



The Rhythm Boys of Omaha Central: High School Basketball at the '68 Racial Divide

Steve Marantz

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In the spring of 1968, the Omaha Central High School basketball team made history with its first all-black starting lineup. Their nickname, the Rhythm Boys, captured who they were and what they did on the court. Led by star center Dwaine Dillard, the Rhythm Boys were a shoo-in to win the state championship. But something happened on their way to glory.

In early March, segregationist George Wallace, in a third-party presidential bid, made a campaign stop in Omaha. By the time he left town, Dillard was in jail, his coach was caught between angry political factions, and the city teetered on the edge of racial violence. So began the Nebraska state high school basketball tournament the next day, caught in the vise of history. *The Rhythm Boys of Omaha Central* tells a true story about high school basketball, black awakening and rebellion, and innocence lost in a watershed year. The drama of civil rights in 1968 plays out in this riveting social history of sports, politics, race, and popular culture in the American heartland.

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