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Out of the Attic

Parker-Gray's NBA pioneer

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Image: Earl Lloyd is at the far right of the photo. Courtesy, Alexandria Black History Museum.



As Parker-Gray alumni prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of their alma mater's opening, we highlight one of the high school's most famous alumni. Earl Lloyd was born in Alexandria in 1928 to Theodore Lloyd Sr. and Daisy Lloyd.

At Parker-Gray, Lloyd played on the basketball team and earned All-South Atlantic Conference honors three times, and All-State Virginia Interscholastic Conference honors twice. Earl's defensive prowess earned him the nickname "Moon Fixer" due to his size and shot blocking ability.

His success led to a scholarship in 1946 to West Virginia State, which he led to two Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association championships. In 1949 and 1950, the *Pittsburgh Courier* named him to its All-American team.

After graduating in 1950, Earl was drafted by the Washington Capitols. He was one of only four black players drafted to the NBA that year. Due to a scheduling coincidence, his start on Oct. 31, 1950, made him the first African American to play in an NBA game. He achieved that honor one day before "Chuck" Cooper played for the Boston Celtics and four days before Nat Clifton played for the New York Knicks.

After playing only seven NBA games, Lloyd was drafted into the army during the Korean War. After two years in the army, he returned to the NBA in 1952 with the Syracuse Nationals, following the dissolution of the Capitols in 1951. Earl played six seasons with the Nationals, winning the championship in 1955 alongside Jim Tucker.

Lloyd and Tucker were the first two African Americans to win an NBA championship.

Lloyd nonetheless endured racial discrimination during much of his life, including his childhood in Alexandria, where he was forced to attend segregated schools, and as an NBA champion, when he was refused lodging at hotels and was spat on by a fan in Indiana. Lloyd once remarked that such hatred only made him play harder.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Earl played for the Detroit Pistons from 1958-60, then retired as a player. He stayed in the Detroit area and returned to basketball in 1968 as the first African American assistant coach in the NBA. In 1971, Lloyd became the second African American head coach in NBA history when he was named head coach of the Pistons.

Lloyd later worked for the Detroit public school system in the '70s and '80s as a job placement administrator. He then became community relations director for the Bing Group, a Detroit manufacturing company owned by former NBA player Dave Bing.

Basketball didn't forget Earl Lloyd, and in 1993 he was inducted into the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame. The National Basketball Hall of Fame inducted him in 2002 and presented him with the NBA Pioneer Award. In 1999, he retired from the Bing Group and moved to Tennessee with his wife Charlita. In 2007, the basketball court at T.C. Williams High School was named for him.

A Parker-Gray icon and basketball pioneer, Lloyd passed away in 2015.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.