

= Bill Russell =

William Felton " Bill " Russell (born February 12 , 1934) is an American retired professional basketball player . Russell played center for the Boston Celtics of the National Basketball Association (NBA) from 1956 to 1969 . A five @-@ time NBA Most Valuable Player and a twelve @-@ time All @-@ Star , he was the centerpiece of the Celtics dynasty , winning eleven NBA championships during his thirteen @-@ year career . Along with Henri Richard of the National Hockey League 's Montreal Canadiens , Russell holds the record for the most championships won by an athlete in a North American sports league . Before his professional career , Russell led the University of San Francisco to two consecutive NCAA championships (1955 , 1956) . He also won a gold medal at the 1956 Summer Olympics as captain of the U.S. national basketball team .

Russell is widely considered one of the best players in NBA history . He was listed as between 6 ft 9 in (2 @. @ 06 m) and 6 ft 10 in (2 @. @ 08 m) , and his shot @-@ blocking and man @-@ to @-@ man defense were major reasons for the Celtics ' success . He also inspired his teammates to elevate their own defensive play . Russell was equally notable for his rebounding abilities . He led the NBA in rebounds four times , had a dozen consecutive seasons of 1 @, @ 000 or more rebounds , and remains second all @-@ time in both total rebounds and rebounds per game . He is one of just two NBA players (the other being prominent rival Wilt Chamberlain) to have grabbed more than 50 rebounds in a game . Though never the focal point of the Celtics ' offense , Russell also scored 14 @, @ 522 career points and provided effective passing .

Playing in the wake of pioneers like Earl Lloyd , Chuck Cooper , and Sweetwater Clifton , Russell was the first African American player to achieve superstar status in the NBA . He also served a three @-@ season (1966 ? 69) stint as player @-@ coach for the Celtics , becoming the first African American NBA coach . For his accomplishments in the Civil Rights Movement on and off the court , Barack Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 .

Russell is one of only seven players in history to win an NCAA Championship , an NBA Championship , and an Olympic Gold Medal . He was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame . He was selected into the NBA 25th Anniversary Team in 1971 and the NBA 35th Anniversary Team in 1980 , and named as one of the 50 Greatest Players in NBA History in 1996 , one of only four players to receive all three honors . In 2007 , he was enshrined in the FIBA Hall of Fame . In 2009 , the NBA announced that the NBA Finals Most Valuable Player trophy would be named the Bill Russell NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award in honor of Russell .

= = Early years = =

Bill Russell was born to Charles Russell and Katie Russell in West Monroe , Louisiana . Like almost all southern towns and cities of that time , West Monroe was a highly segregated place , and the Russells often struggled with racism in their daily lives . Once , Russell 's father was refused service at a gas station until the staff had taken care of all the white customers . When his father attempted to leave and find a different station , the attendant stuck a shotgun in his face and threatened to kill him if he didn 't stay and wait his turn . At another time , Russell 's mother was walking outside in a fancy dress when a policeman accosted her . He told her to go home and remove the dress , which he described as " white woman 's clothing " . Because large numbers of blacks were moving to the West during World War II to look for work there , Russell 's father moved the family out of Louisiana when Russell was eight years old and settled them in Oakland , California . While there the family fell into poverty , and Russell spent his childhood living in a series of public housing projects .

Charles Russell is described as a " stern , hard man " who was initially a janitor in a paper factory (a typical low paid , intellectually unchallenging " Negro Job " , as sports journalist John Taylor commented) , but later became a trucker when World War II broke out . Being closer to his mother Katie than to his father , Russell received a major emotional blow when she suddenly died when he was 12 . His father gave up his trucking job and became a steel worker to be closer to his semi @-@ orphaned children . Russell has stated that his father became his childhood hero , later

followed up by Minneapolis Lakers superstar George " Mr. Basketball " Mikan , who he met when he was in high school .

In his early years , Russell struggled to develop his skills as a basketball player . Although Russell was a good runner and jumper and had large hands , he simply did not understand the game and was cut from the team in junior high school . As a freshman at McClymonds High School in Oakland , California , Russell was almost cut again . However , coach George Powles saw Russell 's raw athletic potential and encouraged him to work on his fundamentals . Since Russell 's previous experiences with white authority figures were often negative , he was delighted to receive warm words from his white coach . He worked hard and used the benefits of a growth spurt to become a decent basketball player , but it was not until his junior and senior years that he began to excel , winning back to back high school state championships . Russell soon became noted for his unusual style of defense . He later recalled , " To play good defense ... it was told back then that you had to stay flatfooted at all times to react quickly . When I started to jump to make defensive plays and to block shots , I was initially corrected , but I stuck with it , and it paid off . "

One of Russell 's high school basketball teammates was future Baseball Hall @-@ of @-@ Famer Frank Robinson .

= = College career = =

Russell was ignored by college recruiters and did not receive a single letter of interest until recruiter Hal DeJulio from the University of San Francisco (USF) watched him in a high school game . DeJulio was not impressed by Russell 's meager scoring and " atrocious fundamentals " , but sensed that the young center had an extraordinary instinct for the game , especially in the clutch . When DeJulio offered Russell a scholarship , the latter eagerly accepted . Sports journalist John Taylor described it as a watershed in Russell 's life , because Russell realized that basketball was his one chance to escape poverty and racism ; as a consequence , Russell swore to make the best of it .

At USF , Russell became the new starting center for coach Phil Woolpert . Woolpert emphasized defense and deliberate half @-@ court play , concepts that favored defensive standout Russell . Woolpert 's choices of how to deploy his players were unaffected by issues of skin color . In 1954 , he became the first coach of a major college basketball squad to start three African American players : Russell , K. C. Jones and Hal Perry . In his USF years , Russell used his relative lack of bulk to develop a unique style of defense : instead of purely guarding the opposing center , he used his quickness and speed to play help defense against opposing forwards and aggressively challenge their shots . Combining the stature and shot @-@ blocking skills of a center with the foot speed of a guard , Russell became the centerpiece of a USF team that soon became a force in college basketball . After USF kept Holy Cross star Tom Heinsohn scoreless in an entire half , Sports Illustrated wrote , " If [Russell] ever learns to hit the basket , they 're going to have to rewrite the rules . "

However , the games were often difficult for the USF squad . Russell and his African American teammates became targets of racist jeers , particularly on the road . In one notable incident , hotels in Oklahoma City refused to admit Russell and his black teammates while they were in town for the 1954 All @-@ College Tournament . In protest , the whole team decided to camp out in a closed college dorm , which was later called an important bonding experience for the group . Decades later , Russell explained that his experiences hardened him against abuse of all kinds . " I never permitted myself to be a victim , " he said .

