

'BLACK IS BEST'

by MARTIN KANE



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID HOVES

The success of the black athlete in America is even greater than Branch Rickey thought it might be on that day in the 1940s when he was inspired to introduce to baseball's cloistered world the very special skills of Jackie Robinson. Until then the black man had won sporting prestige primarily in prizefighting and in track, and not too much in track, because college coaches then were recruiting few black athletes.

But consider what has happened since Jackie Robinson jogged out to first base at Ebbets Field:

- In basketball three of the five players named to the 1969-70 All-NBA team were black, as were all five of the players named to the All-Rookie team. Blacks have won the

league's Most Valuable Player award 12 times in the past 13 seasons.

- In pro football all four 1969 Rookie of the Year awards for offense and defense were won by blacks.

- In baseball black men have won the National League's MVP award 16 times in the past 22 seasons.

- Twenty-six years ago there were no blacks on any of the big-league basketball, football or baseball professional team rosters, though on rare occasions in the past, basketball, baseball and football had used black players. Today there are 150 blacks out of 600 players in major league baseball, 330 out of 1,040 in football and 153 out of 280 in basketball. Of the players on the professional leagues' 1969-70

continued

BLACK continued

all-star teams, 36% in baseball were black, 44% in football and 63% in basketball.

It is clear that the black community in the U.S. is not just contributing more than its share of participants to sport. It is contributing immensely more than its share of stars. Black athletes accounted for all eight Olympic records set by U.S. runners at Mexico City in 1968, which led a European coach to observe: "If not for the blacks, the U.S. team would finish somewhere behind Ecuador."

As American black athletes have achieved world recognition they have stirred competitive instincts in their ancestral Africa. Africa's first Gallup-type poll was taken in 1965. Seven thousand Africans were asked what man—politician, writer or sportsman—would they consider as African of the Year. Ethiopia's Abebe Bikila, first black African ever to win an Olympic gold medal—he won the marathon in 1960 and '64—was elected. Now he has lots of victorious company. In the 1968 Games, Ethiopia's Mamo Wolde won the marathon, and three Kenyans—Kipchoge Keino, Naftali Temu and Amos Biwott—took gold medals in the 1,500 meters, the 10,000 meters and the steeplechase respectively.

In the 1960 Games the emerging nations won one gold and one silver medal. In 1964 they took one gold and three bronze. In 1968 they won four gold, seven silver and three bronze medals. Indeed, at Mexico City only four men won more than a single medal in individual track events, and three of them were from black Africa—Keino, Wolde and Temu. The other was Mohamed Gammoudi of Tunisia. Overall, in men's track and field, black runners and jumpers from Africa, the Americas and Europe accounted for 40 of 90 medals (including the relays), and they won 11 of the 24 events.

In only one sport, thoroughbred racing, has the role of the American black declined over the years. This was the first sport in which any considerable number of blacks became prominent. The first Kentucky Derby, run in 1875, had 15 jockeys, 14 of them black. In the first 28 runnings of the Derby black jockeys brought in 15 winners. The first jockey ever to win back-to-back Derbies was a Negro, Isaac Murphy, in 1890 and '91. His total of three Derby victories was unequalled for 39 years and unsurpassed for 57. Other noted black jockeys were Willie Simms, who won the Belmont in 1893 and '94, the Derby in 1896 and '98 and the Preakness in 1898, and Jimmy Winkfield, who won the Derby in 1901 and '02 and finished second and third in his other two rides.

Today there are no top American black jockeys and very few of any ranking. This has happened in part because, as one trainer puts it, "they have become too big." It also happened because horse racing, a socially exclusive sport, at some point decided to exclude black riders from its hierarchy. Latin American jockeys are tops in thoroughbred racing now.

Despite Charlie Sifford, Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson, golf and tennis have seen few outstanding black athletes—there is a marked shortage of country clubs in ghettos. Nor does the young black have a significant opportunity to learn skiing, sailing, swimming or hockey. Environmental factors have a great deal to do with excellence in sport.

