

Bill Russell

(born 1934). U.S. basketball player Bill Russell was regarded in his day as the greatest defensive center in basketball history and the outstanding National Basketball Association (NBA) player of the 1960s. Standing 6 feet, 10 inches (2.1 meters) tall, he set the standard by which other exceptionally tall players were then judged. In 1966 he became the first black coach of a major professional sports team (the Boston Celtics) in the United States.

William Felton Russell was born on Feb. 12, 1934, in Monroe, La., but was raised in Oakland, Calif. He attended the University of San Francisco, where he led the basketball team to two consecutive National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championships, in 1954–55 and 1955–56. Russell also played on the U.S. basketball team that won the 1956 Olympic gold medal in Melbourne, Australia.

Russell played for the Boston Celtics from 1956 through 1969. With him at center, the Celtics won nine championships (1957, 1959–66) in 10 seasons and two more (1968–69) with Russell as player and coach. On five occasions Russell was voted the Most Valuable Player in the NBA. In 1967 the Associated Press (AP) named him one of the five members of its All-America collegiate team for the preceding 20 years, and later the AP selected him the outstanding professional basketball player of the 1960s.

At age 32 Russell became the first African American coach of a major professional U.S. sports team when he took over the helm in Boston as a player coach. He also coached the Seattle SuperSonics from 1973 to 1977 and the Sacramento Kings from 1987 to 1988 and served the Kings briefly as vice-president of operations in 1988 to 1989. In addition, Russell worked as a sports announcer, wrote a syndicated column, and did television news commentary. His autobiography, *Second Wind: The Memoirs of an Opinionated Man*, was published in 1979. In 2011 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Cite

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"Bill Russell." , Encyclopædia Britannica, 7 May. 2017.

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