Racism also shaped his lifelong paradigm as a team player . " At that time , " he has said , " it was never acceptable that a black player was the best . That did not happen ... My junior year in college , I had what I thought was the one of the best college seasons ever . We won 28 out of 29 games . We won the National Championship . I was the [Most Valuable Player] at the Final Four . I was first team All American . I averaged over 20 points and over 20 rebounds , and I was the only guy in college blocking shots . So after the season was over , they had a Northern California banquet , and they picked another center as Player of the Year in Northern California . Well , that let me know that

if I were to accept these as the final judges of my career I would die a bitter old man . " So he made a conscious decision , he said , to put the team first and foremost , and not worry about individual achievements .

On the hardwood , his experiences were far more pleasant . Russell led USF to NCAA championships in 1955 and 1956 , including a string of 55 consecutive victories . He became known for his strong defense and shot @-@ blocking skills , once denying 13 shots in a game . UCLA coach John Wooden called Russell " the greatest defensive man I 've ever seen " . During his college career , Russell averaged 20 @.@ 7 points per game and 20 @.@ 3 rebounds per game . Besides basketball , Russell represented USF in track and field events . He competed in the 440 yards (400 m) race , which he could complete in 49 @.@ 6 seconds . He also participated in the high jump ; Track & Field News ranked him as the seventh @-@ best high jumper in the world in 1956 . That year , Russell won high jump titles at the Central California AAU meet , the Pacific AAU meet , and the West Coast Relays . One of his highest jumps occurred at the West Coast Relays , where he achieved a mark of 6 feet 9 1 ? 4 inches (2 @.@ 064 m) .

After his years at USF , the Harlem Globetrotters invited Russell to join their exhibition basketball squad . Russell , who was sensitive to any racial prejudice , was enraged by the fact that owner Abe Saperstein would only discuss the matter with Woolpert . While Saperstein spoke to Woolpert in a meeting , Globetrotters assistant coach Harry Hanna tried to entertain Russell with jokes . The USF center was livid after this snub and declined the offer : he reasoned that if Saperstein was too smart to speak with him , then he was too smart to play for Saperstein . Instead , Russell made himself eligible for the 1956 NBA draft .

= = 1956 NBA draft = =

In the 1956 NBA draft , Boston Celtics coach Red Auerbach had set his sights on Russell , thinking his defensive toughness and rebounding prowess were the missing pieces the Celtics needed . In retrospect , Auerbach 's thoughts were unorthodox . In that period , centers and forwards were defined by their offensive output , and their ability to play defense was secondary .

However , Boston 's chances of getting Russell seemed slim . Because the Celtics had finished second in the previous season and the worst teams had the highest draft picks , the Celtics had slipped too low in the draft order to pick Russell . In addition , Auerbach had already used his territorial pick to acquire talented forward Tom Heinsohn . But Auerbach knew that the Rochester Royals , who owned the first draft pick , already had a skilled rebounder in Maurice Stokes , were looking for an outside shooting guard and were unwilling to pay Russell the \$ 25 @,@ 000 signing bonus he requested . The St. Louis Hawks , who owned the second pick , drafted Russell , but were vying for Celtics center Ed Macauley , a six @-@ time All @-@ Star who had roots in St. Louis . Auerbach agreed to trade Macauley , who had previously asked to be traded to St. Louis in order to be with his sick son , if the Hawks gave up Russell . The owner of St Louis called Auerbach later and demanded more in the trade . Not only did he want Macauley , who was the Celtics premier player at the time , he wanted Cliff Hagan , who had been serving in the military for three years and had not yet played for the Celtics . After much debate , Auerbach agreed to give up Hagan , and the Hawks made the trade .

During that same draft , Boston also drafted guard K. C. Jones , Russell 's former USF teammate . Thus , in one night , the Celtics managed to draft three future Hall of Famers : Russell , Jones and Heinsohn . The Russell draft @-@ day trade was later called one of the most important trades in the history of North American sports .

= = 1956 Olympics = =

Before his NBA rookie year , Russell was the captain of the U.S. national basketball team that competed at the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne , Australia . Avery Brundage , head of the International Olympic Committee , argued that Russell had already signed a professional contract and thus was no longer an amateur , but Russell prevailed . He had the option to skip the

tournament and play a full season for the Celtics , but he was determined to play in the Olympics . He later commented that he would have participated in the high jump if he had been snubbed by the basketball team . Under coach Gerald Tucker , Russell helped the national team win the gold medal in Melbourne , defeating the Soviet Union 89 ? 55 in the final game . The United States dominated the tournament , winning by an average of 53 @.@ 5 points per game . Russell led the team in scoring , averaging 14 @.@ 1 points per game for the competition . His Celtics teammate K. C. Jones joined him on the Olympic squad and contributed 10 @.@ 9 points per game .

= = Professional career = =

= = = 1956 ? 59 = = =

Russell could not join the Celtics for the 1956 ? 57 season until December , due to his Olympic commitment . After rejoining the Celtics , Russell played 48 games , averaging 14 @.@ 7 points per game and a league @-@ high 19 @.@ 6 rebounds per game . During this season , the Celtics featured five future Hall @-@ of @-@ Famers : center Russell , forwards Heinsohn and Frank Ramsey , and guards Bill Sharman and Bob Cousy . (K. C. Jones did not play for the Celtics until 1958 because of military service .)