But so do physical differences, and there is an increasing body of scientific opinion which suggests that physical differences in the races might well have enhanced the athletic potential of the Negro in certain events.

This is not so much a matter of height and weight as of body proportions. Researchers have found that the black American, on the average, tends to have a shorter trunk, a more slender pelvis, longer arms (especially forearms) and longer legs (especially from the knees down) than his white counterpart. His bones are denser, and therefore heavier, than those of whites. He has more muscle in the upper arms and legs, less in the calves. There is reason to believe that his fat distribution is patterned differently from that of the white man—leaner extremities but not much difference in the trunk. And there is a trifle of evidence—this aspect has been studied so little that it still is in the highly speculative state—that the black man's adrenal glands, a vital factor in many sports, are larger than the white man's.

At the Rome Olympics in 1960, and previously at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games in 1958, Dr. J. M. Tanner measured, photographed and X-rayed 137 track and field athletes and a number of weight lifters and wrestlers. His findings were reported in *The Physique of the Olympic Athlete* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London). They concluded that "Amongst competitors in both track and field events there were large significant racial differences in leg length, arm length and hip width."

Black sprinters, Tanner's team found, averaged 86.2 centimeters in leg length while white sprinters averaged 83. Similar differences were noted in arm length, but the sitting height of the blacks averaged 92.5 compared with the whites' 93.5. The blacks' hip width averaged 26.8 centimeters, and the whites', 28.5. "The ratio of leg length to sitting height for sprinters, 400-meter runners and high jumpers averaged 0.88, 0.92 and 0.93 in whites, and 0.93, 0.97 and 1.01 in Negroes," they reported. "Evidently the Negroes have longer limbs and narrower hips than the whites, even at approximately the same overall size. In the comparison of Negro and white weight lifters exactly the same three differences occurred."

Tanner's group also discovered a "distinct difference in the composition of the Negro calf compared with that of the white, in both sprinters and 400-meter men. The Negroes have wider bones and narrower muscles. In the 400-meter competitors, for example, the Negro tibia breadth averages 4.5 centimeters compared with

the white's 4.2 cm.; in calf muscle breadth the Negroes average 7.4 cm. and the whites 7.9 cm. In fat also the Negroes are lower.

"In total arm circumference Negroes are just significantly greater than whites, and in total subcutaneous fat they are significantly less.

"Thus there are clearly racial differences in measurements, and we must not lump these different populations together," Tanner reported.

Without reference to race, the study found that 400-meter men are large and marathon men small. Middle-distance runners tend to have long legs, marathoners short legs. Like their white counterparts, black sprinters are also relatively short-legged compared with black middle-distance runners.

"A short leg can be moved more rapidly than a long one," the study observed. "Alternatively, the short legs may not be directly associated with the high speed but, indirectly, through an association with the large muscles also characteristic of the sprinter. In an analysis of the body measurements of ordinary students, we found that men with big muscles had relatively short legs. This comes about during growth as a result of muscular boys maturing and ceasing growth slightly earlier than others. As the legs are growing relatively faster than the trunk just before puberty, an early puberty deprives them of further increments more than it does the trunk. It is for the physical educationist to analyze whether the lever effect or the large muscle size is of greater importance in sprinting; practically, the two go together.

"This explanation would not hold for the long-distance runners; here it seems certain that short legs confer some mechanical and physiological advantage. The walkers also have short legs, and perhaps the speed of movement of the ankle is of first importance to them as to the sprinter. A long-legged man spends too much time with his feet in the air. The few 110-meter hurdlers, be it noted, do not have the short legs of their flat-racing companions. The hurdler has to clear the hurdles, and a center of gravity high above the ground is imperative for him. Only a very large hurdler indeed could afford to have short legs relative to his trunk. This is an event where one might expect, and within limits, one obtains, Negro predominance."

Other studies found further physical differences in the races. Albert Damon of Harvard University's department of anthropology, writing in *Human Biology*, reported on an anthropometric survey undertaken at Fort Devens, Mass. with respect to lung function. The study covered 529 Army drivers.

