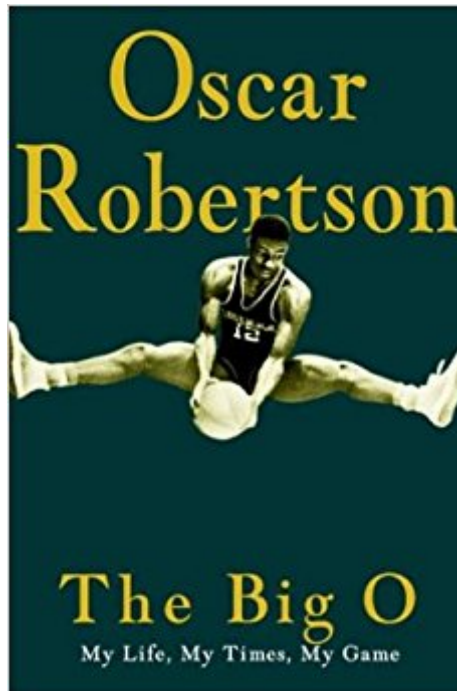




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# The Big O: My Life, My Times, My Game



## Synopsis

This is the story of perhaps the greatest all-around player in basketball history, told straight from his mouth. The name Oscar Robertson nowadays gets mentioned in conjunction with one of basketball's seminal accomplishments: the triple-double season. The year was 1962. He was all of twenty-three. No player in basketball history had ever done this. No one has done it since--not Magic Johnson, not Larry Bird, not Michael or Kobe. Throughout the first five years of his career, he averaged a triple-double. Videotape does not do him justice. The images are washed out, the colors faded and fuzzy in a manner associated with bygone eras, the fashions and style of play not aging well. And yet there is palpable greatness. He was voted into the Basketball Hall of Fame on the first ballot, and the National Association of Basketball Coaches named him their player of the century. ESPN put him among their fifty greatest athletes of the century, the National Basketball Association on their list of the fifty greatest players. On and on. So many accolades that they run into one another. But the story of Oscar Robertson is about much more than basketball. The story of Oscar Robertson is one of a shy black child growing up in a city so segregated that, until he is ten years old, his only exposure to white people is the distant memory of two Tennessee farm owners whose land his father had worked. It is the story of a poor family, and absent parents working long hours without complaint or reward. The story of Oscar Robertson is also the story of the basketball-crazed state of Indiana and Crispus Attucks High School, the high school he led to the state championship. He joins the University of Cincinnati's basketball team and handles the ball on the perimeter in a way that has never been seen before. Oscar Robertson enters the NBA with the Cincinnati Royals, who have been just barely holding on as they wait for the fledgling star. Robertson does not disappoint. Moving to the backcourt, he simply revolutionizes the game. The story of Oscar Robertson is one of a superstar at the height of his career becoming the president of a union, the National Basketball Players Association, using his fame to try to improve conditions for all basketball players. It is the story of the man who sues the NBA for the right to free agency. He is thirty-one years old when the Milwaukee Bucks trade for him. And so Oscar Robertson's story is also the story of a veteran player who joins young superstar Lew Alcindor (the future Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) and leads Milwaukee to an NBA championship. It is the story of a man who, at thirty-four years old, is forced to leave the game. Who is blacklisted from coaching and is forced out of broadcasting. Who must face questions not about whether he fought the good fight, but how he fought it. Two years after he leaves basketball, after six years of legal wrangling, Robertson wins his lawsuit with the NBA. It is the story of a man who revolutionized the game of basketball twice: once on the court, and once in the way that the business of basketball is conducted. It is the story of how the NBA, as

we now know it, was built. Of race in America in the second half of the twentieth century. Of a complex hero. An uncompromising man. It is Oscar Robertson's story.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 342 pages

Publisher: Oscar Robertson Media Ventures; First Edition edition (November 15, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1579547648

ISBN-13: 978-1579547646

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 33 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,257,723 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in [Books > Sports & Outdoors > Basketball > Professional](#) #533 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Sports & Outdoors > Basketball](#) #2709 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > African-American & Black](#)

