Reading, Massachusetts, and produced three children. The Celtics possessed extraordinary camaraderie and stability: Auerbach traded away only one regular during Russell's entire tenure, and veterans trained rookies to take over their jobs.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, this Celtics family transcended race, as whites and blacks shared professional respect and personal ties. Russell had once been the lone African American maintaining personal distance, but he became the team's standard-bearer for racial cooperation. He developed friendships and exchanged praise with his teammates, and he lauded Red Auerbach as a perfect coach. Other black players followed him onto the Celtics. Sam Jones and K. C. Jones replaced Sharman and Cousy in the backcourt, and Satch Sanders started at forward. When Willie Naulls joined the team in 1963, Boston became the first franchise to play five blacks on the court at once. As the civil rights movement compelled national attention, the Celtics represented integration in action. "There's a team over there in Boston Garden made up of blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, coached by a Jew, and they've been world champi-

ons for a long time now,” once noted Boston Red Sox general manager Dick O’Connell. To him, the Celtics embodied brotherhood for a common cause.<sup>26</sup>

Russell championed the new spirit wrought by the civil rights movement. In 1961, before a preseason game in Marion, Indiana, the mayor presented the Celtics with keys to the city. After the game, a local tavern declined to serve a group of players. Russell led those Celtics, black and white, on a midnight excursion to complain to the police and then the mayor. One week later in Lexington, Kentucky, before an exhibition against St. Louis, a coffee shop refused service to Sam Jones and Satch Sanders. They told Russell, who booked the next flight out of Lexington. The other black Celtics and Hawks followed suit. The incident demonstrated that Jim Crow touched even these accomplished athletes.<sup>27</sup>

As the mass demonstrations of the early 1960s spurred national attention to civil rights, Russell further participated in grassroots political organization. In May 1963, as Martin Luther King Jr. led civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, Russell led a march from Roxbury to Boston Common, site of a 10,000-person human rights rally. That August he participated in the March on Washington; he stood in the second row after declining an invitation to stand near the podium. The following year, during the Freedom Summer voter registration campaign, Russell conducted basketball clinics for both black and white children in Jackson, Canton, and Clarksdale, Mississippi. He came at the invitation of Charles Evers, the brother of the martyred NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers. Upon his return to Boston, Russell publicized the mysterious deaths of twelve Mississippi blacks, none of whose murderers had been brought to justice. In this era, most black professional athletes disassociated themselves from overt political protest, whether due to personal preference or the pressure levied by team owners. But Russell possessed both athletic stature and the courage of his convictions. African-American newspapers not only admired his on-court prowess, but also championed his civil rights activity.<sup>28</sup>

Russell further emerged as an international symbol of American democracy. In the midst of the Cold War, when the repression of African Americans wounded the nation’s reputation abroad, black celebrities could be showcased as examples of a racial meritocracy. The State Department sponsored Russell on a tour of West Africa in 1959; Russell even bought a rubber plantation in Liberia. Both the African-American and mass-market media trumpeted Russell’s capitalistic initiative, as well as his contribution to the development of the nation formed by freed American slaves. In Europe, where basketball gained steady popularity, Russell was better known than Mickey Mantle or Jim Brown. In 1964 Russell headlined an all-star tour through Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, and the United Arab Republic. Before they slipped behind the Iron Curtain, the team received a personal briefing from Secretary of State Dean Rusk.<sup>29</sup>

The nonviolent civil rights campaigns of the early 1960s—the Student Sit-In Movement, the Freedom Rides, the Birmingham Campaign, the March on

Washington—had projected powerful images to the American public. In print and on television, African Americans demanded the basic rights of democratic participation, achieved the moral high ground, and swathed their claims in the Bible and the Constitution. On multiple levels, Russell personified the goals and successes of his political generation: through his leadership of championship teams, his heroic image vis-à-vis Wilt Chamberlain, his rewarding relationships with fellow Celtics, his intelligence, his marital status, and his political credentials both at home and abroad. Yet Russell also projected a fierce individuality. While other black leaders and entertainers toed a line between mass appeal and racial progressivism, Russell surpassed the boundaries of the integrationist icon.

