Interview with Oscar Robertson
Date: December 18, 1984
Interviewer: N/A
Camera Rolls: 34-38
Sound Rolls: 17-20
Team: N/A

Interview gathered as part of *Black Champions*. Produced by Miles Educational Film Productions, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, William Miles Collection.

Interview with Oscar Robertson, conducted by Miles Educational Film Productions, Inc. on December 18, 1984 for *Black Champions*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, William Miles Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of *Black Champions*.

[camera roll 34]

[sound roll 17]

00:00:00:00 — 00:00:35:00

[wild sound]

[Caption: Defective Camera Roll: Sound Only]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

Interviewer #1:

Slate, please.

Camera Crew Member #2:

K, sound fifty-five.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, I wonder if you'd begin by telling us about where you grew up, about growing up in Indianapolis. I know you were born in Tennessee, but tell us a little bits about your childhood.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Step him over, please.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Could you just move your glass in?

Oscar Robertson:

Which way?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yeah, towards you. Yeah. That's fine, that's good, yeah.

00:00:36:00 — 00:01:35:00

Interviewer #1:

Can you take it from there, or you want me to repeat?

Oscar Robertson:

No, I can take it from there.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Oscar Robertson:

I grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, on the west side of town, in a neighborhood where most of the guys that I played with all had, were in the same financial situation. We didn't have any money. My father worked for a, oh, meat company called Kingan's and Company, which later moved out of the city. We had sports as our social event. We didn't go to very many movies, because we didn't have any money to go to. Church was very important to us in those days. My background is, is a Baptist background. My mother's very religious woman. I spent most of my summers with my grandparents, where I grew up, in Charlotte, Tennessee—which is, later was called Bellsburg, Tennessee, because my grandfather was a Bell. That, and this is, all his relatives there—a whole hillside of relatives there, really. But

Indianapolis was a v-, very poor situation. We lived in a shotgun-type house, it was very cold; a little pot-bellied stove in the wintertime. But it was hap-, those are happy days.

00:01:36:00 — 00:02:45:00

Interviewer #1:

Tell us a little about the, tell us a little bit about your family, the folks in your family.

Oscar Robertson:

Well, we have, I have two older brothers, Bailey and Henry; a loving father, of course. My brother played basketball before I did. We all played some s-, form of sports, because this is all there was during those days. It was sort of like a, a pride thing to get involved with sports, because all the guys at the high school played sports, and you talked about those so many, so many times when you sat down just, just to shoot the bull. But you know, listen-, listening to Joe Louis and some of the guys box, and watching some of the Globetrotters play, I, it was just sort of like, there wa-, this was a way out. If, there was nothing else. I th-, think in a lot of societies that, that people involved in, people can talk about being a doctor or a lawyer. My parents never talked about me working in, at a meat company. But, so you watched television—I don't remember watching television very much when I was growing up; but I did s-, listen to the radio quite a bit. And listen-, listening to people like Joe Louis box, Sugar Ray; Goose Tatum play basketball with the Harlem Globetrotters: these are the things, you know, it's like peer pressure. This is what you wanted to do. I wasn't very good as a boxer. I could not handle a jab at all, so I had to let that go.

00:02:46:00 — 00:03:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Were you interested in any other sports? Did you play anything else?

Oscar Robertson:

Actually, I was a pretty good baseball player. I played baseball all the time. Basketball was a sport that was played late in the afternoon when the sun went down, w-, when it wasn't so hot. But I played baseball all the time. We'd go out in the parks and just pick up a s-, game and hit ground balls, and chase flyballs, and do all these things. And I also played football and I ran track. I think when you grew up, you're involved in all those things. I mean, th-, it was just macho to do those things during those days. I mean, you know, we didn't play—t-, tennis was a, considered a girl's game in, during those days, so this is why I'm still struggling about tennis today. I listened to all that [laughs], all that crazy talk.

00:03:25:00 — 00:04:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Was there something particular that captured your attention in basketball, and in the influence of your older brothers? Or was, just something about the game that, that caught you attention?

Oscar Robertson:

Probabl-, probably his influence; influence of the Globetrotters. And this was a—see, I went to an all-black high school, and the, and, and if you understand this situation—Indianapolis in the fifties—it was very, very difficult to get any kind of recognition for black people at that particular time, especially in Indiana. And I think that our school got into a state championship in 1951. They were in the final four. This brought out a lot of press and publicity, and a lot of talk. And I think from that point on, most of the black guys, who did not live in my, in my neighborhood, in areas to go to Crispus Attucks High School, started to come there. And I think it just sort of, like a snowball going down a hill, it just picked up momentum each, each roll it would take. And it was just a way of, of black people saying to the city of Indianapolis, hey, we can, we can play basketball, we can meet you on equal terms on the, on the, on the court, if not socially.

00:04:25:00 — 00:05:34:00

Interviewer #1:

You also played, I gather, prior to high school, a place called the dust bowl, and—tell us—

Oscar Robertson:

[clears throat]

Interviewer #1:

—something about the games that were played there.

Oscar Robertson:

Well, first, before I do it, you know, I was very devastated. I went back to Indianapolis maybe a couple years ago, and they had torn it down. You know, where all the history was made, all the great athletes, and, you know, where I played, and where many, many other guys played, in a place called Lockefield. It wasn't really a dust bowl. I think the dust bowl term came because wh-, on the street where I lived we played on a court because the house was torn down. It was all dust, it was just like a mass of just hard clay. And that's, I think, it's where the dust bowl idea came from. Then we went into a park, which was close, close by, in this housing project called Lockefield, and this is where they had a paved court, but they still considered it a dust bowl. But th-, it's, it's torn down. It was really disheartening to see that, that, you know, that we, we, you know, we, as black people, can't effect anything to happen to keep those, those historic things up and going. They could've moved it or taken it some

other place. But it seemed that, because of the political nature there, in Indianapolis, we, we just were not tough enough to, to keep it, keep it alive. It, the, it's a real shame.

00:05:35:00 — 00:06:20:00

Interviewer #1:

T-, talk a little bit about your experience at Crispus Attucks when you first got there. Were you, would you consider yourself a coachable youngster? Did you respond to the, the kind of formal discipline that was involved in high school basketball, as opposed to what you were doing in the playground?

Oscar Robertson:

Oh, yes. You know, I, I think I—my father made me very coachable. You know, I, I think during those days you were, really respected your parents. I think a lot of that's eroding today. My father could say anything to me, you know, I, and I wouldn't ever question what, you know, his decision. I wa-, I think I played basketball—I had some very good coaches, as matter of fact. They were like my fathers, to a certain extent; and really cared for you, and—which is something you don't get very much anymore. And I think it was unique. Because as I said before, it was an all-black high school. I think it really helped. I think it really helped in my development, and a lot of other kids' development, as well.

