



**Lew Freedman, *Becoming Iron Men: The Story of the 1963 Loyola Ramblers*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014. 260 pp. \$29.95.**

Lew Freedman, a sports writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, has written a pretty standard sports book, filled with facts and statistics, which most sports enthusiasts will enjoy reading. *Becoming Iron Men* is the fifth offering of the Texas Tech University Press series, Sport in the American West edited by Jorge Iber.

While Freedman chronicles Loyola's 1962-1963 championship season, he also writes persuasively against a common misconception about the history of African Americans in college basketball: that the 1965-1966 Texas Western University Miners were the first college team starting five African Americans to win the NCAA Championship in men's basketball. This honor, according to Freeman, belongs to the Iron Men of Loyola--the five Ramblers who won the championship three years earlier. This Loyola team paved the way for other teams dominated by African Americans to win the respect they deserved in college sports. Freedman argues that the Ramblers' NCAA Championship is as important to sports history and the history of race relations in America as Jackie Robinson's breaking the color line in major league baseball in 1947.

Freedman portrays Coach George Ireland as somewhat hard headed, dictatorial, and inflexible, a man who recruited African American players not so much to make a social statement or to advance racial justice, but because they were the best players he could recruit. The only player to receive his own chapter is All-American, Jerry Harkness, the leading scorer and captain of the team. The other starters share chapters, as do the bench, and the freshmen team. Unsurprisingly, much of *Becoming Iron Men* concerns racial matters. Even in Chicago, the home of Loyola, school officials frowned on interracial dating, and road trips to the South, especially the games played in New Orleans and Houston during the championship season are best described as brutal.

The "Big Game" of the season, the game Freedman calls the "Game of Change," is not the 1963 NCAA Tournament championship game, but the semifinal against the Mississippi State Bulldogs. From the segregated South where white players were forbidden by law to play against African Americans, the game took on a much wider significance than just a college basketball game, although it was anti-climactic as the Ramblers quickly outscored the Bulldogs 7-0, never trailed in the game, and won 61-51.

Freedman has not only written a fine sports story, but has opened a window into the not so distant past. Many readers may not be familiar with the social conventions of Jim Crow and college basketball before African Americans came to dominate the game, nor the NCAA Men's Basketball Championship before March Madness took over an entire month. Although the book wanders a bit, and is redundant in places, most fans of college basketball, sports historians, and students of social history will enjoy this look into a period in American sports when the color line was well established and well enforced.

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