"On forced expiration," the article reported, "the vital capacity of some 30 soldiers approached or exceeded the six-liter limit of the recording machine. Surprisingly, none of these 30 pulmonary athletes was a Negro, although at

least five Negroes might have been expected, since 17% of the soldiers were Negroes and since the Negroes as a group seemed to try as hard as the whites, [and] were no smaller and were actually more muscular and stronger."

While stressing the importance of social, cultural and motivational factors that have kept the black man from excelling in some sports, Dr. Edward E. Hunt Jr., professor of anthropology at Pennsylvania State University, has noted that the black athlete has "hyperextensibility—or what the layman might call being double-jointed."

"The Negro has more tendon and less muscle than the white," he said. "The black man's heel doesn't protrude as much and his leg and foot give him tremendous leverage for jumping."

On the other hand, since the black athlete tends to have less body fat, Dr. Hunt observed, his muscles tend to get chilled sooner in cold climates, and this might affect his performance in such sports as ice hockey, or football when played in extreme northern areas.

Then there is the theory of Lloyd (Bud) Winter, the former San Jose State track coach, who holds that black athletes "have a distinctive ability to relax under pressure."

"Their antagonistic muscles—the muscles that extend—

continued



BLACK continued

stay loose," he says. "I remember one of my quarter-milers, Thelmo Knowles. I kept saying to him, automatically, to stay loose. One day Thelmo answered, 'Coach, if I relax any more I'm going to fall in a heap.'

"What heritage or heredity brought the black athlete this ability to keep out tension, no one knows. Yet, prior to the big day the black athlete, as a rule, can go through his daily motions or his sleep period normally, and when the big moment comes he can react normally. In white athletes the conscious mind often takes over and the tensions mount."

Winter makes the quite obvious point that black athletes differ from each other physically quite as much as whites do, regardless of the averages, which are what scientific studies are concerned with. He notes that Ray Norton, a sprinter, was tall and skinny with scarcely discernible hips, that Bobby Poynter, also a sprinter, was squat and dumpy with a swayback and a big butt, that Dennis Johnson was short and wiry, that Tommie Smith was tall and wiry, and so on. What they had in common, in Winter's experience, was "that looseness and limberness."

"I don't mean agility here," he explains. "I mean the quality of remaining limber, as you can note in the way they dance. A limber athlete has body control, and body control is part of athletic skill. It is obvious that many black people have some sort of head-start motor in them, but for now I can only theorize that their great advantage is relaxation under stress. As a class the black athletes that have trained with me are far ahead of the whites in that one factor—relaxation under pressure. It is their secret."

A similar concept is held by Coach Stan Dowell of Silver Creek High School in San Jose, Calif., a man who has worked with Lee Evans, John Carlos, Tommie Smith and Clifton McNeil, among others.

"The black athletes," he says, "have an ability to let their bodies go—you know, they hang everything loose. They walk loose, they dance loose, they are loose. You see it easily in their dancing. Their knees aren't stiff."

"I've discussed this with Lee, Carlos and Smith—about letting their bodies go. I think it is linked with the suppressed life of the black man in America. Their emotions come out in their bodies, and we notice this kind of expression develops body muscle control. Have you noticed how, when they're dancing or playing games, their heads seem to flop around? It's magnificent."

"White kids haven't had to live under an oppressive burden, but white kids are so much more aware of conventional things, of Emily Post and timetables and being right, or of being checked on by parents or teachers about doing right."

In short, many authorities say that there are marked physical differences among athletes in the various sports and that blacks differ significantly from whites in some

aspects—including the motivational and cultural—which permit them to exceed whites athletically in certain events.

Some extensive work in this area has been done by Dr. Robert M. Malina, assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Texas. On the point of physical proportions Dr. Malina cites well-known findings which suggest that animals living in hot climates tend to have longer extremities and a lesser body mass in order to dissipate heat. With their long legs and arms, blacks have a greater surface area from which to dissipate heat through the skin.

(A striking example is to be found in the ear size of various types of foxes living in different climates. The Arctic fox has tiny ears, the common fox of the temperate zones slightly larger ones and the desert fox has very big ears, permitting him to radiate heat faster.)