00:06:21:00 — 00:07:17:00

Interviewer #1:

Would you talk about your coach at Crispus Attucks?

Oscar Robertson:

Well, my—actually, my first coach was a guy named Tom Slate, who played for Butler University - was a football player. I think he got it started, working on the fundamentals, and little give-and-go things, things sometimes that—'cause coming from outdoors and going to organized structure, you know, we shot—I mean, the outdoors, you'll be even shooting the ball and makin' a fake, a move on someone just to really put him down. But he got us all working together as a team. And from that point on, I went into the—met Ray Crowe. Ray Crowe was a great individual for, for Indianapolis at that time, a time when nothin' was going right for, for black people. He was able to get a winning team. He was able to get a team to play together, get all these kids, who were just weaned on playing one-on-one basketball, to, to pull together. And it, it's really unique, and it's only happened once in a, in a lifetime. I don't think it'll ever be that way again.

00:07:18:00 — 00:07:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, you, you said you had two older brothers? Are you the youngest of three brothers?

Oscar Robertson:

Yes, I am. Had, Bailey is the oldest, and then Henry is the middle, and I'm the youngest.

00:07:25:00 — 00:08:06:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, the, you all played ball? What was it like being in a house with two older brothers who were ball-players? Did they kind of put a little pressure on you, or was there some competition—

Oscar Robertson:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

—in the house, or what?

Oscar Robertson:

Yeah, competition. My older brother'd never—he'd—we're—never play against me. He was, you know, an older brother. I don't know if you have any, any older brothers or not. It's just something that they don't do, you know. They had their group. He was four years older than I am, and, and you know, he just thought that would just be, I mean, he'd play out and just kid around, but [someone shouts in background] nothing really serious. And my other brother played on a 1956 undefeated team at, at the, the high school together. At, that's Henry. We played on that team. We—I don't know the team we beat, but—must have been Lafeyette Jeff, I don't—Lafeyette, Indiana.

00:08:07:00 — 00:08:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Fifty-six. And one, one year, was there a championship game between Crispus Attucks and Gary—

Oscar Robertson:

Oh—

Interviewer #1:

—Indiana?

Oscar Robertson:

—1955.

Interviewer #1:

Right, with, with—

Oscar Robertson:

Well—which would never happen again.

Interviewer #1:

—Barnett.

Oscar Robertson:

Yeah, that was all—two black schools—

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Oscar Robertson:

—playing together for a final in Indianapolis, 1955, which will never happen again. And—

Interviewer #1:

Do—

Oscar Robertson:

—I think—

00:08:25:00 — 00:09:05:00

Interviewer #1:

—do you recall that game? You tell us a little about it?

Oscar Robertson:

Not really. It's been so long ago. But I know we beat them. As a matter of fact, I didn't know they were all black either, until we got on the court. So, we had ten, twelve black guys, and so did they. Did not fully realize that they were an all-black team. But you know, I think a lot of, lot of things like that you don't really think about until they're brought up by people. I didn't really think that much about it until the next day almost, that we, we'd start reading newspapers, and the subs-, subsequent years, to read about, oh, Gary Roosevelt plays Crispus Attucks High School in an all-black final; and, and you hear comments, saying, oh well that never, we don't want this ever to happen again. Th-, you know, this is things you don't read, but you hear, you hear comments and conversation about these, these types of things.

00:09:06:00 — 00:10:19:00

Interviewer #1:

Was there a point when you were in high school that you really began to feel that your game was that good that you could take yourself somewhere with it?

Oscar Robertson:

Never thought, never really thought about it. Tell you a funny story. [clears throat] When I was a sophomore—you know, the reason I played varsity ball was 'cause, because of a friend of mine named Bill Mason. Because when you go out for the varsity team, you had to be invited out. And I was going to try out for the reserve team as a freshman. No, I played freshman ball. I was going to try out for the reserve team as a sophomore. And I was sitting there, and just not thinking about anything. We were waiting for the coaches to come in and start giving us their little talk about what they, what they, we should expect of them. And he signals for me to come over and, and try out for the varsity team, so I did. And that's the reason I'm, that's the reason I played on the varsity team, because of, because of him. But another, another kid, Winnifred O'Neil, that, as a sophomore—he was a senior, and he was probably one of the better, one of the better defensive players, that, as a 6'3" center in the city of Indianapolis. And I had to play against him every day. I think he helped me become a little better basketball player. I think competition is the real key. I've always said that no one could ever become a great player playing in, in miniocre [sic], mediocre games. You have to be put in, in, put in stressed situations. You have to be put into strit-, in situations where you can either fail, or it's gonna even, even go ahead.

00:10:20:00 — 00:10:54:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, Indianapolis itself—I mean, we all know about Indiana basketball, but Indiana and Indianapolis itself had, how many high schools? Was there a big city league, or—

Oscar Robertson:

Yeah, a tremendous city league. Oh, they must have about, oh, fourteen or fifteen high schools—maybe not that many. I—i-, in outline, the little county areas, which is right acr-, Beach Grove, oh, Elmwood, and places like that. Must've had about, 'bout fourteen. Southport, which is not considered the city. They had quite a few high schools. I don't know the exact number now, but I'm sure it was over, well over ten.

00:10:55:00 — 00:11:33:00

Interviewer #1:

So your, your main competition were schools right there in the city?

Oscar Robertson:

That's true.

Interviewer #1:

Now, where, where was—talk about the state powers at that time. You know, obviously, Crispus Attucks was one. Where were some of the other Indiana state powers?

Oscar Robertson:

[sighs] Oh, in the, in the early fifties, Evansville, Muncie, schools—Anderson, schools like that. City, city school called Tech-, Arsenal Technical High School, which had, oh, maybe four or five, four thousand students going to that school. It was—huge school. Cathedral, the Catholic school, was very, very tough. But I would say the powers were f-, Fort Wayne, Muncie, Anderson, schools like that.

00:11:34:00 — 00:13:13:00

Interviewer #1:

How much time do we have? [pause] How did you go to Cincinnati? Did somebody come to you? Had you planned at some point—say, during your senior year—to think about colleges, or were you just bombarded with recruiters? How did that happen for you?

