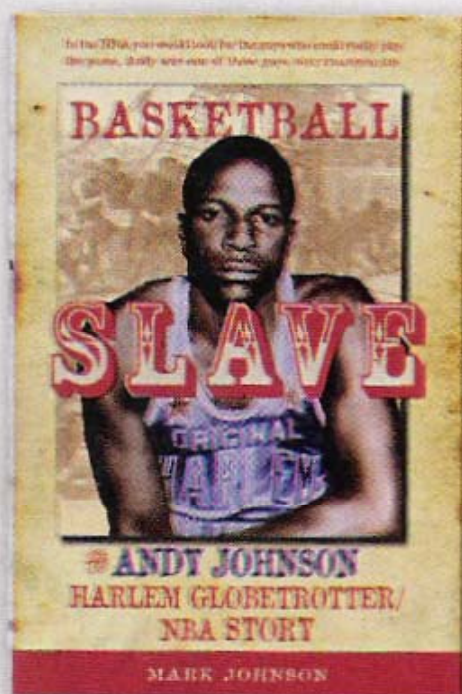
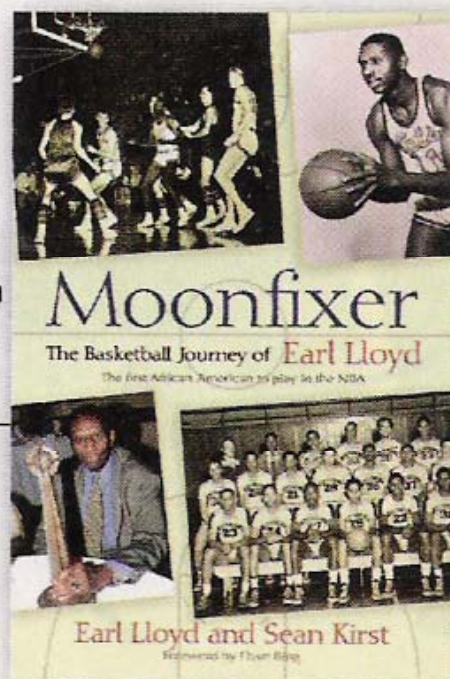


BOOKS

With each standing 6-5, Earl Lloyd and Andy Johnson weren't large players. Their stats weren't gaudy, and neither were their games flashy. But as average as their appearances and as quiet as their games were, their impacts on basketball were anything but small.

In 1950, three years after Jackie Robinson first strode across the baseball diamond, Earl Lloyd became the first black man to play in the NBA. Eight years and not many black players later, Andy Johnson joined him there. As chronicled in Lloyd's and Sid Kirst's *Moonfixer: The Basketball Journey of Earl Lloyd* and Mark Johnson's *Basketball Slaves*, both Lloyd and Andy Johnson had a knack for telling stories—about people, events and playing professionally in a segregated country. Like the stories they told so well, their own lives make for excellent books.

Moonfixer, Earl Lloyd's first-person account of his life, reads like a good talk with your grandfather: It teaches you a lot of historical lessons; it makes you want to hear more; and it repeats itself for emphasis. In this case, Lloyd and Kirst stress that this book isn't about Earl's career, it's not about all that he overcame to become the first black player to win an NBA title and it's not about him later becoming the first black assistant coach. It's about the doors that he opened for later players. At



the same time, Lloyd says that luck had a lot to do with him making it, when a lot of men with just as much talent didn't.

Andy Johnson was another lucky one—if you can call him that. Written by his son, Mark, *Basketball Slave* tells the tale of the elder Johnson, beginning with his adolescent years, going through his playing days and ending with his death in '02. In this quick read, Johnson, with the help of old newspaper clippings and memorabilia, reveals how hard being a black athlete was in the '50s and '60s. Comparing college recruiting and free agency to slavery, Johnson tells of how being a good, black player robbed his father of a proper education—as well as money.

Long after leaving the game with little to show for it, and after much effort, Andy Johnson received a portion of the NBA pension Mark felt he deserved.

Meanwhile, 43 years after playing in his last game, Earl Lloyd was finally recognized as a Hall of Famer. By that point, both overdue honors were almost beside the point: Ever since they'd broken barriers, every time a black man took the court in the NBA was recognition in and of itself for these two pioneers.

—TZVI TWERSKY