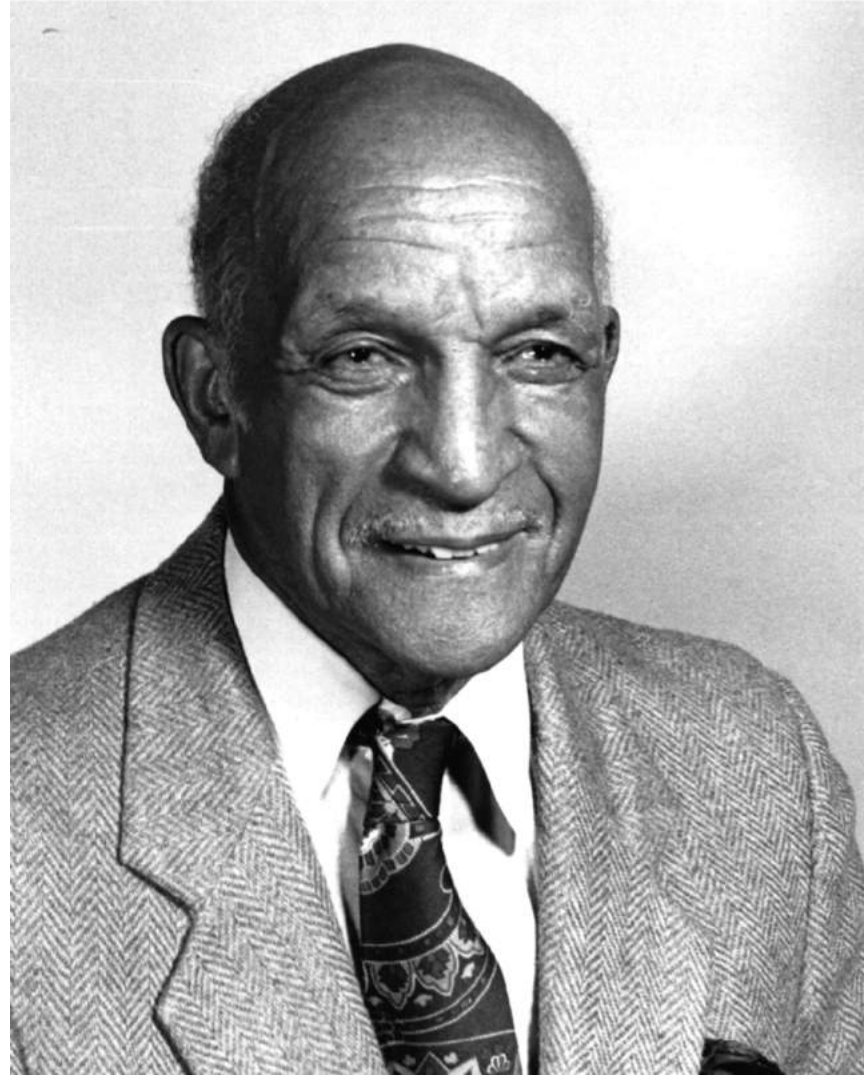


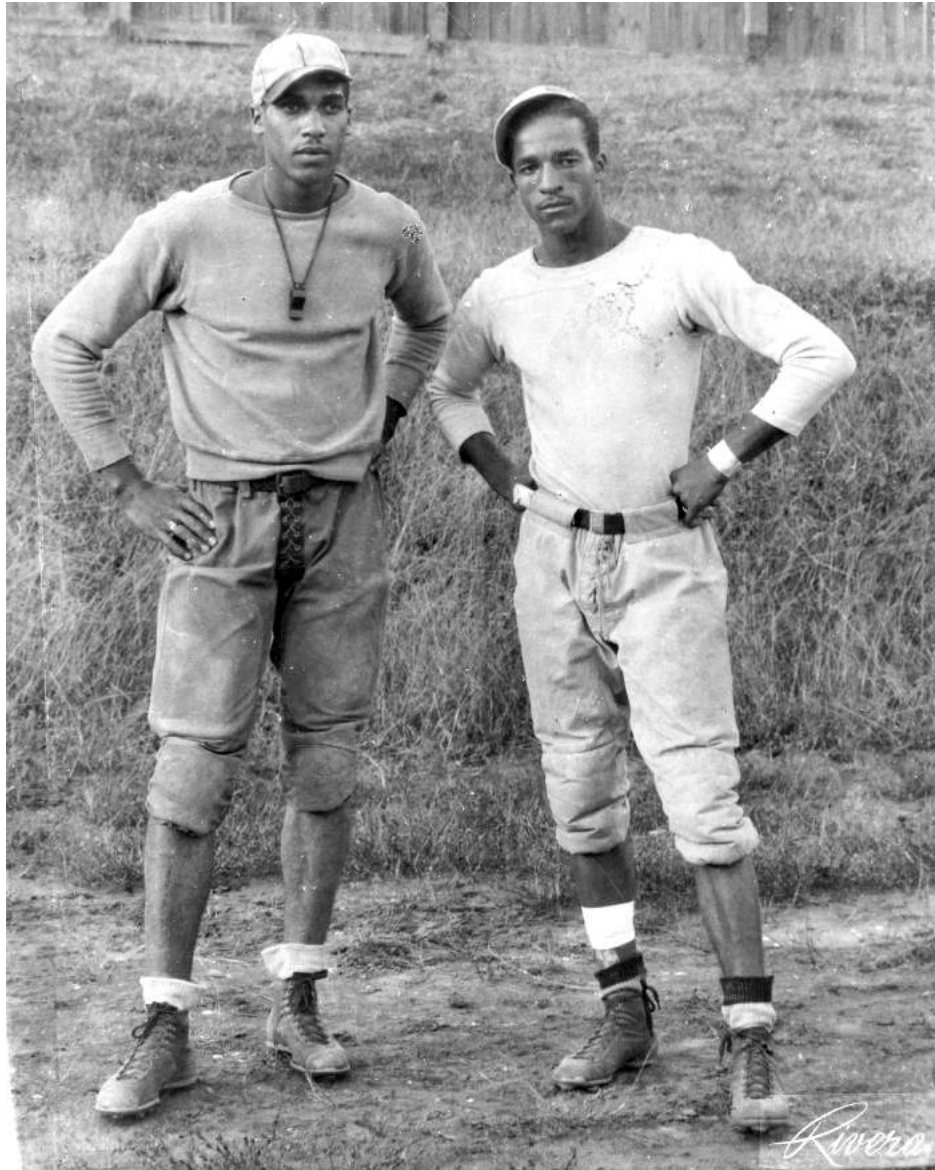
John B. McLendon: 1915-1999



John B. McLendon: His Life

John B. McLendon was born in 1915 in the town of Hiawatha, Kansas. From the time he saw his first game at the age of 10, he became obsessed with basketball. McLendon played the sport in high school and decided he wanted to pursue a career in coaching and physical education.

After finding out that Dr. James Naismith, who invented the game of basketball in 1891, was only 40 miles away at the University of Kansas, McLendon enrolled as the school's first black student in the physical education department. Naismith became his advisor. This young African American man and basketball's inventor formed a mentoring relationship that would change the *face* and *pace* of the game of basketball forever. With Naismith's support, he challenged the school's integration policy in campus swimming pools.



In 1937, Coach McLendon started his coaching career at North Carolina College, now North Carolina Central University, assisting coach W. F. Burghardt. At North Carolina College (NCC) he established the first physical education program in North Carolina and helped to found the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). He won eight CIAA titles at NCC between 1941 and 1952.