## Customer Reviews

While *The Big O: My Life, My Times, My Game* will not disappoint basketball purists longing for Oscar Robertson's play-by-play of favorite games, the attraction of this autobiography is Robertson's perspective on the evolution of the sport and on the racial struggles that were the context of his formative years. Called by many basketball experts the greatest all-around player ever, Robertson earned an astonishing array of honors including an Olympic gold medal, 12 NBA All-Star appearances, the NBA Rookie of the Year award, and the 1964 NBA MVP award. Most remarkably, Robertson remains the only player in basketball history with a triple-double season (double-digit averages for scoring, rebounds, and assists). While Robertson could have easily candy-coated this impressive record for his retrospective, he devotes large sections of his book to the racial battles he faced off court, and his final chapters recount his controversial efforts as an NBA union leader to create free agency, a pension plan, and disability protection for players. In telling his life story, he lays bare the racism and mistreatment he suffered at the hands of individuals and institutions throughout his career, from the Mayor of Indianapolis and Cincinnati University to the NBA and CBS Sports. At times, his critiques can seem excessive (e.g. his discussions of the distortions in the film *Hoosiers*, while interesting, are repeated a bit too often), and some sections (like his attempts to compare himself to contemporary players) border on self-indulgence. Yet, he

seems justified in arguing that his achievements--largely accomplished on second-rate teams, against a back-drop of unprecedented racial strife, and before the modern era of sports-media saturation--are easily underrepresented. In the end, *The Big O* offers a complex, human portrait to complement a spectacular sports career. --Patrick O'Kelley

As one of the NBA's all-time greats, Oscar Robertson has much to pass on to both his old fans and young basketball enthusiasts perhaps unfamiliar with his legacy. Whether it was winning Indiana's famed statewide high school tournament (and playing in the first all-black final, the first time black teams had made the final), winning a gold medal in the 1960 Olympics or making the NBA all-star team 12 times, the author certainly made his mark on sports history. But while listing his accomplishments and including the testimony of former teammates, coaches and opponents effectively details his greatness, *The Big O* feels compelled to constantly remind readers of his eminence with statements like, "By all accounts, I was the best all-around player of my era"-though the case has already been clearly stated. He also spends much of the epilogue explaining how no modern player compares to him in his prime. Arrogance aside, Robertson's rise from sharecropper's grandson to world-class athlete and his dealings with overt racism throughout the journey (as a college player, he was told to leave an all-white Houston hotel in the middle of the night) offer wonderful lessons for young athletes. Robertson's experiences playing for the NBA (Cincinnati and Milwaukee) in its bumbling early days, such as the time his team arrived at their arena only to find the circus already set up, are entertaining, too. Still, one may wonder why Robertson, humorless to the final buzzer, came away with so much more bitterness than joy. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

At 50 I'm a little young to have followed Oscar Robertson's career other than the Milwaukee Bucks period. I have run into Robertson at Cincinnati ballgames and hotels when in the city although have not spoken to him. This is a biography written in typical form, "Here's what I did growing up, here's the influence of my parents and others, here's what I did that you know me for and here's what I'm doing now." But the difference is Oscar really has something to say and he's rattled a few cages saying it. While many people come from poor backgrounds, particularly basketball players, Oscar's is particularly interesting due to the very rural nature of his upbringing in Tennessee. Most of his early life was centered on working in fields, church and family. A move to inner city Indianapolis was significant in his development as a basketball player. And this is where the book becomes very interesting as Oscar conveys the first noticeable slights from racism. Oscar has always been very

well mannered projecting a great image. And maybe in many ways this hid the hurt he was feeling from racism or maybe I was just too young to hear about it. After rising to a top star, Robertson commits to a smaller school, U of Cincinnati, amid rumblings of improper recruiting. He dispels most of this and introduces boosters or mentors who took his best interests at heart and helped him grow as a man. He also meets his wife who he describes in glowing terms, clearly a very strong marriage that eventually yields two daughters. This is another interesting part of the book as one of his daughters suffers from a disease requiring an organ transplant. Robertson starts his pro career in his hometown of Cincinnati with an under funded team which creates conflicts throughout his career there as money and a good supporting cast is always short. Discussing his pro career you can really see his bitterness with the pre-free agent market and how he had to fight for his money and was often blamed for putting himself above his team. This for a man that averaged a triple-double. If you follow the NBA today, you will almost find the numbers thrown around as comical. Clearly, this book has generated controversy as Robertson has alluded to racism throughout the book. While it didn't match the impression I had of Robertson, I found he supported his positions well even though you may not agree with the outcome. Overall, I found this to be an excellent book of a basketball icon in the late 50s to 70s. If you have interest in sports in those periods, life in America in those periods, or a short view of race relations at that time, I think you will enjoy this book as much as I did.