Russell 's first Celtics game came on December 22 , 1956 , against the St. Louis Hawks , led by star forward Bob Pettit , who held several all @-@ time scoring records . Auerbach assigned Russell to shut down St. Louis 's main scorer , and the rookie impressed the Boston crowd with his man @-@ to @-@ man defense and shot @-@ blocking . In previous years , the Celtics had been a high @-@ scoring team , but lacked the defensive presence needed to close out tight games . However , with the added defensive presence of Russell , the Celtics had laid the foundation for a dynasty . The team utilized a strong defensive approach to the game , forcing opposing teams to commit many turnovers , which led to many easy fast break points . Russell was an elite help defender who allowed the Celtics to play the so @-@ called " Hey , Bill " defense : whenever a Celtic requested additional defensive help , he would shout " Hey , Bill ! " Russell was so quick that he could run over for a quick double team and make it back in time if the opponents tried to find the open man . He also became famous for his shot @-@ blocking skills : pundits called his blocks " Wilsonburgers " , referring to the Wilson NBA basketballs he " shoved back into the faces of opposing shooters " . This skill also allowed the other Celtics to play their men aggressively : if they were beaten , they knew that Russell was guarding the basket . This approach allowed the Celtics to finish with a 44 ? 28 regular season record , the team 's second @-@ best record since beginning play in the 1946 ? 47 season , and guaranteed a post @-@ season appearance .

However , Russell also received negative attention . Constantly provoked by New York Knicks center Ray Felix during a game , he complained to coach Auerbach . The latter told him to take matters into his own hands , so after the next provocation , Russell punched Felix unconscious , paid a \$ 25 fine and was no longer a target of cheap fouls . With his teammates , Russell had a cordial relationship , with the notable exception of fellow rookie and old rival Heinsohn . Heinsohn felt that Russell resented him because the former was named the 1957 NBA Rookie of the Year : many people thought that Russell was more important , but Russell also had only played half the season . Russell also ignored Heinsohn 's plea to give his cousin an autograph , and openly said to Heinsohn that he deserved half of his \$ 300 Rookie of the Year check . The relationship between the two rookies remained reserved . On the other hand , despite their different ethnic backgrounds and lack of common off @-@ court interests , his relationship with Celtics point guard and fan favorite Bob Cousy was amicable .

In Game 1 of the Eastern Division Finals , the Celtics met the Syracuse Nationals , who were led by Dolph Schayes . In Russell 's first NBA playoff game , he finished with 16 points and 31 rebounds , along with a reported 7 blocks . (At the time , blocks were not yet an officially registered statistic .) After the Celtics ' 108 ? 89 victory , Schayes quipped , " How much does that guy make a year ? It would be to our advantage if we paid him off for five years to get away from us in the rest of this

series . " The Celtics swept the Nationals in three games to earn the franchise 's first appearance in the NBA Finals .

In the NBA Finals , the Celtics met the St. Louis Hawks , who were again led by Bob Pettit , as well as former Celtic Ed Macauley . The teams split the first six games , and the tension was so high that , in Game 3 , Celtics coach Auerbach punched his colleague Ben Kerner and received a \$ 300 fine . In the highly competitive Game 7 , Russell tried his best to slow down Pettit , but it was Heinsohn who scored 37 points and kept the Celtics alive . However , Russell contributed by completing the famous " Coleman Play " . Here , Russell ran down Hawks guard Jack Coleman , who had received an outlet pass at midcourt , and blocked his shot despite the fact that Russell had been standing at his own baseline when the ball was thrown to Coleman . The block preserved Boston 's slim 103 ? 102 lead with 40 @-@ odd seconds left to play in regulation , saving the game for the Celtics . In the second overtime , both teams were in serious foul trouble : Heinsohn had fouled out , and the Hawks were so depleted that they had only 7 players left . With the Celtics leading 125 ? 123 with one second left , the Hawks had the ball at their own baseline . Reserve guard Alex Hannum threw a long alley oop pass to Pettit , and Pettit 's tip @-@ in rolled indecisively on the rim for several seconds before rolling out again . The Celtics won , earning their first NBA Championship .

Energized by their championship , the Celtics won 14 straight games to start the 1957 ? 58 season , and they kept rolling . Russell averaged 16 @.@ 6 points per game and a league @-@ record average of 22 @.@ 7 rebounds per game . An interesting phenomenon began that year : Russell was voted the NBA Most Valuable Player , but only named to the All @-@ NBA Second Team . This would occur repeatedly throughout his career . The NBA reasoned that other centers were better all @-@ round players than Russell , but no player was more valuable to his team . The Celtics won 49 games and easily made the first berth in the 1958 NBA Playoffs , and made the 1958 NBA Finals against their familiar rivals , the St. Louis Hawks . The teams split the first two games , but then Russell went down with a foot injury in Game 3 and only returned for Game 6 . The Celtics surprisingly won Game 4 , but the Hawks prevailed in Games 5 and 6 , with Pettit scoring 50 points in the deciding Game 6 .

In the following 1958 ? 59 season , Russell continued his strong play , averaging 16 @.@ 7 points per game and 23 @.@ 0 rebounds per game in the regular season . The Celtics broke a league record by winning 52 games , and Russell 's strong performance once again helped lead the Celtics through the post @-@ season , as they returned to the NBA Finals . In the 1959 NBA Finals , the Celtics recaptured the NBA title , sweeping the Minneapolis Lakers 4 ? 0 . Lakers head coach John Kundla praised Russell , stating , " We don 't fear the Celtics without Bill Russell . Take him out and we can beat them ... He 's the guy who whipped us psychologically . "

= = = 1959 ? 60 = = =

In the 1959 ? 60 season , the NBA witnessed the debut of legendary 7 ft 1 in (2 @.@ 16 m) Philadelphia Warriors center Wilt Chamberlain , who averaged a record 37 @.@ 6 points per game in his rookie year . On November 7 , 1959 , Russell 's Celtics hosted Chamberlain 's Warriors , and pundits called the matchup between the best offensive and best defensive center " The Big Collision " and " Battle of the Titans " . Both men awed onlookers with " nakedly awesome athleticism " , and while Chamberlain outscored Russell 30 to 22 , the Celtics won 115 ? 106 , and the match was called a " new beginning of basketball " . The matchup between Russell and Chamberlain became one of basketball 's greatest rivalries . In that season , Russell 's Celtics won a record 59 regular season games (including a then @-@ record tying 17 game win streak) and met Chamberlain 's Warriors in the Eastern Division Finals . Chamberlain outscored Russell by 81 points in the series , but the Celtics walked off with a 4 ? 2 series win . In the 1960 Finals , the Celtics outlasted the Hawks 4 ? 3 and won their third championship in four years . Russell grabbed an NBA Finals @-@ record 40 rebounds in Game 2 , and added 22 points and 35 rebounds in the deciding Game 7 , a 122 ? 103 victory for Boston .