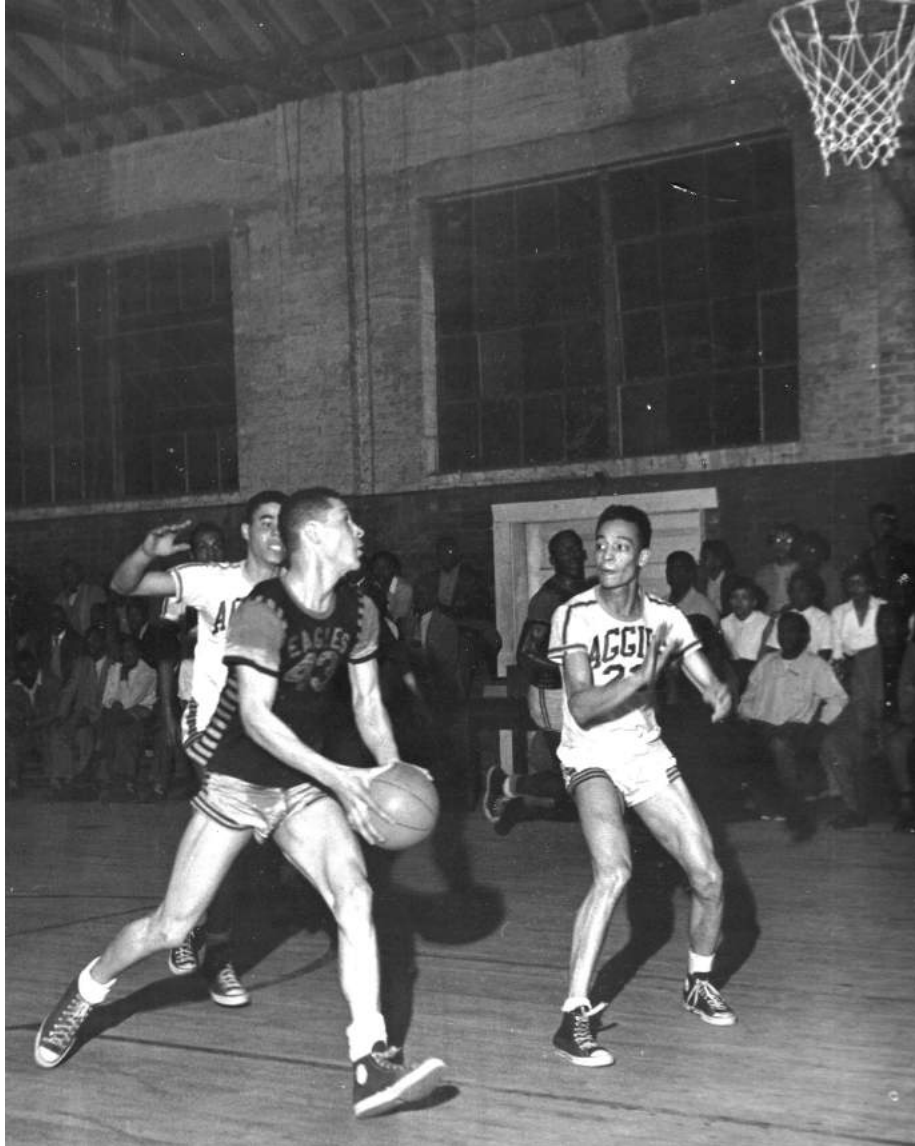
From NCC, McLendon went on to coach teams at Hampton Institute, Tennessee State A&I University, Kentucky State College, and Cleveland State University. He was the head coach of two professional teams, the Cleveland Pipers and the Denver Rockets.