Oscar Robertson was the greatest all-around basketball player of his generation and still one of the greatest players in basketball history. So I was eager to read his story and try to discover what made Robertson so great. I was a teen when Oscar was doing his magic in the NBA, so I saw him in his prime...at least on tv. It's always interesting to me to read about athletes on their way up. What motivated them, what obstacles did they face, and how did they overcome any obstacles that confronted them. For Robertson it becomes very clear early on that he considered the racism of the times the most formidable obstacle for him and other black Americans to overcome. Certainly, racism in the fifties was much more a gigantic hindrance to the lives of most black Americans from that time. It was no different for Robertson who recounts numerous instances of racism directed at him and his friends, family, and other black citizens where he grew up. And certainly racism was a shameful part of American history. But you get the feeling that Robertson goes out of his way to blame racism for virtually everything bad that happened to him in his career. He still feels that while progress has been made in the area of race relations, the country is still institutionally racist. The book was written before Obama became president, but even before Obama gigantic progress had

been made. But Robertson still seems to feel racist, nasty white people are behind every black failure, even though his own career is an example of a very intelligent, determined person who happened to be black. He states that he's grateful for basketball in giving him a wonderful life, and if not for the game, he'd be back in Indianapolis doing menial jobs. I sincerely doubt that. People with Robertson's talents (and not just athletic) eventually rise in the world. It's obvious that he has never been able to shake the bitter memories of real racism so that now he thinks everything bad that ever happened to him was because of racism. Robertson devotes whole sections of his book to accusing various white people or the country in general of racism. He even recounts the canard about Muhammad Ali aka Cassius Clay throwing his Olympic gold medal into the Ohio River. The fact is, there will always be racism. But millions of people of all colors and ethnicities fail every day. Including millions of white Americans. Can we trace their failures to racism? Maybe they're just failures. Robertson doesn't seem to grasp that racism as a reason for black failure ended decades ago. It's been almost fifty years since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights bill and affirmative action (or affirmative discrimination.) But Robertson feels the country still isn't doing enough for black Americans even though trillions of dollars have been spent on various welfare programs and other transfers of public money to black Americans. Black faces are numerous in many areas where previously none existed. He's a committed liberal who doesn't understand that the biggest impediment to the success of black Americans has been the Democrat Party. He's undoubtedly one of those liberals who firmly believe the more you give people i.e. freebies funded by taxpayers, the better off they'll be. It doesn't work that way. It's a shame that so much of his bio is given to diatribes about racism when his life story is so interesting. Much of the book is very interesting reading. He writes with a flair and the story of his youth (in Tennessee as well as Indiana) is exceptionally interesting. Also absorbing are his descriptions of life as a college and professional player. Which is why I purchased the book in the first place. But when you've finished the book, you're still left with the impression that Robertson is still very bitter. The worst way to go through life is thinking you can't succeed because someone is holding you back. The only thing holding back 99% of Americans is themselves. Maybe he has a right after some of the horrible experiences he went through, but it doesn't help not to recognize the changes the country has gone through for the better.

I grew up during the tail end of O's career but remember my older brothers and their friends talking about O's court exploits. When I did get a chance to watch him play, you could tell he was a leading force on the court. I also remember hearing how he seemed to play angry, I now understand the

false perception of him being angry, and if he was angry, lord knows he had reason. I would r recommend this book to all young black men, especially today's athletes who have no idea of the shoulders they stand on today.,,

This book is a great look at the life and times of Oscar Robertson. Robertson's description of the racial tensions and development of the NBA are shocking, enlightening, and vivid. The book is wonderfully written with a great story of The Big O's childhood. Robertson saw huge growth in college basketball and in the NBA. He took part in much of the improvements of the league including the establishment of free agency.

This is a great book about one of the best players ever. I watched Oscar play at UC and with the Royals, but I did not know the background of his life. This man came from such a poor background. I had no idea of all the injustices that he endured. The inside stories regarding his days with the Royals is interesting. I would definitely recommend this book.

I'm a white 52 year old man who is very interested in the 1960's basketball with the likes of Wilt, Russel, West, and Robertson. I am only on page 10 but this is the book I wanted to read. Oscar tells it like he saw it. I appreciate his honesty and not sugary coating it.

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