In the 1960 ? 61 season , Russell averaged 16 @.@ 9 points and 23 @.@ 9 rebounds per game , leading his team to a regular season mark of 57 ? 22 . The Celtics earned another post @-@

season appearance , where they defeated the Syracuse Nationals 4 ? 1 in the Eastern Division Finals . The Celtics made good use of the fact that the Los Angeles Lakers had exhausted St. Louis in a long seven @-@ game Western Conference Finals , and the Celtics convincingly won in five games .

The following season , Russell scored a career @-@ high 18 @.@ 9 points per game , accompanied by 23 @.@ 6 rebounds per game . While his rival Chamberlain had a record @-@ breaking season of 50 @.@ 4 points per game and a 100 @-@ point game , the Celtics became the first team to win 60 games in a season , and Russell was voted as the NBA 's Most Valuable Player . In the post @-@ season , the Celtics met the Philadelphia Warriors of Chamberlain , and Russell did his best to slow down the 50 @-@ points @-@ per @-@ game scoring Warriors center . In the pivotal Game 7 , Russell managed to hold Chamberlain to only 22 points (28 below his season average) while scoring 19 himself . The game was tied with two seconds left when Sam Jones sank a clutch shot that won the Celtics the series . In the 1962 NBA Finals , the Celtics met the Los Angeles Lakers of star forward Elgin Baylor and star guard Jerry West . The teams split the first six games , and Game 7 was tied one second before the end of regular time when Lakers guard Rod Hundley faked a shot and instead passed out to Frank Selvy , who missed an open eight @-@ foot last @-@ second shot that would have won L.A. the title . Though the game was tied , Russell had the daunting task of defending against Baylor with little frontline help , as the three best Celtics forwards , Loscutoff , Heinsohn and Tom Sanders , had fouled out . In overtime , Baylor fouled out the fourth forward , Frank Ramsey , so Russell was completely robbed of his usual four @-@ men wing rotation . But Russell and little @-@ used fifth forward Gene Guarilia successfully pressured Baylor into missed shots . Russell finished with a clutch performance , scoring 30 points and tying his own NBA Finals record with 40 rebounds in a 110 ? 107 overtime win .

The Celtics lost playmaker Bob Cousy to retirement after the 1962 ? 63 season , but they drafted John Havlicek . Once again , the Celtics were powered by Russell , who averaged 16 @.@ 8 points and 23 @.@ 6 rebounds per game , won his fourth regular @-@ season MVP title , and earned MVP honors at the 1963 NBA All @-@ Star Game following his 19 @-@ point , 24 @-@ rebound performance for the East . The Celtics reached the 1963 NBA Finals , where they again defeated the Los Angeles Lakers , this time in six games .

In the following 1963 ? 64 season , the Celtics posted a league @-@ best 58 ? 22 record in the regular season . Russell scored 15 @.@ 0 ppg and grabbed a career @-@ high 24 @.@ 7 rebounds per game , leading the NBA in rebounds for the first time since Chamberlain entered the league . Boston defeated the Cincinnati Royals 4 ? 1 to earn another NBA Finals appearance , and then won against Chamberlain 's newly relocated San Francisco Warriors 4 ? 1 . It was their sixth consecutive and seventh title in Russell 's eighth year , a streak unreached in any U.S. professional sports league . Russell later called the Celtics ' defense the best of all time .

Russell again excelled during the 1964 ? 65 season . The Celtics won a league @-@ record 62 games , and Russell averaged 14 @.@ 1 points and 24 @.@ 1 rebounds per game , winning his second consecutive rebounding title and his fifth MVP award . In the 1965 NBA Playoffs , the Celtics played the Eastern Division Finals against the Philadelphia 76ers , who had recently traded for Wilt Chamberlain . Russell held Chamberlain to a pair of field goals in the first three quarters of Game 3 . In Game 5 , Russell contributed 28 rebounds , 10 blocks , seven assists and six steals . However , that playoff series ended in a dramatic Game 7 . Five seconds before the end , the Sixers were trailing 110 ? 109 , but Russell turned over the ball . However , when the Sixers ' Hall @-@ of @-@ Fame guard Hal Greer inbounded , John Havlicek stole the ball , causing Celtics commentator Johnny Most to scream : " Havlicek stole the ball ! It 's all over ! Johnny Havlicek stole the ball ! " After the Division Finals , the Celtics had an easier time in the NBA Finals , winning 4 ? 1 against the Los Angeles Lakers of Jerry West and Elgin Baylor .

In the following 1965 ? 66 season , the Celtics won their eighth consecutive title . Russell 's team again beat Chamberlain 's Philadelphia 76ers 4 games to 1 in the Division Finals , proceeding to win the NBA Finals in a tight seven @-@ game showdown against the Los Angeles Lakers , with Russell scoring 25 points and grabbing 32 rebounds in a 95 ? 93 win in the deciding seventh game . During the season , Russell contributed 12 @.@ 9 points and 22 @.@ 8 rebounds per game . This

was the first time in seven years that he failed to average at least 23 rebounds a game .