Oscar Robertson:

No, not really. I, I think the way I got, really got to Cincinnati is that one year the, my college coach, George Smith, came over to scout a g-, a fellow teammate, when I was a junior, named Willy Meriwether. And so he saw me play in these—so that's, that's, y-, from that point on—I ran, I ran track in high school, and I wa-, I was a high jumper, although I was not a great high jumper. I could jump, but I was just too heavy. And I weighed 195 pounds, at 6'4", and that's just too much weight. To be a great high jumper, I should have been around 165 or 170 pounds. And so, as a result of, of running track, and that did, did not end until

June, I could, I could not be contacted by a lot of schools, so they had to wait. Then after that I was involved in a, in an all-star game v-, versus Kentucky, and, which also delayed the, the re-, the recruiting, so they could only contact my high school coach, Ray Crowe, about me, about me going to a school. Cincinnati was close by. I didn't want to go that far. I, I did not want to go to Indiana. I, I talked to the coach there, Branch McCracken, and, and I just did-, I just didn't feel the situation was for me. Another player who went to Indian-, Indiana, named Hallie Bryant, had some very unpleasant experiences while, while going to school there. And I felt him being Mr. Basketball was mistreated very poorly by Indiana and Branch McCracken, and this is why I didn't want to go to school there.

00:13:14:00 — 00:14:21:00

Interviewer #1:

Let's talk about what kind of things would've happened to Ha-, Hallie Bryant, and Indiana in— [noise] the 1950s. He, as you say—and I remember his name, he was, he was quite a ball-player, and quite a popular guy, as I—what kind of things were happening to guys in places like Indiana? I guess here in the east, we don't think of Indiana as having anything like a southern personality, from that period. What was it like for a guy going there? What—

Oscar Robertson:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—scarred you from going there?

Oscar Robertson:

As I said, I thought Hallie Bryant was one of the greatest basketball players I had ever seen play basketball, during the, during those days. He was a, had a very good atti-, very good attitude. Intelligent person who got his grade—he, very good student. And he goes to Indiana. And when he first went there, they had a very, pretty good basketball team. They had players like Kraak and Farley. Schlundt played. And I think they had won the NCAA championship. I could be mistaken about that. And I just don't think Hallie Bryant was ever given opportunity to really play basketball there. The next year they, they dra-, they recruited couple of players. Pas-, Paxton Lumpkin—

Interviewer #1:

Hold on—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Cut.

Interviewer #1:

—one second. Yeah.

[cut]

00:14:22:00 — 00:16:19:00

[camera roll 35]

[sound roll 18]

[picture and sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound fifty-six.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Thank you.

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, we were talking about conditions in the 1950s when you were coming out of high school and heading for college, and what things were like for a lot of young black ball-players. We've mentioned Hallie Bryant, who went off and had not a good experience in Indiana. What kind of conditions prevailed in, in schools like Indiana, for a player like Hallie Bryant, at that time?

Oscar Robertson:

One player, named Bill Scott, who went to Franklin College in, in and around Indianapolis, was telling me that when he went to that school, he was a great scorer and the—as a matter of fact, he averaged well over thirty points a game. And the coach was telling him that he didn't fit in well with the other players. I mean, those types of things, where he, he was getting publicity, and, and the coach didn't like it; other the players didn't like it. But that, a lot, a lot of horror stories about players who go to schools, and, and—see during those days, as, as a black athlete, if you, if you didn't perform, they'd get rid of you. I mean, you know, the coach—I think when you went to schools like a, they wanted you to really d-, play great. If you didn't play great, if you were mediocre—as a matter of fact, if you were mediocre, they wouldn't take you in the first place. You look at the early days in the fifties and look at a lot of college teams, they may have had a black guy or two on the team, but they could really play basketball. But, but some of the other kids, white kids, were just struggling players, but they would get scholarships. And I knew myself that a lot of other guys should've had

scholarships, even at Cincinnati. I felt that some-, we should've had some, when I was there, s-, some other black players I knew of—but maybe because of the academic requirements, you, there was, they couldn't get in. You never know. There, there are so many things, you don't know how people are, perceive the situation like that. They, some coaches think about the attendance and, and about the alumni. There's so many things to think about that people don't often have thoughts, have thoughts of.

00:16:20:00 — 00:17:08:00

Interviewer #1:

During this same period, coaches had a lot more control over players and it was like, a little more disciplined atmosphere, I guess, compared to what we have now, isn't it?

Oscar Robertson:

Well, I think that's because—

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—where you ca-, where you come from. ***I had a v-, I had a good basketball high school coach, Ray Crowe. He was a, he had to be a good disciplinarian, because we had, we had a, we had a—where I was from was very difficult. I never went on the south side of town, because that was primarily all-white; I didn't go on the east side of town, because it's all-black, but you had to really, you had to r-, fight. It was combat-zone to go over there. In the north side of town it was just too far to go.***

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

So it, you know, because the economics of, of my situation, my brothers, w-, you know, we stayed in our own neighborhoods, and we played with, with all the guys in the, on the, in the, the surrounding blocks, and, and just set out and pl-—and the on-, only thing there was to do was play sports, really. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]

00:17:09:00 — 00:18:44:00

Interviewer #1:

What kind of things did you do? You know, the, there are all—

[noise offscreen]

Interviewer #1:

—there are all kinds of stories about the young Oscar Robertson, who always had a basketball with him, who bounced it all the way to school, or going to the store, or whatev-—but what kinds of things did you really do? I mean, what, what's your story of that story, about how you improved your skills? How you worked on your game?

Oscar Robertson:

Well, I used, used to practice a lot by myself. I had a basketball from my mother. There was a little commercial running down in Indiana, and it's, it's, it's not quite accurate as to how I got a basketball. ***But my mother worked for, as a domestic, for, oh, someone in Indianapolis,*** and—and I, I've always forg-, remembered the address: 5500 Elm Broadway, is where she worked. Fifty-five-twenty—

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—I believe, or 5580***—and she brought me a basketball, and that's, that was my first ball. And I s-, I played. I'd play in the, late at night. I'd play in the daytime. I'd even set up hypothetical sit-, situations, work on shots here and shots there. And, and I, I did-, I didn't actually sleep with the basketball. I dribbled it to school. But, but I played a lot. I mean, it was just, I used to play with the ball in my fingers and imagine scoring baskets in, in big games, and, and imagined dribbling around tough defensive players, and, and I would go out in the park and, and shoot by the light of the moon, sometimes. And sometimes, in the, in the, in the wintertime I'd shoot with gloves on, it would get so cold. And I'd get laughed at a lot by a lot of players. But I tell you, you know, it's a, I didn't, I didn't, I didn't think about them. And it would just, I just loved to play the game so, that was all foremost on my mind. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]***

00:18:45:00 — 00:19:29:00

[missing frames]

Interviewer #1:

I would tend to think, though, that to be a great player, you'd have to have that kind of a near obsession, at least with the game. You'd have to want to do things right.

