

Spinning the Globe: The Rise, Fall, and Return to Greatness of the Harlem Globetrotters

By Ben Green

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Before Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell, Julius Erving, or Michael Jordan -- before Magic Johnson and Showtime -- the Harlem Globetrotters revolutionized basketball and spread the game around the world. In **Spinning the Globe: The Rise, Fall, and Return to Greatness of the Harlem Globetrotters**, author Ben Green tells the story of this extraordinary franchise and iconic American institution.

While millions of fans have been entertained by the Globetrotters, the true story of their amazing eighty years as a team has never been told. With lyrical prose and masterful story-telling, Green chronicles the Globetrotters' rise from backwoods obscurity during the harsh years of the Great Depression to become the best basketball team in the country and, by the early 1950s, the most popular sports franchise in the world.

Through original research, Green also uncovers intriguing controversies about the Globetrotters' origins, their image in the African American community, and how they were used as a propaganda weapon during the Cold War. Green renders captivating portraits of founder Abe Saperstein and the players who defined the Trotters' legacy, including Inman Jackson, Goose Tatum, Marques Haynes, Meadowlark Lemon, and Curly Neal. He describes the Trotters' struggles to overcome racial discrimination and internal dissension on their long road to glory.


In equally vivid terms, Green details the Globetrotters' fall from grace to the brink of bankruptcy in the early 1990s, and the ultimate rebirth under owner Mannie Jackson.

At every turn of the narrative, Ben Green illustrates the surprising connections that link the Globetrotters' story to the complex issues of race and sport in America, and skillfully weaves a social history of America into the Trotters' saga.

Of their formative years, he writes: "The Harlem Globetrotters were not just a

great barnstorming team; they were a sociology class on wheels, bringing black hoops and black culture to a hundred midwestern towns that had seen neither, and in the process transforming Dr. James Naismith's stodgy, wearisome game -- which was still sometimes played in chicken-wire cages by roughneck immigrants with flailing elbows and bloodied skulls, a sport more resembling rugby -- into an orchestration of speed, fluidity, motion, dazzling skill, and, most improbably, inspired comedy."

After playing more than 20,000 games in over 100 countries, before millions of fans, the Harlem Globetrotters truly belong to the world. This is their story.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

For certain generations, the song "Sweet Georgia Brown" immediately brings to mind the Harlem Globetrotters and their on-court comedy. Long before they became the clown princes of basketball, however, the Trotters were America's most popular sports team. Green (*Before His Time*) traces the team's history back to its roots in Depression-era Chicago and its early barnstorming years. Fans who remember the team through their television appearances in the early 1970s are in for an education, as Green undercuts the reputation of Meadowlark Lemon, whom other Trotters openly criticize as a poor player, while celebrating legends from the '40s and '50s such as Marques Haynes and Goose Tatum. During those years, the team was already honing its gags, but the players were also regularly competing against the nation's best college players—and even beating NBA squads before the league became racially integrated. Green's straightforward but respectful approach carries over into a balanced handling of the "minstrel show" reputation that dogged the Globetrotters almost from the beginning, as well as a brief account of the team's modern revival after being bought by a former player. The overall effect of this vividly rendered history is to make readers wish they could see the Globetrotters it describes in action. 16-page b&w photo insert. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

"...an ambitious, engaging book on the history of the Globetrotters." (Black Issues Book Review)

About the Author

Ben Green is the highly acclaimed author of **Before His Time** (the subject of a PBS documentary), **The Soldier of Fortune Murders** (which sold more than 100,000 copies and was the basis for a CBS miniseries), and **Finest Kind**. A former Bread Loaf Fellow, Green lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife, Tracie, and two daughters, Emily and Eliza. He is a graduate of Brandeis University and is on the faculty of Florida State University.

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From reader reviews:

Lidia Hill:

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Robin Harvey:

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