John B. McLendon: Impact on the Game

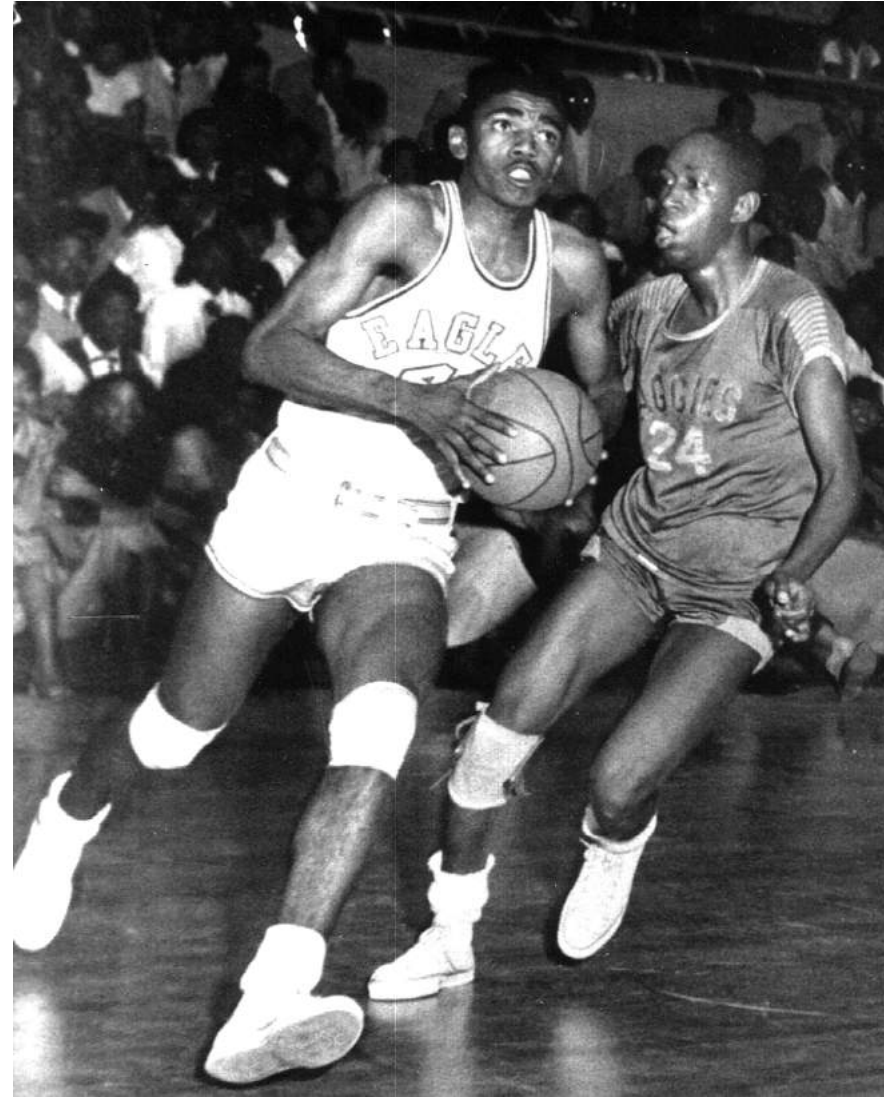
Coach John B. McLendon revolutionized the game of basketball with the invention of the fast break, full court press, full court zone, and pressure defense. McLendon also invented the four corners delay offense, which was adopted and made famous by UNC basketball coach Dean Smith.





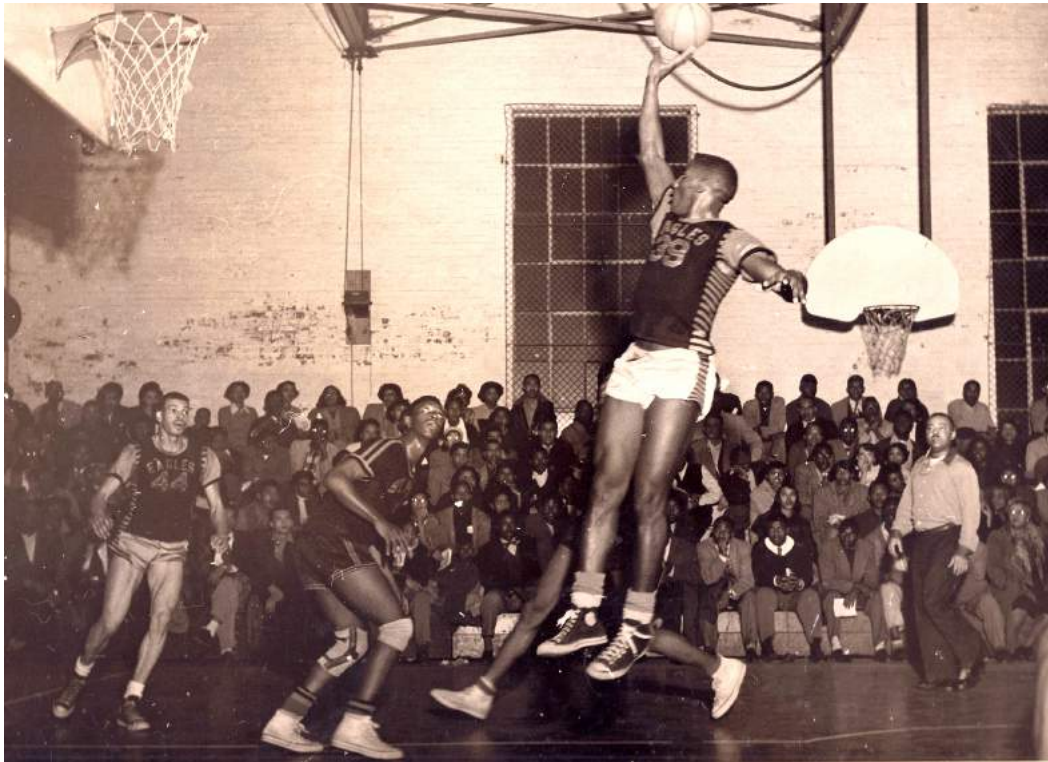
In 1965 McLendon published the groundbreaking book, Fast Break Basketball: Fundamentals and Fine Points. He also regularly published a column called "Sports Dust" in Durham's African American weekly, *The Carolina Times*. The column discussed his views on the game of basketball, game statistics and other sports related news. Coach McLendon's new, innovative approach and style of play was studied and mimicked by college and high school coaches throughout the country (including locally by the Durham Hillside High 1965 "Pony Express team").