Dr. Malina makes the point, too, that the American black is a member of a relatively recent taxonomic group that came into existence some 300 to 350 years ago. In speaking of differences between peoples, many anthropologists do not refer to races. They talk of populations. The so-called Negro race, a term now out of fashion, actually consists of many different kinds of peoples, ranging from the Watusi to the pygmy. Some break down the African populations into three groups: north of the Sahara, the 1,500-mile-wide arc south of the Sahara (black Africa) and the southern tip of the continent.

The black Africans on the east coast—the Ethiopians, Kenyans and others—have a genetic mix. Keino is a man with black skin and many white features. So is Bikila. It is a cliché in American track to say that black runners are good only in the sprints and the shorter runs, which is where they have distinguished themselves. This is not true of blacks from East Africa—but the American black's ancestors came mostly from the west coast, where there was little genetic contact from outside. This area of Africa is pretty much isolated by ocean and desert. The American black athlete's breeding is different from that of the East Africans, who often excel at distance running.

John Velzian, the British coach of the Kenya track team a few years ago when Keino was just coming into prominence, has noted (SI, Dec. 19, 1966) that there are not only physical but environmental differences among the tribes of Kenya, and these differences greatly affect an athlete's ability to perform. But one thing they all have in common is severe living conditions.

The same is true of the bulk of American black athletes and their ancestors, both in this country and in Africa. Calvin Hill, black Yale graduate and Dallas Cowboys running back, puts it this way:

"I have a theory about why so many pro stars are black. I think it all boils down to the survival of the fittest. Think of what the African slaves were forced to endure in this country merely to survive. Well, black athletes are their descendants. They are the offspring of

continued

BLACK continued

those who are physically and mentally tough enough to survive."

Lee Evans, Olympic and world 400-meter record holder, agrees. Asked why black Americans have produced so extraordinarily disproportionate a number of the highest-class athletes in the world, he replies:

"We were bred for it. Certainly the black people who survived in the slave ships must have contained a high proportion of the strongest. Then, on the plantations, a strong black man was mated with a strong black woman. We were simply bred for physical qualities."

It might be that even without special breeding the African has a superior physique. A British medical journal, *The Lancet*, published an article by a World Health Organization team reporting that healthy Uganda infants had muscular development patterns "equal to that of European children twice or three times their age." Out of 107 black babies, averaging three days in age, 90 were able to prevent their heads from falling back when they were drawn up to a sitting position. European infants could do this only when they reached the age of eight to 12 weeks.

Other tests also have shown that the black newborn is more advanced than the white. For example, Dr. Richard A. Berger, member of the department of health, physical education and recreation of Temple University, and Major Robert L. Paradis, who teaches in the ROTC program at Texas Tech University, collaborated on a study of 30 white and 30 black students matched in age and socioeconomic level. Their findings, published in *The Research Quarterly* of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, were that the average performances of black students indicated a higher fitness level than those of the white students "on all test items and on the composite fitness score."

"However," they added, "the only means (averages) which were significantly different were shuttle run, 50-yard dash, 600-yard run and composite fitness score in favor of the black students."

D. G. Barker and N. A. Ponthieux of Texas A&M University, testing grade-school youngsters, found that "Negro boys' fitness scores remained significantly higher with respect to pull-ups, standing broad jump, 50-

yard dash, softball throw and 600-yard run-walk." Negro schoolgirls surpassed white girls to a significant extent on five of the seven fitness tests.

Such research comparing black and white children is surprisingly limited, but the notion that the black child has a stronger early physical development is gaining support. Dr. Malina conducted a study in Philadelphia on children between the ages of 6 and 12 and found that blacks ran faster and were better in the standing broad jump, but there were no differences in throwing ability. Other studies have found that black children are stronger in gripping, pushing and pulling. Dr. Malina

observes that one grim factor behind the apparent precocity of black children might well be the higher infant mortality rate among blacks—the weak die off, leaving the strong or more mature to survive.