The political climate prompted a personal crisis. “Until today my life has been a waste,” Russell said in 1962. “I consider playing professional basketball as marking time, the most shallow thing in the world,” he added in 1963. The civil rights movement had shaped a generation with rising expectations, a generation seeking equality beyond access to a lunch counter. So Russell pondered his own worth and searched for fulfillment. Sometimes he slept only two hours a night. Off the court, he remained a black man in a racist society.<sup>30</sup>

In response, Russell projected an image that challenged expectations of black gratitude. With friends and teammates he was gregarious, warmhearted, and funny. But in public he presented what one-time teammate Carl Braun labeled “a kingly arrogance.” That image included outright rude behavior, especially when asked to sign autographs. He rejected the practice as a demonstration of celebrity worship, and he detected racial overtones in suppositions that he would view autograph requests as an honor. In time he refused to sign them. “You owe the public the same thing it owes you. Nothing!” he proclaimed. “I’m not going to smile if I don’t feel like smiling and bow my head modest.” Behind such statements lurked an anger that the public “owned” him in any respect, or that society would admire him for his basketball prowess yet deny black people their citizenship rights.<sup>31</sup>

Russell thus refused to march in lockstep with the black political orthodoxy. He questioned the strategy of nonviolence. “If you never really express dissatisfaction concretely, people tend to ignore it,” he told *Sports Illustrated*. “This passive kick—if it doesn’t work, how can they preach it? . . . If Martin Luther King is wrong he has failed as a leader.” He also defended the Nation of Islam, anathema to most white Americans. He met Muhammad Ali in the summer of 1964, soon after the boxer’s conversion to the Nation of Islam, and he championed the sect’s emphasis on education and economic empowerment. Though he rejected doctrine such as labeling the white man a devil, he drew from the Nation of Islam’s message of black pride. “I dislike most white people because they are white,” he stated with honest rage. “I like most black people because I am black.” He spoke as an individual, not a mouthpiece of a political position.<sup>32</sup>

Russell's comments also signaled a political focus beyond dismantling the *de jure* segregation of the South. Boston's black community had grown in the 1950s and 1960s, but it remained confined to portions of the South End and Roxbury, and it possessed little political clout. Hostility between the city's African Americans and white ethnics simmered. Russell tried investing in the city by opening a South End restaurant, and in June 1963, when Boston's black leadership staged a one-day boycott to protest *de facto* segregation of schools, he toured nine churches and social centers, where children participated in political workshops and sang freedom songs. He captivated his audiences with appeals to black pride and education. Three years later, at a junior high school in Roxbury, he spoke to the boiling rage of black inner cities. "The fire that consumes Roxbury consumes Boston," he said. "The fire will spread."<sup>33</sup>

On a personal level, as well, Russell denounced the racial climate in Boston. "A poisoned atmosphere hangs over this city," he said in 1966. "It is an atmosphere of hatred, mistrust, and ignorance." Even from the parquet floor of the Boston Garden, he heard racial slurs. He claimed that sportswriters imposed a separate "code of conduct" upon black athletes. Boston fans never fully embraced the man or his team; during their championship reign, they played to average crowds of 8,406, far below capacity. Russell and his family did integrate a neighborhood in the suburb of Reading, and in 1963 the town gave him a testimonial dinner, which so touched him that he wept. Yet when he considered moving to another neighborhood, a protest petition circulated. Once, the Russells found their home vandalized: beer poured on the pool table, trophies smashed, "NIGGA" spray-painted on walls, and feces on their bed. Russell later called Boston "the most rigidly segregated city in the country."<sup>34</sup>

Not a black separatist, not a full-blown revolutionary, Russell nevertheless voiced opinions that sacrificed mass adoration for his principles of justice. "We have got to make the white population uncomfortable and keep it uncomfortable, because that is the only way to get their attention," he told the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1964. He blamed black athletes who saw their public statements as part of a "popularity contest." He also attacked the perceived "quota" system in the NBA, in which teams tacitly agreed to limit black players and preserve their white fan base. "Two or three of the top guys have to be white," he insisted. "Most sports, even these days, are looking for the White Hope."<sup>35</sup>

Russell's comments about the quota system won a feature in the *Chicago Defender*, which emphasized his insistence that only black activism—not the feats of sports heroes, not the converted consciences of liberal whites, not the United States Constitution—would deliver black equality. Russell further garnered the admiration of his African-American peers. Oscar Robertson mourned that the mainstream ignored his competitive ethic, intelligence, and sense of humor. As a teenager, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar worshipped Russell's composure and self-respect. John Thompson, who later coached at Georgetown University, backed up Russell at center for two seasons in the mid-1960s. Russell was his

role model. "I always felt safe around Russell as a black person," recalled the massive, intelligent 6' 10" man. "The way he carried himself was reassuring to me. He came closest to any man I ever met at living at his own terms."<sup>36</sup>

But Russell's outspokenness also sparked outrage throughout the NBA. His comments about the quota system probably cost him the 1964 Most Valuable Player Award, despite his career highs in rebounds and assists. Russell believed that his players around the league kept their distance from him, fearing repercussions from their owners. Even liberal white reporters struggled with his snapping of the black athlete's iconographic shackles. "I felt betrayed by a man I had admired openly, typographically, from the day of his first Celtics' press conference, for what I suspected was his enormous dignity, intelligence and manly qualities," mourned Jerry Nason of the *Boston Globe*. Columnist Milton Gross compared him to Cassius Clay, the outspoken boxer who had joined the Nation of Islam.<sup>37</sup>