Oscar Robertson:

Well, it wasn't actually a, an obsession. I didn't have anything else to do. [laughs] I mean, you know, it's, that—I think the key there, you know, the, you know, people don't have anything, didn't have anything to do during those days. But I, I think you got to be dedicated

to a certain point. I don't think players today are that, will do anything like that. I think kids who are really involved in basketball are the ones who go to camps. Kids who are on the fringes do not go to camps anymore, and I think it's a real tragedy, really, that—because basketball has meant a lot to America. It's an American game, it has done so much for a lot of people, I've—and I think it n-, it can help you in business, to a certain extent.

00:19:30:00 — 00:21:37:00

Interviewer #1:

When you, when you see ball played today [distant shouting] let's say at the high school level, up or down from when you were playing? Better game than it was, or not quite as good?

Oscar Robertson:

I think, I think the athletes have gotten better over the years, but I don't think it's any better game. I don't, I don't think the players are as strong today as they were when, wh-, wh-, when I played. And I'll tell you the reason why. You know, when I lived in Indianapolis, my grandparents lived in Cincinn-, in Tennessee. And the day after school, the next day, I was, I was on the farm where my f-, black grandfather's sharecrop—call it farm, but it really wasn't where he lived. And I worked manual labor. I mean, if you ever worked on a farm, you know what manual labor means. I mean, I got up at, when the, when the roosters crowed I was getting out of bed to eat, and you know, like—I never ate eggs or drank milk when I was, when I lived in the, when I'd visit in the, in the, in the country, because they didn't use those things. For breakfast, you'd have fried chicken, fried potatoes, or fried corn, or something like that, because that was your big meal. It's, 'cause you had to work. I, I never forget. I used to, I used to, I don't know if you ever bailed hay or not, but at [stutters] thirteen or fourteen years old, I was about 6'2". And when you grow up, no matter how it, what's your age, is, they consider you're a man. I had to lift the bails all day long, or working corn, or it's something that's always—man, you're always fixing something on a farm. But in, in, you know, kids don't get that today. You know, kids hardly ever work anymore. I worked since I was a sophomore in high school, doing some type of a job. But, but today—and I think these type things helped you. You know, they have weights today, but I think for str-, overall strength, I don't think they're as strong. Zones are, are very, very t-, bad for kids. I don't think kids can guard anybody that, per se, anymore; because we, we played a lot of man-to-man defense, where you pressed a lot, where you had to. Our coach had stressed that you had to guard somebody, you had to do all the fundamentals that are necessary to win, because sometimes you may be caught out of position, you know. Just because you're, I'm 6'2" and a guy's 6'7", I still have an obligation to do as much as I can to keep him from getting the ball.

00:21:38:00 — 00:22:55:00

Interviewer #1:

Oscar, you had one Olympic experience—

Oscar Robertson:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—I believe. What do you recall about that? That, the 1960 Olympic games.

Oscar Robertson:

Yes, 1960 in Rome. I, I enjoyed it. I, I think it's one of the, the most memorable situations I ever been involved in in my life, and I think it's so because the players I had to go over with, and the coach, Pete Newell—most of the players, you know, were, you know—Boozer, and myself, and Walt Bellamy were blacks on the team, and the rest of the guys were all white, but we were all from the same s-, type situation, you know, as far as money goes. You know, money was, you know, there was no money there. And, and we had a nice time. Pete Newell was a great coach, we had a great basketball team, and I, I think when you get a great team, and you start to play together, and you're having some general confidence as, as to winning or losing, I think it makes for, for a good, good outing. And we won. You know, winning means a lot in the Olympics, because you know, if you get beat, man, you, that, that's a thing to stay with you for the rest of your life. S-, the Olympics, I think, is something that we should all strive to get involved in. Recently, you know, there's been so much political input into the Olympics, that, you know, it's a real shame. The Russians didn't come this year because we didn't go to their Olympics, and for anyone to be so naive and just think they were going to come here, I think they, they were no quite honest with themselves.

00:22:56:00 — 00:23:33:00

Interviewer #1:

The Olympics of 1960 are—obviously the atmosphere of them was considerably different. I gather there wasn't the political pressure to—

Oscar Robertson:

No, but we were told not to lose, not to lose to the Russians, by some of, by some officials. You know, you know, the treatment that I think athletes get is not the best, was not the best then, because we stayed in a, at Olympic Village there in, in Rome, which was built just primarily to house athletes, and you only had hot water at certains times of the day. But, but those little things are, are, the-, are, I think, a great thing to be involved in sometimes, b-—

[Caption: Rollout on Camera & Sound Rolls]

[cut]

[camera roll 36]

[sound roll 19]

00:23:34:00 — 00:24:06:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK. Black Champions, Miles Films Productions, December 18th, 1984. Sound roll 19, camera roll 36, sound 57.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, in 1960, of course, America was the dominant nation in the world as far as basketball was concerned. What did you think about these teams that you saw in Rome? I mean, nobody else in the world played basketball very much.

Oscar Robertson:

Actually, I didn't think that much about them. I knew we were there to win a gold medal and— [offscreen noise]

Interviewer #1:

Oh.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sorry.

[cut]

00:24:07:00 — 00:25:16:00

Interviewer #1:

Slate, please.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound 58.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

OK. You went to the 1960 Olympics, and at that time, of course, America was the dominant force, clearly, in, in the world, in basketball. What, what, some of these other teams like? I mean, some of them must have had fairly mediocre ball clubs, to be, in all frankness.

Oscar Robertson:

Yeah, they could play basketball to a certain point, but I think all the years of being weaned on one-on-one basketball and shooting the ball, and all the great competition that you get here in the States, was just something that they, they could not overcome. We just felt all along that we had the best basketball team there. We worked pretty hard. As a matter of fact, we didn't go into the Olympic Village until right before we had to play our first game. I went to Zurich and Lugano, Switzerland, and stayed there, which was, I think the coach felt we didn't want to get sidetracked by anything, sightseeing or anything that was in the Olympic Village at that particular time. And it worked out fine for us. And I think, now, I look back and see the gold medal that I have, and the other guys, and all the fond memories, and, and, the—and you know, just going out with some of the guys, just talking about basketball while we in Olympic Vill-—the Olympic Village, I should say—just something you cannot replace.

00:25:17:00 — 00:26:04:00

Interviewer #1:

Tell us about Pete Newell. A lot of people have enormous respect—well, the, the number of players I've talked to, have enormous respect for the concept of ball that Pete Newell taught. Tell us a little about that.

