



GAME PLAYERS



by **Robert L. Woodard**
The Wynnefield Barber

have been influenced by many people who have sat in my barber's chair. Some of them have passed away. Life paints many pictures that teach us humble lessons. Here are some of the lives that have influenced me.

When **Michael Jackson** visited **Woodard's Barbershop** for a haircut, I was shocked to hear that he was not satisfied with his nose, skin and hair. Many African-Americans had inferiority complexes about being black because of the stereotypical views of society. Michael Jackson was giving us what he thought was his best, so he changed his looks. But it didn't affect his performance on stage. He was the Pied Piper of love, song and dance. This combination equals a oneness that can only be described as spirit. When Michael Jackson performed, you could see the spirit of rhythm dancing its way into the hearts of people. His rhythm in the motion of time removed any cultural barriers of prejudiced thoughts in the minds of all who enjoyed his talent. His energy of song and dance exemplified life and how to live it with an aggressive love for all human beings all over the planet. It's been seven years since his death and it still is hard to believe. Like oil and water, death and Michael Jackson just don't mix. What a lonely place the earth has become with the absence of this great man.

Darryl Dawkins was one of the strongest players to play the game. His slam dunks shattered backboards on many basketball courts because of his amazing strength. Because of him, the NBA had to restructure the way backboards were designed. I remember his first day as a *Philadelphia 76er*. Darryl's big sister brought him to Woodard's Barbershop to get his first Philadelphia haircut. That same day,

world-renowned singing group – **The Delfonics** – walked into my shop. One of the singers, **Randy Cain**, son of the Honorable Judge Herbert R. Cain Jr., went down the street to the drugstore. When he returned, he thought he was next in the chair to get a haircut. He did not see Darryl Dawkins waiting in the rear of the shop. Randy was a hothead and wanted to fight for the position to be next in the chair. The other two Delfonics, **Wilbert** and **William 'Poogie' Hart**, tried to calm him down. When Darryl Dawkins stood up, Randy saw the enormous size of this man and quickly sat down to wait his turn. I will always have a special place in my heart and will miss this Champion Gladiator who was one of the greatest basketball players of all time.

The *76ers* won the NBA championship in 1983. 4–5–4 was the number that **Moses Malone** said would take us to the *Promised Land*. Moses was a scholar in basketball technique. He mastered positioning himself on the court to be at the right place at the right time – either scoring points or being fouled by his opponent. I will always remember him for his intelligence and wisdom of mastering the game of life as well as basketball.

I will never forget the first time that Moses Malone brought a young **Charles Barkley** in for his first haircut at Woodard's Barbershop. Believe it or not, Charles was a very quiet man. Moses Malone, who also was known as a quiet man, did all the talking. On that day, Moses arrived in his new *Maserati*. He handed me the keys and said, *'Take it for a ride.'* I did and wow, what a car! When I returned, Charles asked Moses, *'Can I take it for a ride?'* Moses just looked at Charles and didn't answer for a while. Then he took him to the side and said, *'Look boy, you are in the NBA. Don't ask to drive my car. Just go buy*

your own.' I then saw the love and affection Moses Malone had for Charles Barkley and the rest is history. I believe that Charles was made for Philadelphia. He represents the epitome of what Philadelphia sports stand for. Charles came ready to please the fans. Even before he ever played with them, he knew what he could do to make the *76ers* one of the most respected teams in the NBA. He found a permanent home at Woodard's Barbershop. He learned a lot about life experiences at the shop and has now gone on to do greater things like sports commentating and acting. He also is an advocate for children, stressing the importance of good behavior and education. He recently hosted his own show, *The Race Card*. I am very proud of his development in his life and look forward to greater things.

When Miss **Nina Simone** arrived at Woodard's Barbershop, her first request was to sit in the same chair that Michael Jackson sat in to have her haircut. I asked her if I could take a picture with her sitting in my antique Cadillac. When she saw the photo of Michael sitting in my car, she asked me to take her for a ride. She requested that I wear a suit and tie and that I pick her up at her home the next morning. When I arrived, she had prepared breakfast for us. After breakfast, she instructed me to drive around East and West River Drive and then back to the Barbershop to take the historic picture that hangs in my shop today. Miss Nina Simone will be remembered as a world-renowned songstress and pianist. I always will remember her as a powerful Civil and Human Rights Activist, who used music as her tool to get her message across.

Human and Civil Rights are important in this country. Please take the "RACE Test" at www.BarbershopTalkHFD.org. PRH