Yet where Clay (soon to be Muhammad Ali) personified black rebellion, Bill Russell forced a consideration of a complicated individual—a man who drew from both liberal and radical ideologies. American sports fans had to listen because of his continued dominance in a team context. Who else compelled such intimidation? Russell's on-court presence gained mythic stature, stimulating shooters into paroxysms of panic that one opponent labeled "Russellphobia." Who else earned such admiration? Younger black players looked upon him with reverence. And who else earned such respect? By 1961 coaches and veterans were putting him on basketball's "all-time" starting fives. By 1964 the *Sporting News* was calling him his sport's all-time greatest winner. "He is Bill Russell," wrote Jim Murray in 1965, "and he owns the game of basketball as no one ever will again."<sup>38</sup>

By the twilight of Russell's career, the NBA had undergone its transition from bush to big league. The ABC network signed the NBA to a three-year deal for Sunday afternoon telecasts. Expansion and relocation had placed all the franchises in major markets, including Los Angeles and San Francisco. Favorable antitrust legislation, commercial jet travel, and a burgeoning consumer culture furthered basketball's financial evolution. The spread of color television made the sport visually appealing on screen, and television ratings attracted investors. The paternalistic relationship between owners and players broke down, and the formation of the rival American Basketball Association in 1967 stimulated bidding wars for players' services. By the end of the decade, NBA players earned generous severance pay, pension benefits, minimum salaries, and medical insurance. They flew first class and stayed in luxury hotels. Some stars earned over \$100,000. No one called the NBA bush league any more.<sup>39</sup>

Professional basketball's modernization included the advance of African-American players. By the 1965-66 season, almost half the league's players were black, including two-thirds of the starters and three-fourths of the All-Stars.

Though some fans grumbled about the sport's changing complexion, attendance and television ratings improved throughout the 1960s. African Americans had fueled the game's popularity. Stars such as Russell, Chamberlain, Robertson, and Elgin Baylor hardly conformed to any one "black" style of play, but they combined speed, agility, and strength with all-around skills, shaping the game's patterns and the players it valued. They laid a foundation for the sport's ultimate association with a black aesthetic: grace, improvisation, showmanship, intimidation, individual flair. Numerous critics have likened this basketball style to other African-American cultural forms such as playing the dozens, sermonizing, and jazz. As the NBA simultaneously underwent commercial expansion and a racial shift, basketball and blackness established strong links in the American imagination.<sup>40</sup>

In this context, Russell honed his challenging stance on racial justice and the role of the black athlete. In 1966, with journalist William McSweeney, he wrote *Go Up For Glory*. Typical sports books muted athletes' personal, professional, and political conflicts; Al Hirshberg's 1964 book *Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics*, for instance, focuses on the protagonist's transition from a gangly, insecure teenager into an eager, popular hero filled with race pride. But Russell's searing, introspective memoir questioned sport's role as a vehicle of black uplift. Even as he celebrated democratic ideals and praised his fellow Celtics, Russell bitterly recalled racist slurs and expressed disillusionment with the moderation of the civil rights establishment. The themes of manhood and character course through the book.<sup>41</sup>

*Go Up For Glory* delivered a warning message that sport less promoted racial equality than it reflected patterns of prejudice. Numerous reporters flinched at its spare, direct attacks upon the hypocrisy of the sports system and the injustice of the racial system. The book forced a complicated perception of Russell. "When you slap me in the face, I acknowledge that you have slapped me," said Russell when asked about the book's tone. "These things have happened to me, and I want you to know these things have happened to me." That honesty was new to sports memoirs, and in the coming years, when the surge in black cultural awareness prompted a new literary output, at least two all-black anthologies included selections from Russell's book. The sociologist Harry Edwards wrote that *Go Up For Glory* was "the first publicly acknowledged indication that a revolt by black athletes was imminent."<sup>42</sup>

Yet Russell was no radical outside agitator. His opinions bore weight thanks to his continued leadership of the champion Celtics, a status cemented by his 1966 elevation to player-coach. Celtics owner Walter Brown had died in 1964, forcing Red Auerbach to concentrate upon his management duties. During the 1965-66 season, former Celtics Frank Ramsey, Bob Cousy, and Tom Heinsohn removed themselves from coaching consideration. "I don't think I could handle Russell," admitted Heinsohn. Russell was proud, intelligent, and sensitive to criticism. Moreover, Russell knew the challenge would motivate him, and he

recognized the political significance. He became the first African-American coach of any major professional sport.<sup>43</sup>