Oscar Robertson:

Pete Newell, to me, was a great individual. Had a lot of respect for his basketball knowledge. He did not over-coach, he got the guys to play well together, and he really stressed defense, which is something that I had been taught for so many, many years, and it just fit right into my game plan. And I, I think Pete Newell did a tremendous job. You know, here again, a, a lot of times when you have a great team a coach goes unnoticed, but he really didn't. And to have great players, that we had at that particular time, is difficult for a coach to get them to play together, and—but he had the inspiration, and, and really the ability to get this done, and he did.

00:26:05:00 — 00:27:38:00

Interviewer #1:

You mentioned before that you all had gone there with a specific, a very specific feeling that you were going to a win a championship. At that point in your life, what did championship mean to you? Was it something particularly prideful in winning a champion-—some people say, well, hey, I just want to play, I just want to have fun with the game. What did being a champion mean to you?

Oscar Robertson:

I think in any s-, any sport that you're involved in, in, today, or, or yesterd-, yesteryear, or tomorrow, you, you, winning is a, is very important, especially when you get to a certain level. When you get to an international competition like that, winning is much, really important, because it's something that doesn't happen ev-, every day of your life. I, I feel very fortunate to be able to come from my background that I did in Indianapolis, Indiana—and also in Charlotte, Tennessee—to ascend to those heights, to be able to compete for, for the USA. I've always said I, I'm very lucky, and the guys on the team were lucky, because if I had been born a year or two later, I would not had [sic] that opportunity, and I, I think that to be able to get in that situation—in high school you maybe had three or four years, and the pros you have a, a career. But a, an Olympic situation like that, winning is, is, is the utmost. Not just to compete, because just to compete means that you don't, you're not thinking about winning, you're not thinking about the things you have to do, and sacrifices you have to make, in order, in order, in order to win, to come out on top, and the hard work you had to do to practice. So it means a lot. It means a lot in, in a, in a short tournament like that, something that's going to be forever lasting, and, and the memories are something that you think about all the time.

00:27:39:00 — 00:29:33:00

Interviewer #1:

Now I recall seeing—the first time I saw you play, was that fall after the Olympic games. They used to, in those days, have an all-star—college all-stars would play one of the professionals, and that year you played the Knicks—

Oscar Robertson:

That's correct.

Interviewer #1:

—in the old Garden, on 50th street. That was the first time I saw you play. What was your feeling about then coming into the pros? I mean, were you, were you confident that you were going to be OK? Did you think there were some special things you were going to have to work on before you'd be ready to take a place among the professionals? What was your feeling as a, an ex-collegian now, and a, an Olympian, coming to play with the big guys?

Oscar Robertson:

I remember that game very well. It's—as, as a matter of fact, I was out in training camp, and, funny thing, that—I was asked, did I wanna go play in a game? I said, fine. And the coaches do, didn't, weren't particularly pleased about it, 'cause we were work-, trying to get our strategy going for the Cincinnati Royals. But you know, I, you know, I never thought about whether I could play against anybody or not. I - I, it's just something I've never thought about. I, I knew I could play. I didn't know how the pro game would be. It was much rougher than I thought it was gonna be, a lot more pushin', and because these are professional players, and they knew the ins and the outs of playing pro basketball. But I never really thought one way or the other whether I was going to make it or not make it. I just, I was out there, and I, I guess, my i-, innate ability. I think sometimes you get involved in somethin', you can, you can, you can think too much about it, and you can—whether I should do this, or whether I should do that. I think you should go in and play your game, and if your game has been complete over the years, all those, all those years, as I said before, running in the gym—when I first went to my high school practice, we must have gone a week without a basketball. Just scooting and slidin' and runnin' and stoppin' and jumpin'. All those little things like that, that are, are—these are things that get you by when you get into a contest where you s-, play against pros for the first time, in an all-star game like we did against here, against the Knickerbockers.

00:29:34:00 — 00:30:52:00

Interviewer #1:

When you, when you went to Cincinnati—of course, you're, you're a youngster out of Indianapolis, you spent time there, you're, spent some time in Tennessee. Now you're going to Cincinnati, you're gonna play a pretty good schedule to take you all over the country. Was this the first time that you'd travelled that much, seen that many parts of the United States?

Oscar Robertson:

Oh, yes. It was a tremendous experience for me to be able to go and travel, and first—well, I'd actually been in one other airplane before, but, you know, these types of things. You know, when I was growin' up, I used to look at airplanes goin' overhead and wonder, where are all these people going? And you just couldn't imagine people movin' that much. But now you, once you get up, and you, you see business people, corporations, corporate giants, athletic teams, and families goin' to visit each other on holidays, and, and some for tragic, and some for happiness, you know. Then you realize, you know, you think about those things. But I, I think it's an education. I think everyone in thi-, in this country should be able to travel and see different people from other parts of the world. I, I, I think it's something they could never be able to—I could never explain to you m-, my first thoughts of when I went to China this, to, once, a couple years ago, and saw all the people there; or, or going to Rome, or Spain, and gettin' involved with the basketball teams. These are things you have to see, because it's a tremendous education that you can never get in school.

00:30:53:00 — 00:32:44:00

Interviewer #1:

When you were at Cincinnati, did you feel that, uh, when you travelled to different parts of the country, that people sort of accepted a basketball team or basketball players perhaps a little more than they would an ordinary group of young black men travelling around the country? What was the difference between being an ordinary guy and being a very special person, as you obviously were, in basketball?

Oscar Robertson:

It, it was, it was helpful, and I didn't know it was. You know, I, I didn't—here again, you know, you, wh-, when you're ***with a team you don't think of a lot of things. But I, I, I had some problems in certain places. We played in North Carolina and we couldn't stay in the city, we had to stay outside the, in a fraternity hall. I was, played in Houston, and I'll never forget this hotel as long as I live,*** the Shamrock-Hilton. I was not able stay there with the team. ***We checked into the hotel, and maybe an hour later I was told that I couldn't stay there. And situations like that,*** that, that'd go a-, go around. And, and we went to a theater once in, in Denton, Texas, and they tell us we had to go upstairs, sit in the balcony, and the balcony was closed. And these are type things you think about. And, and maybe a little, a little place next to your dormitory that you, that they don't want you to go into; or, or you go into a restaurant sometimes and, and you know that th-, you know, people are staring at you. ***But I,*** but I, I think the discipline and the, and dedication you had growing up, I think it, I think it's***—sports—it's stro-, [sic] so tremendous because as a, as a young p-, person playing—the first thing was told to us that—when we were winning high school games in Indianapolis, Indiana, that—***

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—you're no longer a, a normal s-, person. People are going to watch you, you're in a glass bowl. And so if you want to play sports you have to understand that. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

You had to, you had to make allowances for these types of situations. And I think that it helps your temperament to know to, how to deal with these people.