== 1966 ? 69 ==

Before the 1966 ? 67 season , Celtics coach Red Auerbach retired . Initially , he had wanted his old player Frank Ramsey as coach , but Ramsey was too occupied running his three lucrative nursing homes . His second choice Bob Cousy declined , stating he did not want to coach his former teammates , and the third choice Tom Heinsohn also said no , because he did not think he could handle the often surly Russell . However , Heinsohn proposed Russell himself as a player @-@ coach , and when Auerbach asked his center , he said yes . Russell thus became the first African American head coach in NBA history , and commented to journalists : " I wasn 't offered the job because I am a Negro , I was offered it because Red figured I could do it . " The Celtics ' championship streak ended that season at eight , however , as Wilt Chamberlain 's Philadelphia 76ers won a record @-@ breaking 68 regular season games and overcame the Celtics 4 ? 1 in the Eastern Finals . The Sixers simply outpaced the Celtics , shredding the famous Boston defense by scoring 140 points in the clinching Game 5 win . Russell acknowledged his first real loss in his career (he had been injured in 1958 when the Celtics lost the NBA Finals) by visiting Chamberlain in the locker room , shaking his hand and saying , " Great " . However , the game still ended on a high note for Russell . After the loss , he led his grandfather through the Celtics locker rooms , and the two saw white Celtics player John Havlicek taking a shower next to his black teammate Sam Jones and discussing the game . Suddenly , Russell Sr. broke down crying . Asked by his grandson what was wrong , his grandfather replied how proud he was of him , being coach of an organization in which blacks and whites coexisted in harmony .

In Russell 's penultimate season , the 1967 ? 68 season , his numbers slowly declined , but at age 34 , he still tallied 12 @.@ 5 points per game and 18 @.@ 6 rebounds per game (the latter good for the third highest average in the league) . In the Eastern Division Finals , the 76ers had the better record than the Celtics and were slightly favored . But then , national tragedy struck as Martin Luther King was assassinated on April 4 , 1968 . With eight of the ten starting players on Sixers and Celtics being African American , both teams were in deep shock , and there were calls to cancel the series . In a game called as " unreal " and " devoid of emotion " , the Sixers lost 127 ? 118 on April 5 . In Game 2 , Philadelphia evened the series with a 115 ? 106 win , and in Games 3 and 4 , the Sixers won , with Chamberlain suspiciously often defended by Celtics backup center Wayne Embry , causing the press to speculate Russell was worn down . Prior to Game 5 , the Celtics seemed dead : no NBA team had ever come back from a 3 ? 1 deficit . However , the Celtics rallied back , winning Game 5 122 ? 104 and Game 6 114 ? 106 , powered by a spirited Havlicek and helped by a terrible Sixers shooting slump . In Game 7 , 15 @,@ 202 stunned Philadelphia fans witnessed a historic 100 ? 96 defeat , making it the first time in NBA history a team lost a series after leading 3 ? 1 . Russell limited Chamberlain to only two shot attempts in the second half . Despite this , the Celtics were leading only 97 ? 95 with 34 seconds left when Russell closed out the game with several consecutive clutch plays . He made a free throw , blocked a shot by Sixers player Chet Walker , grabbed a rebound off a miss by Sixers player Hal Greer , and finally passed the ball to teammate Sam Jones , who scored to clinch the win . Boston then beat the Los Angeles Lakers 4 ? 2 in the NBA Finals , giving Russell his tenth title in 12 years . For his efforts Russell was named Sports Illustrated 's Sportsman of the Year . After losing for the fifth straight time against Russell and his Celtics , Hall @-@ of @-@ Fame Lakers guard Jerry West stated , " If I had a choice of any basketball player in the league , my No.1 choice has to be Bill Russell . Bill Russell never ceases to amaze me . "

However , in the 1968 ? 69 season , Russell seemed to reach a breaking point . Shocked by the murder of Robert F. Kennedy , disillusioned by the Vietnam War , and weary from his increasingly stale (and later divorced) marriage to his wife Rose , he was convinced that the U.S. was a corrupt nation and that he was wasting his time playing something as superficial as basketball . He was 15 pounds overweight , skipped mandatory NBA coach meetings and was generally lacking energy : after a New York Knicks game , he complained of intense pain and was diagnosed with acute

exhaustion . Russell pulled himself together and put up 9 @. @ 9 points and 19 @. @ 3 rebounds per game , but the aging Celtics stumbled through the regular season . Their 48 ? 34 record was the team 's worst since 1955 ? 56 , and they entered the playoffs as only the fourth @- @ seeded team in the East . In the playoffs , however , Russell and his Celtics achieved upsets over the Philadelphia 76ers and New York Knicks to earn a meeting with the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA Finals . L.A. now featured new recruit Wilt Chamberlain next to perennial stars Baylor and West , and were heavily favored . In the first two games , Russell ordered not to double @- @ team West , who used the freedom to score 53 and 41 points in the Game 1 and 2 Laker wins . Russell then ordered to double @- @ team West , and Boston won Game 3 . In Game 4 , the Celtics were trailing by one point with seven seconds left and the Lakers having the ball , but then Baylor stepped out of bounds , and in the last play , Sam Jones used a triple screen by Bailey Howell , Larry Siegfried and Havlicek and hit a buzzer beater which equalized the series . The teams split the next two games , so it all came down to Game 7 in L.A. , where Lakers owner Jack Kent Cooke angered and motivated the Celtics by putting " proceedings of Lakers victory ceremony " on the game leaflets . Russell used a copy as extra motivation and told his team to play a running game , because in that case , not the better , but the more determined team was going to win .

The Celtics were ahead by nine points with five minutes remaining ; in addition , West was heavily limping after a Game 5 thigh injury and Chamberlain had left the game with an injured leg . West then hit one basket after the other and cut the lead to one , and Chamberlain asked to return to the game . However , Lakers coach Bill van Breda Kolff kept Chamberlain on the bench until the end of the game , saying later that he wanted to stay with the lineup responsible for the comeback . The Celtics held on for a 108 ? 106 victory , and Russell claimed his eleventh championship in 13 years . At age 35 , Russell contributed 21 rebounds in his last NBA game . After the game , Russell went over to the distraught West (who had scored 42 points and was named the only NBA Finals MVP in history from the losing team) , clasped his hand and tried to soothe him . Days later , 30 @, @ 000 enthusiastic Celtics fans cheered their returning heroes , but Russell was not there : the man who said he owed the public nothing ended his career and cut all ties to the Celtics . It came as so surprising that even Red Auerbach was blindsided , and as a consequence , he made the " mistake " of drafting guard Jo Jo White instead of a center . Although White became a standout Celtics player , the Celtics lacked an All @- @ Star center , went just 34 ? 48 in the next season and failed to make the playoffs for the first time since 1950 . In Boston , both fans and journalists felt betrayed , because Russell left the Celtics without a coach and a center and sold his retirement story for \$ 10 @, @ 000 to Sports Illustrated . Russell was accused of selling out the future of the franchise for a month of his salary .