Russell rejected reporters' suggestions that race shaped either his hiring or his potential effectiveness. He resented that journalists asked such questions to him, but never a white coach. But the toppling racial barrier occasioned much public reflection. Jackie Robinson called it "a tremendous inspiration to a lot of young kids," and he suggested that when Russell started coaching, it opened new possibilities for other black athletes. Years before he became the first black manager in Major League Baseball, Frank Robinson argued that fans would "accept the individual by the job he does," using the example of Bill Russell.<sup>44</sup>

The media used the opportunity to analyze Russell's public meaning. *Time* and *Newsweek* examined his controversial statements and political consciousness. Some sportswriters castigated Russell's imperious style, and they hoped that his new job might temper his bitterness. The African-American press, from *Ebony* to *Muhammad Speaks*, celebrated the breakthrough as a civil rights milestone. So did the *New York Times*, which honored Russell on the front page, in a feature article, and in an editorial. The hiring aptly illustrated how Russell blurred sport's typical line between liberal integration and radical militancy.<sup>45</sup>

Under Russell, the Celtics actually improved their win total in the 1966-67 season. But the new coach absorbed considerable criticism when his inexperience and double-duty prompted some dubious decisions. Worse, the Philadelphia 76ers, led by Wilt Chamberlain, beat the Celtics in the Eastern Conference Finals, ending Boston's streak of eight consecutive titles. It appeared that the 76ers would become basketball's new dynasty, and that Russell was piloting a sinking ship. But in their 1968 rematch, Boston triumphed over Philadelphia, overcoming a 3-1 deficit. The Celtics beat their other nemesis, the Los Angeles Lakers, in the finals. Russell had coached his team to a world championship, his tenth in twelve seasons. Sportswriter Al Hirshberg admitted that he once had serious doubts about whether a player-coach could succeed, especially Russell, a "racist" leading an integrated squad. Now Hirshberg took it back. Russell, despite his arrogance and aloofness, deserved that respect. *Sports Illustrated* asked Russell if he had anything left to prove. "To tell you the truth, it's been a long time since I tried to prove anything to anybody," he replied. "I know who I am."<sup>46</sup>

That proud, thoughtful response indicated Russell's sharpening insistence that the public consider him not as a dumb jock or a political mouthpiece, but as an individual. One sign of his iconoclasm was an evolving wardrobe of opera capes, Nehru jackets, pork-pie hats, five-button double-vented suits, lace-front shirts, two-tone boots, love beads, and caftans. Another was his continued, conscious self-presentation as scowling, surly, even callous. Russell still refused autographs, and he ignored or brushed off attempts at conversation by good-natured fans. "Why should I?" he asked. "Most people just want my autograph or want to shake my hand so they can go back and tell their friends they spoke to

me. They look at athletics as if it's romantic. They're not interested in me as a person but as an athlete." To idolize him, Russell believed, was to dehumanize him.<sup>47</sup>

In this same vein, Russell insisted on expressing his political opinions. He spoke against injustice, he told Hugh Hefner on *Playboy After Dark*, "because I am a man." It was "now or never" for black athletes, he argued on *Black Journal*. "Athletes are beginning to realize they can't live in two different worlds." Russell not only criticized that sports franchises failed to consider blacks for management positions, but also bemoaned the lack of economic opportunities in ghettos. He condemned the hypocrisy of the Vietnam War. After Martin Luther King's assassination—even as the *Boston Globe* boosted the Celtics as an emblem of America's racial possibilities—Russell rejected King's nonviolent ethic. He proclaimed that the nation was on a "collision course."<sup>48</sup>

Russell helped pilot new avenues of political activity for black athletes in the late 1960s. In June 1966, he not only attended the White House Conference on Civil Rights, but also attacked the make-up of his workshop on Economic Security and Welfare. "Why are there not representatives of General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler here?" he burned. "What good is education without jobs? And it is big corporations such as these who control the good jobs." An awkward silence ensued. The next year he, Gale Sayers of the Chicago Bears, and Bill White of the Philadelphia Phillies captained a committee of eighteen professional athletes to raise money for the NAACP Legal and Educational Fund.<sup>49</sup>

Russell further defended Muhammad Ali, who had earned much scorn for his outspokenness, his association with the Nation of Islam, and his 1967 decision to resist the draft. Russell mourned that the boxer had become a "national whipping boy." In 1967 Jim Brown called together a summit of Russell, Lew Alcindor, and eight professional football players to meet with Ali. Some of the athletes tried to convince Ali to go into the Army, but they emerged convinced that Ali had resisted the draft because of his sincere religious beliefs. In *Sports Illustrated*, Russell wrote that he did not belong to the Nation of Islam, though he appreciated their celebration of black identity. Nor was he a Communist, though he had educated himself on the subject. He stood by Ali because the boxer was entitled to freedom of expression. He dismissed the notion that Ali was an ignorant tool of black radicals. No one should condemn this man of faith and conviction, he wrote. "The hysterical and sometimes fanatical criticism of Ali is, it seems to me, a symptom of the deeper sickness of our times."<sup>50</sup>