00:32:45:00 — 00:33:37:00

Interviewer #1:

When you entered the NBA in the fall of 1960, looking back at it now, how would you describe the way the game was played then?

Oscar Robertson:

OK, it was a real, a rough and aggressive game. That, I think that ***that particular time in my career, that, it, were only ten pro teams, and you played everybody in eight, eight to ten times, maybe more. And believe me, after about, maybe going around the leg once or twice, everybody knows—***

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—your plays, so that execution was very, very key. The players, you knew all the players, and—

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—which, you know, which was the friendship off the court. But ***once you got on the court, you know, it wa-, it was all out, this was a guy I had to beat.*** I had to beat him in order to help my team win. But it, it was tougher. You know, I think it was a tougher game than it—any-, anything will be tougher if you have ten teams as opposed to twenty or thirty or forty teams. ***[Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]***

00:33:37:00 — 00:34:28:00

Interviewer #1:

Young Rober-, Oscar Robertson now has entered the NBA. It's 1960. You've heard about a lot of the players, obviously. You've seen many of them play. Who were the people who really impressed you, as, as dominant players in the game, and what were the things that, that they were doing which you thought were particularly impressive?

Oscar Robertson:

Well, Baylor was a great player. I'd seen him play. He was a couple years ahead of me. Wilt was a great. Bill Russell. Cousy was, I had heard about Cousy, got to play against him before he retired. Jerry West and I came at the same time. Bob Pettit was a tremendous basketball player. Each player had something in his own right, in his own game that just put him a little bit further out there than the other ball-players. Elgin could command a game, he could carry a basketball game. Pettit was a player who could not dribble very much, and he didn't. He was—

[rollout on camera roll; audio only]

Oscar Robertson:

—a smart player. He stayed inside, rebounded, and did all those types of things.

Interviewer #1:

We're out?

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, cut, we're—

Interviewer #1:

Good.

[cut]

[camera roll 37]

00:34:29:00 — 00:35:05:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed. Stick it.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound 59.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, you were talking about some of the outstanding players you've met when you came into the NBA. You mentioned Elgin, Bill; you were talking about Bob Pettit, and you said he couldn't dribble very well, but he, he played a game appropriate to that.

Oscar Robertson:

Yes. I can never re-, remember Bob Pettit taking over two dribbles without picking the ball up and giving it to a guard. He knew he couldn't do these things, so he didn't. But he played a

heady game. I think an, I think all great players are intelligent on the court. [plane flies over] Bill Russell, you know, was a great passer.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Cut. What is that?

[picture cuts; audio only]

Oscar Robertson:

Oh.

[cut]

00:35:06:00 — 00:36:04:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound 60.

[slate]

Oscar Robertson:

To me, Bob Pettit was one of the great forwards in the basketball game today. Not because he had all the great innate ability as far as dribbling because I've never actually really seen him take over two or three dribbles at one time, or dribble up and down the court. He knew he couldn't do these things, and he played a very heady, intelligent game. And I feel that in order to be a great player you have to have some form of intelligence. Russell was another great basketball player. Russell was not a great shot, but he would always be able to make that basket or make a free throw when you really need him. Tremendous defensive player—he and, he and Wilt Chamberlain, together. Jerry West was a finesse player. Sam Jones was a [sic] underrated basketball player who did a lot of things. Cousy was electrifying with the Celtics. I think, during those days, that you had many, many great stars on each individual team, and collectively, playing together, this is why they were great basketball teams. And I think, I think sometimes you have to have great players with you, in order to become even greater.

00:36:05:00 — 00:36:11:00

Interviewer #1:

Why is it that some players—[door opens offscreen]—hold on.

[cut]

00:36:12:00 — 00:36:58:00

Interviewer #2:

Sound 61.

Camera Crew Member #3:

Thank you. Go ahead.

Interviewer #1:

We're talking about some of the, some of the outstanding players; not only players who were outstanding, but who were outstanding for particular reasons as you remember them. I wonder if you'd go on with that.

Oscar Robertson:

Well, Jack Twyman was a—I played with h-, him on the Cincinnati team. Was a great shot, did not have a lot of great ability; but he had the uncanny ability of getting open, and I think as a guard you have to look for these types of players. Elgin was, you know, just all over the court, I mean, with his dribblin', his rebounding, and his passing. As I said—my, I may have missed this earlier—he could really carry a team. There are very few players that can really carry a, a basketball team, and generate the offense, not only by individual himself, but for gettin' other players involved in the, in the, in the offensive end of the, of the game.

00:36:59:00 — 00:37:29:00

Interviewer #1:

You hear a lot of talk about people controlling the tempo of the game. Is that what you mean when you talk about ability?

Oscar Robertson:

Yeah. For instance, you know, when I played, you know, I knew when guys got tired on the court. We were a runnin' basketball team wherever I played—Cincinnati, and also

Milwaukee. But you—here again, you gotta rest sometimes. On the offensive end, if you know a team who's playin' against you is a'runnin' and really scoring, you walk the ball down the floor. You figure out what player is tired from the defensive end a-, against you, and these types of things.

00:37:30:00 — 00:38:08:00

Interviewer #1:

[pause] Talk about that first Royals team that you played for. Wh-, who, who was on it, and what kind of club was it, as far as you were concerned?

Oscar Robertson:

[laughs] ***Well, it was a team that—we struggle. We, I think we won maybe 33 games the first year.*** Wayne Embry played the pivot, Bob Boozer, Jack Twyman, myself, Arlen Bockhorn, Hub Reed, Win Wilfong, Davy—Dave Piontek, I believe. I'm not, I'm not sure, you know. Some of the guys just, it just fades. ***We, we had a tough time.*** We had to really play a control-type offense, and take advantage of [plane flies over]— ***[Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]***

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

Oscar Robertson:

[laughs]

[cut]

00:38:09:00 — 00:38:58:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Speed.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound 63.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, a lot of great players have gone into the coaching ranks, and I think it's fair to say that there's really not much connection between being a great player and then being a great coach, is there?

Oscar Robertson:

No, there isn't. I think this is because the, the, the people who, who are coaches don't want you in it, because it keeps them out. You know, you know, I've always said, why should a coach go from team A, B, C, D, E, and always, and continue to get coaching jobs? It's like a closed society. They say that great players don't make great coaches. You know, Adolf Rupp once told me once, he said, that's not true. He said, great, great players do make great coaches. So, so why? But they will, the, the, the perception today is that if you're a great player, you can't coach, only because the guys who are coaching were not great players.

