



SEAN KIRST PENS BOOK ABOUT  
THE NBA'S FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN PLAYER

# INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

By Hart Seely  
Staff writer

In 1950, Earl Lloyd became the first African-American to play in a National Basketball Association game. Post-Standard columnist Sean Kirst has co-written "Moonfixer: The Basketball Journey of Earl Lloyd" with the future Hall of Famer, who played six seasons with the Syracuse Nationals. Kirst spoke with Hart Seely.

## WHAT'S EARL LLOYD DOING THESE DAYS?

He's 81 and travels constantly. He lives in Tennessee and acts like a 50-year-old.

## HOW'D YOU TWO EVER MEET?

I called Earl the first time in 1991. I'd just become a sports columnist, and it gave me freedom to putter around with the (Syracuse) Nats. ... I learned that Earl was the first black guy to play in the NBA, and it just blew my doors off. ... He was one of three who signed that year: Nathaniel "Sweetwater" Clifton, Chuck Cooper and Earl. He always diminishes the importance of what he did, but the bottom line is this: On Halloween night 1950, he became the first black man to ever set foot in an NBA basketball game.

## WHY ISN'T EARL LLOYD A HOUSEHOLD NAME?

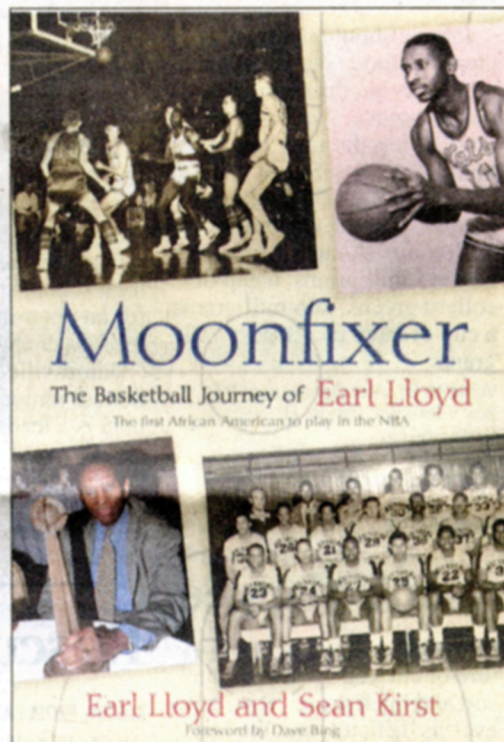
Well, I think basketball evolved differently. There had already been integrated professional leagues. With baseball, Jackie Robinson faced a different situation. The game had been lily-white for 60 years. Still, I think Earl's significance is staggering, especially when you realize that the NBA is

now about 80 percent African-American. He was the first.

## HOW DOES HE REMEMBER HIS TIME IN SYRACUSE?

He has a real appreciation for the fans here. He feels the home-court advantage was outrageous, and it gave birth to what goes on now with Syracuse University basketball. But it also meant having to live in the 15th

LLOYD, PAGE C-3



COVER of "Moonfixer" by Earl Lloyd and Sean Kirst (Syracuse University Press).

## THE DETAILS

Sean Kirst will discuss and sign "Moonfixer" at three upcoming events.

**2 P.M. SATURDAY:**  
Borders Books, Carousel Center.

**2 P.M. SUNDAY:**  
Onondaga Historical Association, 321 Montgomery St., Syracuse.

**7 P.M. FEB. 11:**  
Barnes and Noble bookstore, 3430 Erie Blvd. E., DeWitt.

**WHERE TO BUY IT:**  
The book is available at Borders, Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com. You can also learn more about the book and purchase a copy directly from the publisher at [www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu](http://www.syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu). The list price is \$29.95.

**WIN A COPY:**  
We have a copy of the book to give away. E-mail [dose@syracuse.com](mailto:dose@syracuse.com) by 5 p.m. Friday with "moonfixer" in the subject line for your chance to win. Please include your name and telephone number. One entry per person, please.

d (right) blocks  
on's shot attempt  
War Memorial.



# Lloyd shot hoops in a vastly different era in Syracuse

LLOYD, FROM PAGE C-1

Ward, this tiny African-American neighborhood in the city. He tells stories about trying to rent apartments around town.



Kirst

Those were the realities of Syracuse. Even in the 1950s, there were clubs and restaurants that blacks could not go into. The way he puts it is that Syracuse was a good place for him to be, but it had the same situations as everywhere else.

**What did he think of the 15th Ward?**

The incredible thing was that you could walk into a place on a weekday night in 1956 and maybe run into Jim Brown or Count Basie — or all these incredible guys who had no other place to go. At the same time, Earl became close friends with Pee Wee Caldwell, a postal worker in Syracuse, a beautiful guy, also a hell of a basketball player. They still remain close.

**How did you come into this**



Courtesy of Earl and Charlita Lloyd  
**LLOYD WITH his trophy and ring at the Basketball Hall of Fame induction in 2003.**

**book?**

Well, journalists aren't supposed to say this, but there are times when a source becomes your friend. That's what happened. Throughout the '90s, we talked on a lot of stories. One of the best columns I ever wrote was Earl's take on whether teachers should live in the city. He just became a guy that I could talk to about anything. One day around 2000, he said his family was bugging him to do a book. He asked about my interest. I said,

"When you're ready, tell me." One day, six or seven years later, he suddenly just says, "Let's go!"

**If not for racial barriers, you think he would have been a bigger NBA star?**

One of the things he talks about is how the early African-American players fell into the same role as — well — what happened with quarterbacks in football. There was the sense that they were good for heavy-weight battles under the hole, but you didn't want them running the team. And you didn't want them shooting. In college, Earl scored 14 or 15 points a game. I think his career NBA average was 8 or 9. He didn't shoot often. He has a great line: There was no play called for me.

**Book tour?**

Dave Bing wrote the foreword. They're close. In fact, Earl scouted Bing while they were both in Syracuse, before Bing was drafted. The New York Knicks and Detroit Pistons (in 1966) flipped a coin for the first pick, and the Knicks took Cazzie Russell, who'd gone to (the University of) Michigan. Everybody across Michigan went crazy, because they wanted Cazzie. On Earl's recommendation, the Pistons drafted Bing. All

of Detroit was in mourning, but Earl just told people, "Wait 'til you see this guy." Bing became one of the 50 greatest players of all time. They are like brothers. (Bing and Lloyd did a book signing in Detroit on Wednesday.)

**Last question: How does a guy get the nickname**

**"Moonfixer"?**

West Virginia State had a hazing system for freshmen. He was the tallest guy on campus. The seniors would say, "We've got dates to-night, so get out there, make sure we have moonlight, or you're in trouble. Your job is to fix the moon."



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