Throughout his career, in his unique and evolving way, Russell had both demanded a political voice and resisted any crude political label. His stance gained its deepest salience with the "Revolt of the Black Athlete" in the late 1960s, when a spectrum of academics, journalists, and athletes denounced the racist nature of organized sport. As urban riots, King's assassination, and the Black Power movement signaled a new direction in black politics, San Jose State sociologist Harry Edwards propelled a movement arguing that sport did



not enhance black possibilities; in fact, it entrenched racial stereotypes and inequality. Ali's banishment from organized boxing, protests by black athletes on college campuses, and the proposed boycott of the 1968 Mexico City Olympics spotlighted the plight and political function of the black athlete. Though the Olympic boycott never happened, the movement gained its iconic emblem when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their fists in a Black Power salute on the medal stand.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding the Olympic movement, Russell insisted that "a man should do what he feels is right." He condemned racial separatism, but he also condemned Jesse Owens and Ralph Boston, past and present track stars who opposed the boycott, as "do-nothings." In various contexts Russell defended the potential boycotters for their sacrifice to justice. Harry Edwards considered him an inspiration, even defining the movement as what "Bill Russell tried to say in 1957 but was not heard." In the heat of boycott fervor, Russell attended the U.S. Olympic Trials at the Los Angeles Coliseum and sat in the cheap seats, which Edwards called "the poor people's section." Still, Russell eschewed the pseudo-revolutionary posturing of Edwards. At the trials, when the National Anthem played, Edwards sat down. Russell stood up.<sup>52</sup>

In this contentious era, Russell stood as both a touchstone of black progress and a prophet of sport's racial ills. The 1968 CBS special *Of Black America*, in an episode on sports and music, noted that Russell was the only black professional coach, but it warned: "His presence in that job has not been a source of comfort to the black community, but an irritation. He stands out like a lighthouse, signaling tokenism." Russell had forged a unique and compelling position in the pantheon of black athletes. He had thrived within a racially integrated framework to a degree unprecedented in American sports history. He had avoided a complete alienation of the white mainstream, unlike Ali or Edwards. Yet he had expressed black anger and frustration, and he had forced a public consideration of his intelligence, introspection, and idiosyncrasies.<sup>53</sup>

In 1968, in recognition of both his astounding achievements and political status, *Sports Illustrated* named Russell its Sportsman of the Year. George Plimpton's profile painted a man who had won esteem, and a man of both pride and sensitivity. Russell had a basement filled with trophies, but this tribute touched him. The honor recognized him as more than an athlete. "This award means to me, 'You've been a man. We respect you.'" He had spent a career demanding and earning that respect.<sup>54</sup>

For the 1968-69 season, the Celtics' eight regulars averaged thirty years of age, injuries dogged Russell and other key players, and the team finished the season in fourth place in the Eastern Conference. But they summoned reserves of Celtic Pride for the playoffs, downing the Philadelphia 76ers and edging the up-and-coming New York Knicks. The finals against the Los Angeles Lakers needed the maximum seven games.

That last game lent a lyrical coda to the mythology of Russell as the ultimate winner. The Lakers glittered with star power: Jerry West, Elgin Baylor, and their newest acquisition, Wilt Chamberlain. For game seven, Lakers owner Jack Kent Cooke ordered a victory celebration: the University of Southern California marching band, an elaborate presentation of the championship trophy, and balloons released from the rafters. But the Celtics won 108–106, and the balloons stayed on the ceiling. One final time, Chamberlain’s stature shriveled in Russell’s shadow: he left the game with five minutes left after banging his knee, and coach Butch Van Breda Kolff, immersed in a personality conflict with his star center, had refused to re-insert him.<sup>55</sup>

Russell had led his team to two titles in his three years as player-coach, and eleven championships in his thirteen seasons with the Celtics. The *Baltimore Afro-American* lauded him. “He made the hated cliché permissible, indulgence in the superfluous timely,” the editorial read. “Basketball has never seen his equal in the past, and may not ever in the future.” Russell had redefined the center position, driven a faster and more exciting game, triumphed over his daunting rival, and become sport’s greatest winner. He had further presided over an African-American revolution in basketball—not only a restructuring of the sport’s racial composition, but also a reorientation of its aesthetic. Russell carried this revolution into the political realm. He defied racial bigots, challenged liberals and moderates, and stoked pride among African Americans. “*We see each other as men,*” he had said after his final title. “*We judge a guy by his character.*” Through his courageous iconoclasm, Russell asked the same of the public.<sup>56</sup>