00:38:59:00 — 00:39:41:00

Interviewer #1:

Another thing I've heard sug-, suggested a lot of times is that guard-, mean who have been guards are better coaches than coaches who've been big men in the game. Any validity to that, as far as you're—

Oscar Robertson:

I don't, I don't really know. It's just hard to say. I think that as a guard, it all depends on what you had to do. I think as a guard you set up a lot of things, and you see the court. I think pivot men can see the court also from, from their point of view. But I, I th-, I think any, in any situation you get involved in, if you don't have any athletes on, on your team, you're not gonna win. It's g-, it's, the game has gotten to that point today. It's not like it was years ago where you could have maybe one or two guys on your team, and no bench, and win—go out in a contest and come out successfully. But today that is just not true.

00:39:42:00 — 00:41:13:00

Interviewer #1:

I spoke last year with Lenny Wilkens about the term, reading the court, or, seeing the court, and he said that he didn't want to suggest that players of today couldn't read or see the court the way they did when you and he—he mentioned you, and himself, and a number of other players. But he said the game has changed considerably, so the whole concept of reading the court is somewhat different.

Oscar Robertson:

I, I really don't think they even been taught to do these things, you kno-, you know. I, I, I think that the college coaching—the techniques and terminologies, terminologies, have all

changed to such a point where they, kids who are all-Americans get into the pros and fall flat. There are so many all-Americans today coming out of the college ranks, who, there's no, the, the, the term means nothin' today. To come down a court as a pro player and have the sense that, that, the, the defense is behind you, or your, got a, one of your offensive players on your left: these are things, what, what Lenny is talking about, readin' the court, and s-, makin' the guys spread out on the court. Spread out on the court, keep the court balanced so you can have some team unity. No, they don't do that anymore, and it's because they, I don't think they've been trained to do it. They, they have, they've been trained to come down a court, play against a zone, pass the ball back four or five, fifteen times, and, and the crowd'll roar, because they think that's great defense. But it's not great defense because they're not even tryin' to shoot a lot of times. I, I think these are the things that are happenin'. I think zones are terrible for colleges, or, or high schools, because it does not teach you any individual defense. [background conversation]

00:41:14:00 — 00:42:02:00

Interviewer #1:

When you, when you look at the game today also, do you, do you have any feeling that the college game might be improved with a clock?

Oscar Robertson:

Yes. I think they should go to thirty seconds, or thirty-five seconds. They should also go to six fouls. When the five foul concept was adopted—that was d-, adopted many, many years ago—I guess with the, when the game was first, was invented. Then you played, every, after every basket you had a jump ball. Now, the guys up and down the court so much, bodies are slamming into each other and people are all over the court, and the people are bigger and quicker, so you got, you gotta make a little adjustment. But you see, the colleges don't want to res-, they want to resist this because they think the pros have six fouls, and they don't want anyone to say this, this is a, a pro game. How can going to six fouls be considered a pro game?

00:42:03:00

Interviewer #1:

When you think back about that first season you spent in Cincinnati with the Royals—not a great team, obviously. What were the, what was the reaction of the fans? Of course, kids are going to come and see the games because it's the pros and it's the stars, and what. But what about the atmosphere generally in Cincinnati? What were the fan-, what was the fan reception? How did the papers treat you, coming into the league?

Oscar Robertson:

Well, I, I think, I think the reception from the fans was just really great. We averaged, oh, I guess ge-, doubled in attendance; maybe triple in attendance. I've had problem with the press in Cincinnati. Certain reporters felt that, you know, they did-, they didn't care for me as an athlete, and I think it's b-, it's because, maybe 'cause I was the black athlete who, who played well. I wasn't that talkative to people in Cincinnati because I didn't know them. I've been stung a lot by reporters in, over the years, but you know that's something that's part of the game that you have to adjust to. When Jerry Lucas came to the basketball team in Cincinnati, reporters indicated that he and I had racial problems; and Adrian Smith who was white, from Kentucky, was one of my better, better friends, and we socialized with, quite a bit together on the road. When th-, we were in Rome together. Actually, Jerry Lucas was in Rome together. We were all there together. And I just think that when you have these type of people involved in sports, they're really not professional; because I always felt that fans, the athlete, and the reporters—everybody [pause]—

Interviewer #1:

Keep going.

Oscar Robertson:

I think everybody, really have, really have an obligation [plane flies over]—oh.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Sorry.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

[camera roll 38]

[sound roll 20]

00:43:38:00 — 00:45:12:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Champions. Camera roll thirty-eight, sound roll twenty, sound sixty-four.

[slate]

Interviewer #2:

OK. [watch beeps]

Interviewer #1:

Oscar Robertson, would you talk for a moment about the lawsuit. You were very prominent in a lawsuit against professional basketball, against the league and the owners. Would you tell us how that came about, and, you know, how it proceeded, and what, in your view, the result of it was.

Oscar Robertson:

That's called the Oscar Robertson Case, versus the Owners. We just felt that, in a, in a nutshell, that th-, the playing conditions and things that in-, that players in-, the, were involved with, in a sense were just totally unjust. Actually, the, the crux of the whole matter was being able to play out your option. I remember years ago, when I first started playing basketball, that certain ball-players were blacklisted—

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—from playing. If I were an owner, and you were on my, and you were on my team and I said, look, I'm going to give you ten thousand dollars. You may be worth a hundred-thousand. Where could you go and play? And if you didn't accept the terms, conditions, of anything that I did, then I would say, OK, I'd have perpetual rights to you forever, which means you can't go to team B, or team C or D, and ever try to get a contract. And we just felt that was totally wrong.

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

I think what happened with the—

[picture returns]

Oscar Robertson:

—owners is that they tried to resist us and resist us for so long, instead of c-, instead of having a meeting of the minds and meeting the players halfway, long before it had to go to court. I think any time you go to court, both side [sic] loses. I think, I think professional people who have a strong organization should always settle their differences.

00:45:13:00 — 00:45:47:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you think the result of the suit, what, what came out of it, in your view, changed the game for the better?

Oscar Robertson:

Made a lot of guys a lot more money. I don't know if it changed the game per se. I think it led to the two teams merging together, the ABA and the NBA. I'm sure this, this happened, and they're gonna be some other things happening. They've got a salary cap situation, now, and when it's taken to court, you take a young player who's comin' in who has some great ability, and a team who said, we can only pay you X amount of dollars, if they can't move some players to make up his salary, he's still gonna go to court and he's gonna win.