But what of the measurable physical differences between blacks and whites that could affect their competitive performances? Since American blacks are generally linear in build, with longer arms and legs, a narrower pelvis and more slender calves, says Dr. Malina, they may have special advantages in some events. Mechanically speaking, a

black athlete with legs identical to those of a white athlete would have a lighter, shorter and trimmer mass to propel. This implies a greater power-to-total-weight ratio at any given size. Such a ratio would be advantageous in events in which the body is propelled—the sprints and jumps, for example. These require relatively short bursts of muscular power rather than a prolonged expenditure of energy. (However, the greater weight and density of the black skeleton might tend to offset this advantage.)

Such things might indicate that the black should do well in the pole vault, as he does in the jumping events. As a matter of fact, Dr. Tanner, author of *The Physique of the Olympic Athlete*, wrote: "The pole vault, too, should be particularly attractive, as the length and power of the arms would add to the advantage already present in the weight relations; but here the American Negro does not particularly excel, perhaps only for reasons of tradition."

There is at least one sport in which the black appears to be at a physical disadvantage. No Negro has done really well at swimming. Perhaps because of the greater density



continued

of their bone and muscle, the distribution of their fat and their smaller lung capacity certain blacks have difficulty in learning to swim. Such individuals are what swimming coaches call "sinkers." The late Fred Lanoue, Georgia Tech swimming coach and author of *Drown-proofing, A New Technique for Water Safety*, notes that "the variables of the body as far as floating is concerned are fat, bone and muscle; and if the body is living, air."

"All fat floats," he wrote, "and, generally speaking but not always, the amount of fat present is what determines whether one floats or not. The location of concentrations of fat has a lot to do with the angle at which a person floats. All muscle sinks, even a \$5 steak, though not quite so fast as a 60¢ steak because of the amount of fat in the former. All bones sink, and the harder the work the bone has had to do, the more dense it is and the faster it sinks. The only other variable that applies to people floating is the amount of air they can cram into their lungs. The difference between floating and sinking for a great many people is only a handful of air."

Lanoue reported that at predominantly white Georgia Tech, of some 1,000 freshmen put through a swimming program each year, no more than 2% were sinkers. On the other hand, Dr. James Haines, professor of physical education at predominantly black Morehouse College, found that he had a high percentage of sinkers. Invited to check the results, Lanoue confirmed that 30% of the Morehouse blacks were in the sinker classification. The difference between blacks and whites was statistically vast. Similar differences have been noted between white and black women swimmers.

The importance of buoyancy in competitive swimming has not, however, been clearly established. Chet Jastremski, who held all world records in the freestyle, had "very poor buoyancy," according to James E. Councilman, Indiana University and U.S. Olympic coach at Tokyo. He explains that buoyancy is just one of the variables among many that contribute to success in com-

petitive swimming. "There is also coordination, strength, flexibility, organic capacity [endurance] and what we call power," he says. "Strength and power are different. Strength is how much resistance you can overcome at a given time. With power you bring in a time factor—not only the resistance you can overcome, but the time in which you can do it."

"I think power is the key to the black athlete's success. For instance, in 1968 the eight Olympic finalists in the 100-meter dash were all blacks. In the U.S. the black athletes dominate the sprints and don't do as well in the distances."

"The vertical jump is a good measure of power. Generally speaking, sprinters, high jumpers and pole vaulters have a high vertical jump. Distance runners have a low one. By high I mean 30 to 31 inches. Low is around 20. You find few sprinters at 20 inches. Distance runners are around 20."

"I believe that the black athlete has more white muscle fibers. Oversimplifying it, every muscle has two types of fibers—white fibers and red fibers. The white muscle fibers are adapted for speed of movement, otherwise power. The red muscle fibers are adapted for endurance. White muscle fibers enable you to jump high, throw a good knockout punch or anything that entails power. Red fibers enable you to run a long way."

"I'm the only one who will say this for publication. The physiologists agree with me on the side, but they won't go into print."

"I think the difference in muscle fibers is the reason the black athlete is a better sprinter. There'll be people who'll say, 'Well, what about Kip Keino?' He's an exception. [As noted before, he is also of a different physiological heritage than the West African blacks who came to America.]