Even in retirement, Russell inflamed the sports establishment. He rejected the manifestations of athletic hero worship, not only refusing to sign autographs, but also declining a public retirement of his number at the Boston Garden and avoiding a ceremony inducting him into the Hall of Fame. He also whetted his reputation as basketball’s chief intellectual, crafting with Taylor Branch another autobiography, *Second Wind*, which may be the finest sports memoir of all time. He had mixed success as both a broadcaster and coach of the Seattle SuperSonics and the Sacramento Kings.<sup>57</sup>

But Russell’s relative distance from the public eye may mask his influence upon professional basketball. In the past few decades, the NBA has broadly infiltrated the worldwide consciousness. Fueled by constant television exposure, a sound economic structure built on a salary cap, and the shrewd marketing of individual stars, the league has undergone a commercial and cultural explosion. Russell and the Celtics dynasty established the tradition of basketball excellence that underscored the NBA’s rising popularity. A revival of the Celtics-Lakers rivalry in the 1980s pulled the league out of an economic doldrums, and now only Michael Jordan rivals Russell for the reputation of basketball’s greatest winner.<sup>58</sup>

Russell, moreover, poured the cultural foundation for such black stars as Jordan, Magic Johnson, Charles Barkley, and Allen Iverson to become global

icons. Russell's athleticism and creativity first injected a black aesthetic into the NBA. The modern avatar of this trend, of course, is Jordan, whose swooping, graceful dunks epitomized the spontaneous showmanship rooted in African-American cultural practice. Yet Jordan, in partnership with multinational corporations such as Nike and McDonald's, has commoditized this aesthetic with astonishing global reach. His icon transcends race—it may suggest black dignity and grace to some, but it sells sneakers and hamburgers to all.<sup>59</sup>

The Jordan icon thus suggests both the ubiquity and uniqueness of Bill Russell's legacy. The NBA's surge of popularity had its roots in the values of speed and athletic innovation, in the history of the Celtics dynasty, and in the sport's public association with black stars. More than anyone else, Russell drove these changes. But he also instilled an overt political dimension into basketball. He achieved personal and team success through sport, but he decried the exploitation of athletes and the inattention to racial injustice. He loved his white teammates, but he embraced his blackness. He expressed the dreams of Martin Luther King, but he echoed the warnings of Malcolm X. In so doing, he provoked the typical sports fan of the 1960s to see him as more than a political symbol. How ironic that as the NBA's modern black stars attract unprecedented scales of visibility, they are boiled down to commercial symbols, icons of the global marketplace.

## Notes

1. *Boston Globe*, 6 May 1969.

2. On Russell's career see Thomas J. Whalen, *Dynasty's End: Bill Russell and the 1968-69 World Champion Boston Celtics* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004). On his rivalry with Chamberlain see John Taylor, *The Rivalry: Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain, and the Golden Age of Basketball* (New York: Random House, 2005). On Celtics dynasty see Jeff Greenfield, *The World's Greatest Team: A Portrait of the Boston Celtics, 1957-1969* (New York: Random House, 1976); Joe Fitzgerald, *That Championship Feeling: The Story of the Boston Celtics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975); Dan Shaughnessy, *Ever Green: The Boston Celtics: A History in the Words of Their Players, Coaches, Fans and Foes, From 1946 to the Present* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

3. Sport historians have not yet fully examined an athlete such as Russell, who simultaneously embodied a range of political strategies. Yet recent historians of the African-American freedom struggle have demonstrated how liberal and radical impulses often sprang from similar sources. In this vein, an examination of Russell reveals how one athlete could melt the barriers imposed upon black icons of the civil rights era. See Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

4. On his college team, see "Along Came Bill," *Time*, 2 January 1956, 36-37; "Bill Russell—the antenna with arms," *Look*, 10 January 1956, 66-68; "Best Big Man on View," *Life*, 16 January 1956, 12-14; "Easy Does It and Dons Do It," *Life*, 2 April 1956, 93-94; "Basketball's Leaning Tower," *Ebony*, April 1956, 50-51; "After Five Years," *Newsweek*, 2 April 1956; Bruce Lee, "Bill Russell, K. C. Jones, Unstoppable San Francisco," *Sport*, April 1964, 37-39, 85-87. On the Globetrotters, see *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 December 1956; Ben Green, *Spinning the Globe: The Rise, Fall, and Return to Greatness of the Harlem Globetrotters* (New York: Amistad, 2005), 288-289; Jeremiah Tax, "The Man Who Must Be Different," *Sports Illustrated*, 3 February 1958, 29-31; Bill Russell as told to William McSweeney, *Go Up For Glory* (New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1966), 40-42. On Olympics, see "Russell Promises President He Will Play in the Olympics," *Ebony*, April 1956, 52; "Events and Discoveries," *Sports Illustrated*, 24 December 1956, 37.