00:45:48:00 — 00:46:59:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, one of the players in Philadelphia, I think, was, with regards to how—

Oscar Robertson:

Wood. Leon Wood. He was gonna do the same thing, but I th-, evidently somehow, some way, some al-, alternatives were used or some players were moved, and he got a little bit more money. I, I, I think that, it, really when you look at that situation, I think it, it helped, it's gonna help the sport to a certain extent. But what, what hurts is that to go out and give a guy money, and he's, can't even get in a ball-game. You know, it's, you know, everyone complains and says, oh, this guy's making $800,000 or $1,000,000. It may be too much, granted. But at least he's putting in the forty-five minutes a game, or forty minutes a game, maybe the whole game. What of, about a guy who sits on a bench who makes four, $500,000, you can only get him in the game when you either won or lost the game? See, these are, these are problems, but owners pay out the money, players don't pay out the money. I've always said, you know, why should an owner be a, a fool enough to give a guy $1,000,000 when he's only worth $100,000, and then be another fool enough to complain about it all the time? Don't give it to him. No one is worth $2,000,000. I mean, and they, they, what can he do? He can only play basketball.

00:47:00:00 — 00:48:49:00

Interviewer #1:

How is the, the general health of the NBA as you see it? Do you get to games, or how do you—

Oscar Robertson:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—feel about the, the level of ball that's being played?

Oscar Robertson:

I think that there are two great teams right now: Boston, of course, and Philadelphia. LA's got, they havin' a lot of injury problems, they need some, they need a couple o' key players. The rest of the teams are just out there, as far as the overall ability goes, they're, they're struggling. They aren't consistent. Some are. To be consistent, I mean, c-, to be consistent over a long season. Some teams are up for sale. I understand a couple teams who want to move to certain other, couple locations. But I, I think, I think, basketball, to me, is, is, is a, is a dominant sport as far as participation by individuals. Football is, they get on TV because they have the best contracts. Basketball has not been on TV because evidently CBS says, they'll tell the people, oh, the, basketball's not a good draw. But when you put it on TV they have, they have tremendous, tremendous reception by the people that, to, to watch a game. They don't wanna watch a, some mediocre, or worse than mediocre, teams play. They don't wanna watch Cleveland play, oh, somebody, and the game's gonna be dull. They want to watch the be-, they want, they want to watch the best people play. ***I've always said, basketball, football, baseball, is not unlike a, a movie. You have stars. You don't have a set script, but you have stars that people wanna go see. People respond to anyone who's been successful, and who are star, who, a star character.*** They, they wanna see all-Americans play and do well. If a guy's not all-American, if you've got a team's—they don't wanna see you. Look at colleges today. You've got a team that's ranked in the top twenty, they have no, everyone's averaging ten points a game, they don't wanna see th-, they don't, they don't want these people on television. ***[Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 2]***

00:48:50:00 — 00:50:43:00

Interviewer #1:

Considering that, that well over 90% of the players—99% perhaps—of players who played professional basketball come out of colleges, are there any reforms, as you see it, needed at the college level, both in terms of the way players are being recruited, and the way they're being maintained as students once they're in college?

Oscar Robertson:

Funny you should mention that. I, I'm trying to negotiate with someone to write a book t-, that I wanna write, about, about education and athletes, primarily black athletes, and how they're recruited, and what to look for. And then you, then you going into agents, who, who use these players, who get, really get them started when they're in colleges, but get 'em money, let 'em borrow cars, and really obligating the p-, these—

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

—people to make sure they can go in, they can't go any other places. You look at your major colleges and universities today, and you'll, you'll see where kids haven't graduated in, in years. What is the NCAA, what is their obligation, what does the president of that university, that college—what does he think about it? I read a case some time ago about a young man who went to a univer-, college out in the midwest, graduated and couldn't even read the menu in, in, in a restaurant. Had to go back to a school in Chicago just to, just to be able to do those thing. I think it's a shame and disgrace that these coaches will sit up and consider themselves moral, righteous people, and let a player go to school there for four years, or even take a player in and let him flunk outa school. 'Cause I think, if I'm a coach, I take a player and I know his aca-, his aptitude tests, and his, and his academic ability—if I take him in knowing he can't get through school, then I would f-, I fail as a coach if I le-, if I let him flunk out of school, 'cause I know that to begin with. But this happens all the time. Look at pl-, when you look at some players—some schools have never graduated a basketball player, white or black, in the last, say, ten to fifteen years. That's a shame.

00:50:44:00 — 00:51:53:00

[missing frames]

Interviewer #1:

Let's say a friend comes to you and says, look, Oscar, I've got a son and he wants to play big-time basketball, would you take a look at him? Now, taking all the things you've just talked about into consideration, and athletic abili-, what kind of things specifically would you be looking for before you said to this guy, yeah, I think you, you ought to push your son to play ball.

Oscar Robertson:

I would assume—him being a father, I'd, I'd have some allowances made in for, in that he may not be that good. But I'd sit and talk with him a little b-—with the kid—first, and—just to che-, check his intelligence out, and, and where he wants to go as far a-, as a, an individual. And I would, I would try to assure him to, to, that he doesn't, he can get his education and still make the, the same type of money, if he's a worthy basketball player. Then I would, I would tell him, you know, that he has to, he has to take more responsibility himself, and not let, leave it for someone else to do for him all the time. Wh-, and, and if you do those things, you know, I, I think that it—and then if he's a great player—then he'll, then he'll do well with, with basketball. [noise offscreen]

00:51:54:00 — 00:52:14:00

Interviewer #1:

If someone posed this question to you, said, I'm gonna give you the first part of a sentence, we'd like to f-, I'd like you to finish it, how would you finish this sentence? The sentence began, to be a champion. What's the rest of it?

Oscar Robertson:

It, it t-, it takes hard work and dedication, and it takes someone with the knowledge to be able to, to inspire you to get the best out of your own ability.

00:52:15:00 — 00:52:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Good?

Interviewer #3:

Cut. That's a wrap.

[cut]

00:52:25:00 — 00:52:57:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Slate.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Sound sixty-five.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

We were talk about, to be a champion. Would you, would say that, and just finish the sentence in your own words?

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

To be a champion requires a lotta hard work and dedication, a lotta patience, temperament. And I think it requires an individual who has the a-, ability to get you to, to inspire you t-, to play your best.

[missing frames]

Oscar Robertson:

Even though you have the ability, sometimes, if someone can't get it out of you, then you will not be a great champion.

00:52:58:00

Interviewer #2:

Cut.

Interviewer #1:

That's nice.

[no picture; audio only]

Interviewer #3:

Thank you.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:53:08:00