

# GAME CHANGERS

The Harlem Globetrotters have been entertaining fans for 100 years.

## AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What were some challenges the Globetrotters faced early on?

**L**ucius “Too Tall” Winston is up in the stands, more than 50 feet from the basketball hoop on the court. With his back to the hoop, Winston launches the ball over his head. SWISH, it goes right in! The crowd erupts in cheers.

The no-look shot is one of the many tricks the Harlem Globetrotters are famous for. Fans love their high-flying dunks, dazzling dribbling, behind-

the-back passes, and other moves. The team’s **exhibition games** are also filled with dancing and comedy routines.

“It’s fun for all ages, whether you’re 5 or 95,” says Winston.

The Globetrotters have been delighting fans for 100 years. And without them, professional basketball might look a lot different today.

## Hitting the Road

The Globetrotters got their start in 1926 in Chicago, Illinois. The all-Black team was first

known as the Savoy Big Five. A businessman named Abe Saperstein soon took over the squad and later renamed it the Harlem Globetrotters. Harlem is a neighborhood in New York City that’s rich in Black history.

At the time, many parts of American society were **segregated**, including professional basketball. That meant Black players weren’t allowed to join the same pro leagues that White players could. To earn money, the Globetrotters traveled from town to town. They took on anyone who would play them—including farmers in Iowa and lumberjacks in Canada.

Most opponents were no match for the Globetrotters. In fact, they dominated other teams so easily that they started adding tricks during games to keep fans entertained.

## New Heights

By the 1940s, the Globetrotters had begun playing exhibition games against other top pro

teams. In 1948 and 1949, they beat the all-White Minneapolis Lakers, a team many people considered to be the best in the world. Those games proved that the Globetrotters were as talented as top White players.

The National Basketball Association (NBA) was formed in 1949. The following year, three former Globetrotters became the new league’s first Black players.

The NBA struggled to attract fans in its early years. Meanwhile, the Globetrotters were playing in packed arenas. To help bring in new fans, NBA teams played the Globetrotters in exhibition games.

“Without the Globetrotters, the NBA wouldn’t be as successful as it is today,” says Louis “Sweet Lou” Dunbar. He played on the team for 27 years and is now a coach.

## Spreading Joy

Today the team is more about entertaining fans than winning—

though they rarely lose. And they’ve lived up to the Globetrotters name over the years, playing in more than 120 countries. During games, players often invite fans onto the court to try out tricks or join dance routines.

“We put smiles on people’s faces,” says Dunbar.

This year, the Globetrotters are celebrating their 100th anniversary with a world tour. They plan to play in more than 300 places around the globe. Winston is proud to represent the history-making team.

“It’s been an amazing journey,” he says.

—by Alicia Green

## WORDS TO KNOW

**exhibition games** *noun, plural.* unofficial games often meant for entertainment or practice

**segregated** *adjective.* separated based on race

Lucius “Too Tall” Winston

Cherelle “Torch” George

## MAKING MOVES

Before each game, the Globetrotters gather in what they call the Magic Circle to perform tricks. Here are some of the team’s showstopping moves.

**Body Roll:** A player puts up their arms in a half circle and rolls the ball from one hand to the other across their chest. Then they stretch out their arms and roll the ball across their back.

## Around the World:

This move starts with spinning the ball on one finger. The player then twists their wrist in a circle while still spinning the ball.

Louis “Sweet Lou” Dunbar

## Watch a VIDEO

Witness the magic of the Harlem Globetrotters!