

Shaun Campbell, founder of the Arthur Wharton Foundation clip
Transcript

I'm Shaun Campbell, the founder of the Arthur Wharton Foundation, we began [I suppose] the Foundation back in 2010, although the campaign to pay tribute to Arthur Wharton began in 2008.

He was the beginning of the black presence, not just in football but also in sport. He became the world's first black professional footballer, the world's first ever fastest man on the planet, a professional cricket player, a professional rugby player and a cycling champion all at the same time. So, he's a remarkable sporting icon and individual that we should all be very proud of.

Arthur was born in Ghana, 1865. He came to Darlington in 1883 to study as a Methodist preacher. He was spotted you know, running across the forecourt of Darlington Cleveland College by this chap called Manny Harbron, who just thought "wow, this guy's quick, he's got a turn of speed" and from there I guess Arthur was asked to play football and "would you like to do some running?" and that's when he went on to record these amazing, trailblazing, pioneering exploits.

He lived in Darlington until about [I suppose] 1888. He had a relationship with Darlington but also played for Rotherham and Preston in between and Sheffield, so he got about a little bit. It was the North East that let him in. It was the North East that gave him the opportunity to express himself through his physical attributes let's say. So, it's a North East story but in the North East of England, you have to earn your stripes. You can't walk as a black man looking like Arthur did into a football team, unless they want you to be part of that football team. You have to earn your opportunity. Well, Darlington, Sunderland, Newcastle, Middlesbrough all gave him that opportunity, because he played with or against all of them.

And then at the very end of his life he had to become a coalminer. He was ostracised in a way from Ghana, from his own family, because he turned his back on the church, as they saw it and Arthur wasn't really welcomed back to Ghana. So, he had little option really but to live you know and work here in England. So, he was a tobacconist, he was a pub landlord, he owned a pub. He died of a terrible illness, very debilitating, died of cancer ultimately. This poor man lay in an unmarked grave from 1930 to 1998.

And since then of course, there's been a headstone erected for him. We've erected a 16-foot statue at the home of the FA, St George's Park. We unveiled the statue on 16 October 2014 and we had the true pioneers, trailblazers of the game there. Cyrille Regis, Brendon Batson, Vivian Anderson, Paul Davis... you know, these wonderful icons of the game. Les Ferdinand, we call him Sir Les Ferdinand, because he's that great. Chris Hughton... there was a lot of tears man. When we unveiled that statue, it was just... but there were a lot of smiles, it was happiness. We could not believe we'd done it. You know, that it was somewhere where our young black men and women let's say, who we subsequently now know face racism today when they're playing for their country. It's somewhere that reminds those authorities of the beginning of the black presence in football, at least.

It is a sporting symbol, but it's a strength of character, an achieving in the face of adversity symbol. It's an educational symbol. It's a nod to all black and brown people who've ever struggled to make their way in the beautiful game. That's why we have Arthur diving majestically and if you notice that statue is in an approximate shape of the number seven. Arthur's humanitarian spirit, seven games in ten days, he played to feed the poor for charity. In the face of his own adversity. Seven games in ten days now would be hard enough, but the balls and the rules of the game back then were considerably harder. This was at a time in a bleak Victorian England, the industrial era. You played in all weathers, all conditions.

If he's the beginning of the black presence, where are we today? That's your yardstick. It's how you measure how far you've come. A year ago or so, our three young, black men who missed the penalties suffered horrific abuse. I mean, this is 130 plus years after Arthur. Racism is still there. Every week it seems now we're hearing racism, you know, chants. That breaks my heart because when those young black men went to bed that night after that abuse, they did not sleep like their white counterparts in that game. Because they have a mother and a father that's affected by that abuse, a son, a daughter, a brother, a sister, an uncle, an aunt and their friends. I didn't sleep well that night. I was thinking of the pain they were going through and the pain that their mother and father were going through. People just thought "oh, you know, this abuse is terrible isn't it?" and then you go to bed and it's forgotten about. We didn't. No way. It must have been horrendous. There's a whole world out there feeling that pain. Every black and brown person in the world who saw that that day was hurting.

Nothing's changed. So when we go back and we say "what is the gap between Arthur Wharton and you know black players starting to play in the game, the likes of..." Ok. Andrew Watson was 11 years before Arthur Wharton. Classed as amateur. When you are paid the equivalent of your counterpart, that's progress, right? That's where you begin. Now, as far as we understand now, that's the very beginning of that process. Ok. So, Arthur achieved A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I... all the way through to Z. So many different things in his life. So, how come then as you quite rightly put it, did it take so long for other black players to get involved? Well, the thing is, there were other black players involved, you just never heard about them, they were written out of history, just like Arthur really. Nobody would ever have known he'd existed. Well, that's the same for Walter Tull, it's the same for Andrew Watson, it's the same for Jack Leslie. It's exactly the same for people like Albert Johanneson.

Well, in the '50s, Leeds United – I'm from Leeds and I've only found this out recently really. I always had a hero in Albert Johanneson even though he's before my time. Black, South African playing for Leeds, right? What I've just discovered is that Leeds United had a brilliant relationship with South Africa and there was three or four black men. How come we didn't know about them? How come nobody ever knew about Ben Odeje, the first black player to play for an England team. How come we never learned about John Charles? In other words, they're there but we're still just learning about them now because they've been buried. We're talking about human beings who've done exactly the same as everybody else in football and they've been written out of history.

The idea that Jack Leslie was picked to play for England, right? Then they learned of his colour and suddenly he was no longer welcome, it's a story that's only relatively new that people have heard. We have a history and a legacy to be proud of in the black and brown community. This theme of Black History Month of course is Action not Words. For one month a year we can really focus in on the issues of black history, it's brilliant. I wouldn't change that for the world, but we know that black history is every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year.

If you'd have asked me ten years ago how long it would take to eradicate racism and show meaningful growth, I would have said none of those things were going to be put right for 50 or 60 years. But because now the advancement of social media and stuff, I feel really optimistic that we can make massive changes much quicker. You know, in other words, education now is accessible 24 hours a day, we need to take full advantage of that.