= = = NBA statistics = = =

= = = = Regular season = = = =

= = = = Playoffs = = = =

= = = Post @- @ player career = = =

Russell 's No. 6 jersey was retired by the Celtics on March 12 , 1972 , Besides the Celtics , Russell also wore number 6 at the University of San Francisco and for the 1956 USA Olympic Team .

He was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1975 . Russell , who had a difficult relationship with the media , was not present at either event . After retiring as a player , Russell had stints as head coach of the Seattle SuperSonics (1973 to 1977) and Sacramento Kings (1987 to 1988) . His time as a coach was lackluster ; although he led the struggling SuperSonics into the playoffs for the first time in franchise history , Russell 's defensive , team @- @

oriented Celtics mindset did not mesh well with the team , and he left in 1977 with a 162 ? 166 record . Russell 's stint with the Kings was considerably shorter , his last assignment ending when the Kings went 17 ? 41 to begin the 1987 ? 88 season .

In addition , Russell ran into financial trouble . He had invested \$ 250 @, @ 000 into a rubber plantation in Liberia , where he had wanted to spend his retirement , but it went bankrupt . The same fate awaited his Boston restaurant called " Slade 's " , after which he had to default on a \$ 90 @, @ 000 government loan to purchase the outlet . The IRS discovered that Russell owed \$ 34 @, @ 430 in tax money and put a lien on his house .

Russell became a vegetarian , took up golf and worked as a color commentator , but he was uncomfortable as a broadcaster . He later said , " The most successful television is done in eight @-@ second thoughts , and the things I know about basketball , motivation , and people go deeper than that . " On November 3 , 1979 , Russell hosted Saturday Night Live , in which he appeared in several sports @-@ related sketches . Russell also wrote books , usually written as a joint project with a professional writer , including 1979 's Second Wind .

After spending about a decade living as a recluse on Mercer Island near Seattle , Russell rose to prominence again at the turn of the millennium . Russell 's Rules was published in 2001 , and in January 2006 , he convinced Miami Heat superstar center Shaquille O 'Neal to bury the hatchet with fellow NBA superstar and former Los Angeles Lakers teammate Kobe Bryant , with whom O 'Neal had a bitter public feud . Later that year , on November 17 , 2006 , the two @-@ time NCAA winner Russell was recognized for his impact on college basketball as a member of the founding class of the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame . He was one of five , along with John Wooden , Oscar Robertson , Dean Smith and Dr. James Naismith , selected to represent the inaugural class . On May 20 , 2007 , Russell was awarded an honorary doctorate by Suffolk University , where he served as its commencement speaker , and Russell received an honorary degree from Harvard University on June 7 , 2007 . On June 18 , 2007 , Russell was inducted as a member of the founding class of the FIBA Hall of Fame . Russell was also honored during the 2009 NBA All @-@ Star Weekend in Phoenix .

On February 14 , 2009 , NBA Commissioner David Stern announced that the NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award would be renamed the " Bill Russell NBA Finals Most Valuable Player Award " in honor of the 11 @-@ time NBA champion . The following day , during halftime of the All @-@ Star game , Celtics captains Paul Pierce , Kevin Garnett , and Ray Allen presented Russell a surprise birthday cake for his 75th birthday . Russell attended the final game of the Finals that year to present his newly christened namesake award to its winner , Kobe Bryant . Russell was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 .

= = Head coaching record = =

= = Accomplishments and legacy = =

Russell is one of the most successful and decorated athletes in North American sports history . His awards and achievements include 11 NBA championships as a player with the Boston Celtics in 13 seasons (including two NBA championships as player / head coach) , and he is credited with having raised defensive play in the NBA to a new level . By winning the 1956 NCAA Championship with USF and the 1957 NBA title with the Celtics , Russell became the first of only four players in basketball history to win an NCAA championship and an NBA Championship back @-@ to @-@ back (the others being Henry Bibby , Magic Johnson , and Billy Thompson) . He also won two state championships in high school . In the interim , Russell collected an Olympic gold medal in 1956 . His stint as coach of the Celtics was also of historical significance , as he became the first black head coach in major U.S. professional sports when he succeeded Red Auerbach .

In his first NBA full season (1957 ? 58) , Russell became the first player in NBA history to average more than 20 rebounds per game for an entire season , a feat he accomplished 10 times in his 13 seasons . Russell 's 51 rebounds in a single game is the second @-@ highest performance ever ,

only trailing Chamberlain's all-time record of 55. He still holds the NBA record for rebounds in one half with 32 (vs. Philadelphia , on November 16 , 1957) . Career wise in rebounds , Russell ranks second only to Wilt Chamberlain in regular season total (21 , 620) and average per game (22 . 5) , and he led the NBA in average rebounds per game four times . Russell is the all-time playoff leader in total (4 , 104) and average (24 . 9) rebounds per game , he grabbed 40 rebounds in three separate playoff games (twice in the NBA Finals) , and he never failed to average at least 20 rebounds per game in any of his 13 post-season campaigns . Russell also had seven regular season games with 40 or more rebounds , the NBA Finals record for highest rebound per game average (29 . 5 rpg , 1959) and by a rookie (22 . 9 rpg , 1957) . In addition , Russell holds the NBA Finals single-game record for most rebounds (40 , March 29 , 1960 , vs. St. Louis , and April 18 , 1962 , vs. Los Angeles) , most rebounds in a quarter (19 , April 18 , 1962 vs. Los Angeles) , and most consecutive games with 20 or more rebounds (15 from April 9 , 1960 ? April 16 , 1963) . He also had 51 in one game , 49 in two others , and twelve straight seasons of 1 , 000 or more rebounds . Russell was known as one of the most clutch players in the NBA . He played in 11 deciding games (10 times in Game 7s , once in a Game 5) , and ended with a flawless 11 ? 0 record . In these eleven games , Russell averaged 18 points and 29 . 45 rebounds .