5. *Boston Globe*, 17 December 1956, 19 December 1956, 26 March 1957; Arnold Red Auerbach and Paul Sann, *Red Auerbach: Winning the Hard Way* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), 85-95; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 December 1956, 22 December 1956; *Boston Traveler*, 21 December 1956; *Boston Herald*, 19 December 1956.

6. *Boston Herald*, 23 December 1956; Fitzgerald, *That Championship Feeling*, 52.

7. Ed Linn, "Bill Russell's Private World," *Sport*, February 1963, 66; *Boston Globe*, 24 January 1956, 26 December 1956, 4 January 1957, 7 January 1957, 22 January 1957, 12 February 1957; *Boston Herald*, 3 January 1957, 22 January 1957, 12 February 1957; Jeremiah Tax, "All In the Mind," *Sports Illustrated*, 14 January 1957, 48-49; Bob Vetrone, "Gottlieb Growl at Russell Only Teapot Tempest," *Sporting News*, 16 January 1957, Sect. 2, 1-2; "Lapchick on Russell—He Could Make It BIG," *Sporting News*, 6 February 1957, Sect. 2, 2; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 January 1957, 19 January 1957.

8. On growing offensive prowess, see Bud Palmer, "The Six Best Shots in Basketball," *Sport*, April 1956, 44-47, 89. On twenty-four second clock, see Terry Pluto, *Tall Tales: The Glory Years of the NBA, in the Words of the Men Who Played, Coached, and Built Pro Basketball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 28-31. For Cousy quote see *Boston Globe*, 8 February 1966.

9. *Boston Herald*, 22 March 1957; Leonard Koppett, *The Essence of the Game is Deception: Thinking About Basketball* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 66-71.

10. "Three in One," *Sports Illustrated*, 20 January 1958, 16; *Boston Globe*, 26 December 1956, 27 December 1956; Bill Russell with Bob Ottum, "The Psych...And My Other Tricks," *Sports Illustrated*, 25 October 1965, 39; Charles Salzberg, *From Set Shot to Slam Dunk: The Glory Days of Basketball in the Words of Those Who Played It* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 40-41; Bob Cousy and Bob Ryan, *Cousy on the Celtic Mystique* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1988), 33-35.

11. Leonard Koppett, *24 Seconds to Shoot: The Birth and Improbable Rise of the National Basketball Association* (Kingston, NY: Total/Sports Illustrated, 1999; orig. 1968), 1-106. On larger structural transformations in professional sports see Randy Roberts and James Olson, *Winning Is the Only Thing: Sports in America since 1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989), 47-112. On college basketball scandals see Stanley Cohen, *The Game They Played* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977); Charles Rosen, *Scandals of '51: How the Gamblers Almost Killed College Basketball* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978). On AAU basketball see Adolph H. Grundman, *The Golden Age of Amateur Basketball: The AAU Tournament, 1921-1968* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

12. Leonard Koppett, "Does Pro Basketball Have a Future?," *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 December 1958, 36, 81-84; Bob Cousy as told to Al Hirshberg, "Pro Basketball Needs a Bill of Rights," *Sport*, April 1956, 12-13, 68-69; Ed Linn, "Is the N.B.A. Big League?," *Sport*, 10-11, 82-85.

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14. Russell, *Go Up For Glory*, 121; Tommy Heinsohn and Joe Fitzgerald, *Give 'Em the Hook* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1988), 179; Tommy Heinsohn with Leonard Lewin, *Heinsohn, Don't You Ever Smile? The Life and Times of Tommy Heinsohn and the Boston Celtics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1976), 81-82; Bob Cousy with Ed Linn, *The Last Loud Roar* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 126.

15. On Russell studying his teammates, see Bill Russell with Alan Hilburg and David Falkner, *Russell Rules: 11 Lessons on Leadership from the Twentieth Century's Greatest Winner* (New York: New American Library, 2001), 25-30. On 1956-57, see *Boston Herald*, 14 April 1957; Herbert Warren Wind, "Hubbub in the Hub," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 April 1957, 17-19. On 1957-58, see Jeremiah Tax, "This Vintage Year," *Sports Illustrated*, 4 November 1957, 46-51; Leonard Koppett, "The Celtics Look Better Than Ever," *Sport*, December 1957, 42-45, 70-71; *Boston Herald*, 3 April 1958; *Boston Globe*, 7 April 1958, 13 April 1958. On 1958-59, see Jeremiah Tax, "Short, Sweet Series for Slick Celtics," *Sports Illustrated*, 20 April 1959, 66-68; *Boston Herald*, 10 April 1959, 11 April 1959.