"The black athlete is more adapted to speed, and that accounts for his superiority in sports. Football, baseball, boxing, basketball, sprinting, high jumping, broad jumping—these involve speed."

"I'm not saying the black man is in-

ferior or superior. I'm just saying that he is better adapted for speed and power. And I'm not saying every black man. It's just that the average is higher in the blacks."

The big reason that there are no outstanding black swimmers, Councilman says, is primarily socioeconomic. "One, he has not had the opportunity to be a good swimmer. Two, there is just a lack of money. There are not enough pools in their areas. Swimming can cost quite a bit of money. And what good does it do them to be swimmers? There are no professional swimmers. They can't elevate themselves socially or economically in swimming. In other sports there is the possibility of big contracts. In track there is the chance for a lot of publicity. Swimming, as yet, does not get that kind of valuable publicity."

"A third factor in the socioeconomic area is that there has never been a great black leader in swimming, a winner of a national title. Swimming needs a Jackie Robinson figure. The door is open, but they just haven't gone in. We need that first national or Olympic black champion. I would certainly like the first one who wins a national title to swim for Indiana."

Councilman does have a black swimmer, John Tunstall, a junior and freestyler, but he had never swum competitively until last year. "Unfortunately," the coach says, "it's going to be difficult to help him. Swimmers have to start early—10, 11, 12. It's interesting to note that if you went to a swimming meet five years ago you didn't see any black swimmers. To discover a great swimmer like Mark Spitz you've got to have 100,000 trying. The blacks don't have enough numbers yet."

Of all the physical and psychological theories about the American black's excellence in sport, none has proved more controversial than one of the least discussed: that slavery weeded out the weak. Without doubt, the slaves were brought across the Atlantic under the most inhuman conditions. Lee Evans and Calvin Hill did not exaggerate the hardships. Only the strong-

est survived the passage, the "seasoning" process which followed and the rigors of labor in the New World, though most had been strong to begin with.

It has been estimated that 5% of the slaves captured in Africa died on the march to the coast or in the barracoons they were cooped up in until a slave ship arrived to trade for them. Another 13% died during the passage and some 30% died during seasoning—the three-to-four-year period during which a slave was broken to work in the fields or elsewhere. Thus for every two condemned to slavery, only one lived to labor in the New World. The majority were warriors captured from other tribes, therefore physically superior, but some were sold by their own chiefs for violation of one taboo or another. The traders, naturally, dickered for the fittest.

Even after slavery ended, a black child in America had very little to which he could aspire. Eventually sports opened a door, and now, as Elvin Hayes' former coach, Melvin Rogers, said in *The Black Athlete—A Shameful Story* (SI, July 1, 1968 *et al.*), "A white kid tries to become President of the United States . . . a black kid tries to become Willie Mays."

The West African black was brought across the Atlantic, at first to the West Indies, in large part because plantation owners were disappointed with the native Indians. As slaves the Indians were hopeless. At the start of the 17th century, one Antonio de Herrera, a historian, contended that the work of one Negro was more than equal to that of four Indians. On the other hand, he caustically noted, "These Negroes prospered so much in the colony—that . . . as yet none have been known to perish from infirmity."

Indians, though, as one Spanish planter complained, "died like fish in a bucket," partly because they were less resistant to European diseases—like smallpox and measles—than the blacks.

Some African slaves died by their own hands. Suicide was a particular characteristic of members of the Ibo

tribe, many of whom either escaped their chains and threw themselves into the sea or hanged themselves on their chains. To this day a folk saying in Haiti observes that the Ibo is prone to hang himself. Some slaves were encouraged to kill themselves by a belief that their souls would then return to Africa, where they would be reunited with their families and friends.