On the hardwood , he was considered the consummate defensive center , noted for his unmatched defensive intensity , his stellar basketball IQ and his sheer will to win . Russell excelled at playing man-to-man defense , blocking shots , and grabbing defensive and offensive rebounds . He also could score with putbacks and made mid-air outlet passes to point guard Bob Cousy for easy fast break points . He also was known as a fine passer and pick-setter , featured a decent left-handed hook shot and finished strong on alley oops . However , on offense , Russell's output was limited . His NBA career personal averages show him to be an average scorer (15 . 1 points career average) , a poor free throw shooter (56 . 1 %) , and average overall shooter from the field (44 % , not exceptional for a center) . In his 13 years , he averaged a relatively low 13 . 4 field goals attempted (normally , top scorers average 20 and more) , illustrating that he was never the focal point of the Celtics offense , instead focusing on his tremendous defense .

In his career , Russell won five regular season MVP awards (1959 , 1961 ? 63 , 1965) ? tied with Michael Jordan for second all-time behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's six awards . He was selected three times to the All-NBA First Teams (1959 , 1963 , 1965) and eight Second Teams (1958 , 1960 ? 62 , 1964 , 1966 ? 68) , and was a twelve-time NBA All-Star (1958 ? 1969) . Russell was elected to one NBA All-Defensive First Team . This took place during his last season (1969) , and was the first season the NBA All-Defensive Teams were selected . In 1970 , The Sporting News named Russell the " Athlete of the Decade " . Russell is universally seen as one of the best NBA players ever , and was declared " Greatest Player in the History of the NBA " by the Professional Basketball Writers Association of America in 1980 . For his achievements , Russell was named " Sportsman of the Year " by Sports Illustrated in 1968 . He also made all three NBA Anniversary Teams : the NBA 25th Anniversary All-Time Team (1970) , the NBA 35th Anniversary All-Time Team (1980) and the NBA 50th Anniversary All-Time Team (1996) . Russell ranked # 18 on ESPN's 50 Greatest Athletes of the 20th Century in 1999 . In 2009 , SLAM Magazine named Russell the # 3 player of all time behind Michael Jordan and Wilt Chamberlain . Former NBA player and head coach , Don Nelson , described Bill Russell in a quote that says , " There are two types of superstars . One makes himself look good at the expense of the other guys on the floor . But there's another type who makes the players around him look better than they are , and that's the type Russell was . "

On Saturday , February 14 , 2009 , during the 2009 NBA All-Star Weekend in Phoenix , NBA Commissioner David Stern announced that the NBA Finals MVP Award would be named after Bill Russell . Russell was named as a 2010 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom .

== Personal life ==

Russell was married to his college sweetheart Rose Swisher from 1956 to 1973 . They had three children , namely daughter Karen Russell , the television pundit and lawyer , and sons William Jr. and Jacob . However , the couple grew emotionally distant and divorced . In 1977 , he married Dorothy Anstett , Miss USA of 1968 , but they divorced in 1980 . The relationship was shrouded in controversy because Didi was white . In 1996 , Russell married his third wife , Marilyn Nault ; their marriage lasted until her death in January 2009 . He has been a resident of Mercer Island , Washington for over four decades . His older brother was the noted playwright Charlie L. Russell .

In 1959 , Bill Russell became the first NBA player to visit Africa . Russell is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity , having been initiated into its Gamma Alpha chapter while a student at University of San Francisco . On October 16 , 2013 , Russell was arrested for bringing a loaded .38 @-@ caliber Smith & Wesson handgun to the Seattle ? Tacoma International Airport .

According to a Thursday evening , July 17 , 2014 Associated Press (AP) news story , it was stated that , : " Boston Celtics officials say NBA Hall of Famer Bill Russell is doing OK after collapsing during a speaking engagement near Lake Tahoe . Team spokesman Brian Olive says the 80 @-@ year @-@ old Russell felt faint after the Thursday morning fall at the Hyatt Regency resort in Incline Village , Nevada , but was planning on returning home to Seattle this evening "

= = Earnings = =

During his career , Russell was one of the first big earners in NBA basketball . His 1956 rookie contract was worth \$ 24 @,@ 000 , only fractionally smaller than the \$ 25 @,@ 000 of top earner Bob Cousy . In contrast to other Celtics , who had to work in the offseason to maintain their standard of living (Heinsohn sold insurance , Gene Guarilia was a professional guitar player , Cousy ran a basketball camp , and Auerbach invested in plastics and a Chinese restaurant) , Russell never had to work part @-@ time . When Wilt Chamberlain became the first NBA player to earn \$ 100 @,@ 000 in salary in 1965 , Russell went to Auerbach and demanded a \$ 100 @,@ 001 salary , which he promptly received .

= = Personality = =

Russell was driven by " a neurotic need to win " , as his teammate Heinsohn observed . He was so tense before every game that he regularly threw up in the locker rooms ; it happened so frequently that his fellow Celtics were more worried when it did not happen . He was also known for his natural authority . When he became player @-@ coach in 1966 , Russell bluntly said to his teammates that " he intended to cut all personal ties to other players " , and seamlessly made the transition from their peer to their superior .

To teammates and friends , Russell was open and amicable , but was extremely distrusting and cold towards anyone else . Journalists were often treated to the " Russell Glower " , described as an " icily contemptuous stare accompanied by a long silence " . Russell was also notorious for his refusal to give autographs or even acknowledge the Celtics fans , so far that he was called " the most selfish , surly and uncooperative athlete " by one pundit .