16. On Boston sporting culture, see *Boston Globe*, 29 January 1958, 7 March 1960; *Boston Herald*, 28 January 1958, 30 March 1958; Heinsohn, *Heinsohn, Don't You Ever Smile?*, 78-80. On Cousy, see Bob Cousy as told to Al Hirshberg, *Basketball Is My Life* (1957; New York: J. Lowell Pratt and Co., 1963); Bill Reynolds, *Cousy: His Life, Career, and the Birth of Big-Time Basketball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005). On 1958 snub, see *Boston Herald*, 14 March 1958, 1 April 1958. On Dallas incident, see Russell, *Go Up For Glory*, 90.

17. Bill Russell as told to Al Hirshberg, "I Was a 6' 9" Babe in the Woods?," *Saturday Evening Post*, 18 January 1958, 25, 66-68; Tax, "The Man Who Must Be Different," 29-31; Russell, *Go Up For Glory*, 120; Gilbert Rogin, "We Are Grown Men Playing a Child's Game," *Sports Illustrated*, 18 November 1963, 77. On Russell's beard see also Randy Roberts, "The Battle of the Beards: Russell and Chamberlain," in Randy Roberts, ed., *The Rock, the Curse, and the Hub: A Random History of Boston Sports* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 293-294.

18. On early Russell-Chamberlain comparisons, see *Pittsburgh Courier*, 8 December 1956, 15 December 1956; *Los Angeles Times*, 23 December 1956; *New York Times*, 14 January 1957; *Lawrence Journal-World*, 19 March 1957, 23 March 1957; *Boston Globe*, 13 December 1957. On Chamberlain at Kansas see "What It Took to Get Wilt," *Life*, 28 January 1957, 113-117; Jimmy Breslin, "Can Basketball Survive Chamberlain?," *Saturday Evening Post*, 1 December 1956, 104-108; "Seven-Foot Freshman," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 August 1955, 11; "Wilt the Stilt," *Time*, 12 December 1955, 61-62; "The 7-Foot Man," *Newsweek*, 17 December 1956, 96; Wilt Chamberlain with Tim Cohane and I. R. McVay, "Why I Am Quitting College," *Look*, 10 June 1958, 91-101; Aram Goudsouzian, "'Can Basketball Survive Chamberlain?': The Kansas Years of Wilt the Stilt," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 28 (Autumn 2005): 2-25. On Walter Brown charges see *Boston Globe*, 18 February 1957, 19 December 1957; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 2 March 1957; *Chicago Defender*, 9 March 1957.

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20. Lee Greene, "Bill Russell is Better Than Ever," *Sport*, January 1961, 25-26; Jim Murray, "Wilt Chamberlain," *Sport*, December 1986, 49-50; Wilt Chamberlain as told to Tim Cohane, "Pro Basketball Has Ganged Up On Me," *Look*, 1 March 1960, 51-58. For a biography of Chamberlain see Robert Cherry, *Wilt: Larger Than Life* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2004). On Russell's psychological handling of Chamberlain, see Gottehrer, "When Wilt and Russell Meet . . .," 41; *New York Times*, 21 February 1960, 14 January 1963; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 November 1959; *Boston Globe*, 5 November 1959, 2 December 1959, 16 March 1960, 14 February 1961, 13 December 1961; Mike Carey with Jamie Most, *High Above Courtside: The Lost Memoirs of Johnny Most* (Champaign, IL: Sports Publishing LLC, 2003), 338-340; Bill Russell and Taylor Branch, *Second Wind: Memoirs of an Opinionated Man* (New York: Random House, 1979), 159-160; Pluto, *Tall Tales*, 348.

21. Gottehrer, "When Wilt and Russell Meet . . .," 39; Goodman, "The Big Collision," 16-17; Jeremiah Tax, "Two Big Men in a Tight Pennant Race," *Sports Illustrated*, 22 February 1960, 46-49; "Bill vs. Wilt," *Life*, 1 December 1961, 51-55; Milton Gross, "Who Is The Best of Basketball's Super-Stars?," *Sport*, April 1962, 24-27, 93-95; *Boston Globe*, 29 December 1959, 13 February 1962; Clif Keane, "Wilt and Russell Great—Mikan Above 'Em All," *Sporting News*, 20 January 1960, Sect. 2, 1; Earl Strom with Blaine Johnson, *Calling the Shots: My Five Decades in the NBA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 186-187; Gary M. Pomerantz, *Wilt, 1962: The Night of 100 Points and the Dawn of a New Era* (New York: Crown, 2005); *Boston Globe*, 6 March 1966.

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