

W. G. (Bill) STROUD
General Manager

HARRY RUTHERFORD
Editor

GEORGE McLEAN
Publisher-Exec. Editor

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Mixing To Be Decided In Court, Not Gym

Opponents of letting Mississippi State's basketball team compete for the national title feel that if the Maroon cage team gets on the floor with Negroes, the action will cause collapse of color barriers in schools of the state.

We doubt it.

If Mississippi schools are integrated, the action will be forced upon the state through court suits such as those which put James Meredith in Ole Miss and which now seeks to desegregate the public schools of Jackson.

What happens to the Mississippi State basketball team will have nothing to do with whether a federal court puts Negroes in Jackson schools or whether a second or a third or a fourth Negro is ordered admitted to Ole Miss.

In other words, we feel that somebody is trying to make a "fall guy" of the superb Mississippi State basketball team and Coach Babe McCarthy, depriving them of the athletic opportunity of a lifetime without any very convincing reason.

One year ago on Feb. 1, 1962, Gov. Ross Barnett was quoted in a lengthy Jackson press dispatch as declaring:

"The only way integration can come to Mississippi is for us to lie supinely down and let it come."

The governor was wrong. Certainly nobody can claim that he lay down. Yet the University of Mississippi is integrated.

Now the same group which was quoted a year ago as joining in Gov. Barnett's behalf that integration would never come to Mississippi "unless we lie supinely down" are saying that integration will come to Mississippi only if Mississippi State's basketball team is permitted to compete for the championship of America.

We doubt it. We doubt that this argument is any more nearly correct than that of Gov. Barnett a year ago that no Negro would enter a Mississippi school unless "we lie supinely down."

Mississippi schools have remained segregated for eight years since the Supreme Court's original integration ruling in spite of the fact that our state has twenty thousand soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen serving in the fully integrated armed forces of America.

Since the Supreme Court ruling perhaps 100,000 of these service men, white and colored, have returned to our state. Yet they have not caused integration of a single classroom because of their integrated military experience.

Similarly, there are now in training in Mississippi 19,400 fully integrated military personnel, largely from other states.

Among the 3,000 military Reserves in Mississippi, there are even integrated local units, including the Northeast Mississippi unit training in Tupelo.

These integrated troops both from outside the state and from within the state have not caused integration of a single school.

Yet there are some who argue that if a dozen

Mississippi State basketball players compete in a national tournament which includes Negro players, the color barrier in Mississippi education will automatically collapse. We doubt it?

All that is asked of our College Board by Maroon supporters is that Mississippi State be given the same break that Ole Miss got through the national competition of her all-winning beauty queens.

The fact that the audiences before which our two Miss Americas performed did not cause integration of Mississippi schools.

And neither will one or a dozen basketball games played by Mississippi State against teams that include Negro players.

We repeat: The integration of Mississippi schools will come only when and if such action is ordered by federal courts and all avenues of escaping such decision are closed.

Let us then not penalize a fine group of Mississippi State basketball players and one of the nation's best coaches by trying to place the blame on them for something which will be decided completely outside the realm of their competition in the national tournament they so strongly desire to enter.

To the College Board we suggest: Let our boys play. Not only let them play but do your best to send them into the national tournament with the best wishes and the enthusiastic encouragement of the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Mississippi.

For our part we are proud of Coach McCarthy and his players and have confidence in their bringing credit to our state.