A theory quoted by Arnold Toynbee holds that the black man surpassed the Indian as a slave because he came from a superior culture. Certainly the West African was no savage. He created an architecture of respectably high standards. He was a skilled and artistic weaver. No white men had to teach him to smelt iron or make brass. And he was a highly competent woodworker. He was a good herdsman of cattle, sheep and goats. He used the donkey as a beast of burden. He was a fine farmer, considering what he had to work with. When the European introduced the musket he was able to copy it and make his own. He had not, though, for the most part, reached that fine stage of civilization in which he was able to make gunpowder. And, as Mannix and Cowley point out in *Black Cargoes, a History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, he never invented the wheel and the plow.

With the skills he had and the ability to learn new ones, the Negro became a very valuable piece of property in America and was treated as such once he passed the seasoning test. Though many slaves died aboard ship, even there it was not too unusual for the slaves to be better fed than the white crewmen, who were considered expendable and often were marooned in the Indies once the westward passage was completed. The idea was that a sailor could be shanghaied in London and abandoned in Jamaica at a bit of extra profit to the captain and the owners. There are tales of compassionate black slaves sharing their rations with starving white sailors.

Once at work ashore, properly trained and much more valuable than he was

continued

BLACK continued

when bought on the African West Coast, the slave was sometimes given less arduous and hazardous work than gangs of Irish and German laborers, whose services were leased out by contractors to the plantation owners. One Virginia planter, asked why he should pay Irishmen to dig drainage ditches when he could have it done by black slaves, explained that it was dangerous work "and a Negro's life is too valuable to be risked at it. If a Negro dies it is a considerable loss, you know" (as much as \$2,500 in the currency of the day). Similarly, a traveler in the South observed that when a boat was being loaded with cotton from a high bluff on the Alabama River, Irish deckhands were given the perilous job of remaining below, there to deal with crazily bounding bales pitched down a chute to them by black slaves from the bank above.

"The niggers are worth too much to be risked here," the captain explained. "If the Paddies are knocked overboard or get their backs broke, nobody loses anything."

The slave had not known much of sport in Africa, where he had little time or incentive for it. The idea of exertion and competition for the fun of it was generally unknown in tribal culture. Sport is a product of leisure. Dancing was fun for the African, but it had meaning, too, often of a religious nature. And it was not competitive.

There were some sports, to be sure. *Lutte*, which still survives and is very popular in Senegal, is a ritualistic form of wrestling rather like the Japanese sumo. It begins with singing, dancing, boasting and the hurling of insults to the rising beat of drums. Then there is a flash of action and one of the participants is knocked off his feet. That ends it. The winner need not pin his man. And there is an Ethiopian game called *genna*, which resembles field hockey.

For their own amusement the slave owners taught their blacks to compete against each other in racing and a primitive form of boxing, just as the own-

ers raced their horses in plantation vs. plantation competition. This was the start of the black athlete's eventual preeminence in boxing. In 1890 bantamweight (later featherweight) George Dixon became the first black to win a world championship. For a while it was not considered fitting for a white prizefighter to oppose a black. But that attitude began to break down, and around the start of the present century there emerged such fine fighters as Jack Johnson and Sam Langford, dubbed the "Boston Tar Baby." In the 1930s came Joe Louis and Henry Armstrong, the only fighter ever to hold three world titles simultaneously, and black men have dominated the sport in America since.

Needless to say, not all the successes of the black man in boxing, or in other sports for that matter, have been entirely due to physical characteristics. Motivation is a vital factor. Sport is a way out of the despair of the slums, a route to social prestige among one's peers and sometimes a way to quick wealth. Few other roads to fame and financial reward have been open to the young black. Show business used to be the only other one of consequence, and even in that field the black was relegated to roles of low comedy or faithful servitude. It took a long time for Dixieland jazz to come up the river to Chicago, and when it did, white orchestras picked up the beat.

But sport in recent years has opened some very special doors. Every male black child, however he might be discouraged from a career with a Wall Street brokerage firm, knows he has a sporting chance in baseball, football, boxing, basketball or track. He might even make it in other sports. Since there is now a substantial chance for success, motivation is all the stronger. The black youngster has something real to aspire to when he picks up a baseball bat or dribbles a basketball. He has the examples of Willie Mays and Bill Russell, of Frank Robinson and Lew Alcindor to inspire him.

Other doors will surely open. ■■■