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**BLACK LEGENDS OF PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL FOUNDATION NAMES
TWO LEGENDARY PLAYERS *BLACK BASKETBALL PIONEERS OF THE YEAR***

The Late Johnny Isaacs and Al 'Runt' Pullins Honored During *Black History Month*

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. (February 2009) – The Tennessee-based Black Legends of Professional Basketball Foundation has named the late legendary athletes **Johnny Isaacs** and **Al "Runt" Pullins** as the first recipients of its newly established *Black Basketball Pioneers of the Year* award.

The awards, which are being presented posthumously during *Black History Month*, honor Isaacs and Pullins for their key roles in the development of black professional basketball. The guards were star players on black "barnstorming" teams that played during the 1920s, '30s and '40s, a period when African Americans were not allowed to participate in the white professional basketball leagues. Both went on to play for the Harlem Globetrotters.

"Al 'Runt' Pullins and Johnny Isaacs played a critical role in the emergence of professional basketball as an interracial sport," said Black Legends founder and president Dr. "Jumpin' Johnny" Kline, who played for the Globetrotters in the 1950s. "They helped start black 'barnstorming' teams in Chicago and New York, which helped lead to the development of the NBA in 1949. Journalistic accounts, both on the Internet and in the archives, are inaccurate and don't give these two pioneers the credit they deserve."

Called one of the "fathers of professional basketball", **Pullins** was a star guard on the Wendell Phillips High School basketball team in Chicago. He later played for Morris Brown University in Atlanta and helped launch the Windy City's legendary Savoy Big Five black "barnstorming" team in 1926. According to Kline, to attract more business, onetime Minnesota football star Dick Hudson founded the team to play basketball on the heavily waxed dancing floor of the Savoy ballroom. Hudson entered a gentleman's agreement with Abe Saperstein to serve as the sixth player and handle bookings. Two years later, Pullins joined the fledgling New York Globetrotters (later the Harlem Globetrotters), wowing crowds across the nation for the next six years. In 1934, he started the Broadway Clowns (a.k.a. the Harlem Clowns), a team he owned and managed for 50 years. He died in 1986.

Isaacs was a key member of the Harlem Renaissance Big Five (the Rens) basketball team, which

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showcased some of New York City's greatest black players during the Depression and captured the first world professional championship in 1939. Known as "Wonder Boy", he led Textile High School in Manhattan to a Public School Athletic League championship as a senior before leaping directly to the pros. The Rens became nationally known as they "barnstormed" across the country. As an all-black team, the Rens often played at great risk. Many victories ended in fistfights with white players and fans who could not accept losing to a black team. On the road, they faced discrimination. John Wooden, the legendary U.C.L.A. coach, once called the Rens "the greatest team I ever saw." Isaacs helped the Rens defeat the Oshkosh All-Stars of the fledgling National Basketball League, 34-25, in the first world professional championship game, in 1939 in Chicago. He later played for the Washington Bears and the Harlem Globetrotters. He spent his remaining years grooming young players. Isaacs died in 2008.

"The *Black Basketball Pioneers of the Year* award is a wonderful way to recognize Isaacs, Pullins and the other legendary players who have meant so much to the sport of professional basketball," Kline added. "The historic roots of professional basketball go back to these men and their teams. Their contributions spread basketball throughout the country and helped build the foundation for the game. By knowing more about the roots of professional basketball, young players can better appreciate their roles as stewards of the game."

Last year, Kline established a good will fund for 26 fellow retired members of the Harlem Globetrotters, many of whom face financial hardships and life-threatening illnesses in their senior years. Since then, three of the players have died, including Isaacs. The Globetrotters organization does not currently provide retirement benefits for its former players.

"My colleagues and I played during World War II and the Cold War in the 1950s, entertaining our troops and citizens during a time of great peril," said Kline, who moved to the Nashville area from Detroit in 2007. "The surviving pioneers were once ambassadors of good will. Now, mostly forgotten, they are in need of good will as they live out their final days."

The surviving Globetrotters, who range in age from 76 to 92, are Don Barnett, Joe Buckhalter (former star at **Tennessee State University**), Bobby Hall, Herman Taylor, David Gaines, J.C. Gipson, Carl Green, Chuck Holton, Charles Hoxie, Webster Kirksey, John Kline, Chico Burrell, Al Price, Charlie Primas, George Smith, Harry Sykes, Herschell Turner, Frank Washington, Ernie Wagner, Charles Ward, Bob Williams, Johnny Wilson, and Vertes Zeigler.

Individuals are encouraged to make donations to the "Globetrotter Good Will Fund" by mailing a check, made payable to the Black Legends of Professional Basketball Foundation, to Dr. John Kline, Black Legends, P.O. Box 3513, Brentwood, TN 37024-3513. Because the Black Legends of Professional Basketball Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization, all donations are 100 percent tax deductible. For more information about Kline or his foundation, call (615) 371-9083, send an e-mail to johnkline@comcast.net or info@blacklegends.org, or visit <http://www.johnkline.org> or <http://www.blacklegends.org>.