= = Russell ? Chamberlain Relations = =

For most of his career , Russell was close friends with his perennial opponent Wilt Chamberlain . Chamberlain often invited Russell over for Thanksgiving dinner , and at Russell 's place , conversation mostly concerned Russell 's electric trains . However , the close relationship ended after Game 7 of the 1969 NBA Finals , during which Chamberlain injured his knee with six minutes left and left the game . During a conversation with students , a reporter ? unknown to Russell ? heard Russell describe Chamberlain as a malingerer and accuse him of " copping out " of the game when it seemed that the Lakers would lose . Chamberlain was livid with Russell and saw him as a backstabber . Chamberlain 's knee was injured so badly that he could not play the entire offseason and he ruptured it the next season . The two men did not talk to each other for over 20 years until

Russell met with Chamberlain personally and apologized . When Chamberlain died in 1999 , Chamberlain 's nephew said that Russell was the second person he was told to call . At Chamberlain 's eulogy , Russell stated that he did not consider them to be rivals , but rather to have a competition , and that the pair would " be friends through eternity . "

= = Racist abuse , controversy , and relationship with Boston fans = =

Russell 's life was marked by an uphill battle against racism and controversial actions and statements in response to perceived racism . As a child , the young Russell witnessed how his parents were victims of racial abuse , and the family eventually moved into government housing projects to escape the daily torrent of bigotry . When he later became a standout amateur basketball player at USF , Russell recalled how he and his few fellow black colleagues were jeered by white students . Even after he became a star on the Boston Celtics , Russell was the victim of racial abuse . When the NBA All -@ Stars toured the U.S. in the 1958 offseason , white hotel owners in segregated North Carolina denied rooms to Russell and his black teammates , causing him to later write in his memoir *Go Up for Glory* , " It stood out , a wall which understanding cannot penetrate . You are a Negro . You are less . It covered every area . A living , smarting , hurting , smelling , greasy substance which covered you . A morass to fight from . " Before the 1961 ? 62 season , Russell 's team was scheduled to play in an exhibition game in Lexington , Kentucky , when Russell and his black teammates were refused service at a local restaurant . He and the other black teammates refused to play in the exhibition game and flew home , drawing a great deal of controversy and publicity .

As a consequence , Russell was extremely sensitive to all racial prejudice : according to Taylor , he often perceived insults even if others did not . He was active in the Black Power movement and supported Muhammad Ali 's decision to refuse to be drafted . He was often called " Felton X " , presumably in the tradition of the Nation of Islam 's practice of replacing a European slave name with an " X " , and even purchased land in Liberia . Russell 's public statements became increasingly militant , so far that he was quoted in a 1963 *Sports Illustrated* interview with the words : " I dislike most white people because they are people ... I like most blacks because I am black " . However , when his white Celtics teammate Frank Ramsey asked whether he hated him , Russell claimed to be misquoted , but few believed it . According to Taylor , Russell overlooked the fact that his career was only made possible by the white people who were proven anti @-@ racists , namely his white high school coach George Powles (the person who encouraged him to play basketball) , his white college coach Phil Woolpert (who integrated USF basketball) , white Celtics coach Red Auerbach (who is regarded as an anti @-@ racist pioneer and made him the first black NBA coach) , and white Celtics owner Walter A. Brown , who gave him a high \$ 24 @,@ 000 rookie contract , just \$ 1 @,@ 000 shy of the top earning veteran Bob Cousy .

As a result of repeated racial bigotry , Russell refused to respond to fan acclaim or friendship from his neighbors , thinking it was insincere and hypocritical . This attitude contributed to his legendary bad rapport with fans and journalists . He alienated Celtics fans by saying , " You owe the public the same it owes you , nothing ! I refuse to smile and be nice to the kiddies . " This supported the opinion of many white fans that Russell (who was the highest @-@ paid Celtic) was egotistical , paranoid and hypocritical . The already hostile atmosphere between Russell and Boston hit its apex when vandals broke into his house , covered the walls with racist graffiti , damaged his trophies and defecated in the beds . In response , Russell described Boston as a " flea market of racism " . In *King Of The Court* by Aram Goudsouzian , he was quoted saying , " From my very first year I thought of myself as playing for the Celtics , not for Boston . The fans could do or think whatever they wanted . " After his retirement , he described the Boston press as corrupt and racist ; in response , Boston sports journalist Larry Claflin claimed that Russell himself was the real racist .

The FBI maintained a file on Russell ; this lends credibility to his observations that racism was an active force against him . The FBI described Russell in his file as " an arrogant Negro who won 't sign autographs for white children " . This clearly denotes a hostile attitude , and gives insight into the nature of Russell 's public persona , which was often perceived by the mostly @-@ white media

as overly harsh .

Russell refused to attend the ceremony when his # 6 jersey was retired in 1972 , or his induction into the Hall of Fame in 1975 . While Russell still has sore feelings towards the city , there has been something of a reconciliation ; and he has even visited the city regularly in recent years , something he never did in the years immediately after his retirement . When Russell originally retired , he demanded that his jersey be retired in an empty Boston Garden . In 1995 , the Celtics left Boston Garden and entered the FleetCenter , now the TD Garden , and as the main festive act , the Boston organization wanted to re @-@ retire Russell 's jersey in front of a sellout audience . Perennially wary of what he long perceived as the racist city of Boston , Russell decided to make amends and gave his approval . On May 6 , 1999 , the Celtics re @-@ retired Russell 's jersey in a ceremony attended by his on @-@ court rival (and friend) Chamberlain , along with Celtics legend Larry Bird and Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul @-@ Jabbar . The crowd gave Russell a prolonged standing ovation , which brought tears to his eyes . He thanked Chamberlain for taking him to the limit and " making [him] a better player " and the crowd for " allowing [him] to be a part of their lives . " In December 2008 , the We Are Boston Leadership Award was presented to Russell .

= = Statue honoring Russell = =

In 2012 , the city and the Celtics announced that a statue honoring Russell would be placed on Boston 's City Hall Plaza . The design features a statue of Russell in game action with 11 plinths representing the 11 championships he helped the team win . The plinths will feature a key word and a related quote to illustrate Russell 's multiple accomplishments . The Bill Russell Legacy Foundation , established by the Boston Celtics Shamrock Foundation , funded the project .

The Bill Russell Legacy Project artwork by Ann Hirsch of Somerville , Massachusetts , in collaboration with Pressley Associates Landscape Architects of Boston , was unveiled on November 1 , 2013 , with Russell in attendance .

= = Selected publications = =

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