Coach McLendon was a leader in organizing the integration of college and professional basketball. In 1959, he became the first African-American to coach a professional team of the American Basketball League called the Cleveland Pipers. He coached several players who went on to integrate the NBA. Harold Hunter, who played for the Eagles under Coach McLendon, became the first black athlete to sign a contract with the NBA. He played for the Washington Capitals. Another Eagle, Sam Jones, was recruited by the Boston Celtics and was selected by the NBA as one of the top 50 greatest players in its history.



Sam Jones

McClendon is recognized in the Basketball Hall of Fame as well as the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame. Due to his achievements and successes as a coach, the CIAA renamed its Hall of Fame to the John B. McLendon CIAA Hall of Fame.



“One day when basketball’s inventor and his protégé were out and about, they stopped to watch some youngsters playing basketball and as they chased the ball around the court, Naismith commented that ‘it was the ultimate way to play the game—to always be on the attack on offense and defense, wherever the ball is.’ **I patterned my whole game after that philosophy...**” **McLendon said.** (*Breaking Through, Katz, 2007*).

John B. McLendon: NCCU Basketball, Then & Now

After becoming NCC head basketball coach in 1940, McLendon implemented his philosophy and core principles. He believed that basketball was to be used as a tool to help develop discipline and character, saying to his players, they could use the whole alphabet, as long they avoided the “Three W’s—wine, weed and women.” At NCC, McLendon perfected his system of constant movement (motion offense), aggressive defense and an up-tempo pace, believing that shots should be taken every 8 seconds, fashioning a game that would be more fun for players, coaches and spectators.



His techniques of intense training and practice proved immediately successful with his 1941 NCC team winning the Negro National College Championship Tournament. Under McLendon, the Eagles continued to advance and improve, and in the year 1944, the Eagles had won all of their games except one.

Recently, North Carolina Central University men's basketball team has revived the heritage. In 1989 the Eagles won the NCAA Division II championship. In 2014, after winning the Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference (MEAC), the Eagles reached the NCAA tournament for the first time in school history.



The Secret Game

Basketball was segregated at the time, but Jim Crow laws did not stop Coach McLendon. He wanted to know for sure if his team could beat the Duke University's medical basketball. That team won the Southern Conference and was considered the best. As a result, on March 12, 1944, McLendon held what would become known as "The Secret Game" with Duke. McLendon locked the doors to the North Carolina College gymnasium after the Duke team came inside with hooded robes. No spectators were allowed. During the game, the Eagles used McLendon's fast break and other defense strategies and defeated Duke's medical team by 44 points. Following the game was a second game, this one "shirts and skins." The game between the North Carolina College Eagles and the Duke Blue Devils was the first integrated college basketball game in the South.



Acknowledgements

This exhibit was curated by Tamar Carroll, Umar Muhammad, Dr. Chanda Powell in collaboration with the Museum of Durham History—special thanks to these citizen-curators for their time, passion, and expertise. Thanks also to Vincent Enoch design and layout and to Through This Lens Gallery for printing. Finally, thanks to the American Tobacco Campus and to Shelly Green for their enthusiastic support of this exhibit.