



Arthur, Sports and Class

Slide 1: Title slide

Slide 2: Who was Arthur?

On slide: Photos of Arthur as a sprinter, footballer and miner

Commentary:

- ❖ Arthur Wharton came to Victorian Britain from the Gold Coast in West Africa to study as a teenager and achieved many great things. He was:
- ❖ The first man to run 100 yards in 10 seconds
- ❖ The first black professional footballer
- ❖ A multi-talented sportsman and celebrity of his day
- ❖ In later life he became a miner for many years and worked the tough conditions of the mines of South Yorkshire
- ❖ Sadly Arthur died a pauper and was buried in an unmarked grave near Doncaster and was forgotten for many years
- ❖ Arthur's life is both inspiring, in terms of his sporting achievements, and tragic, in its 'riches to rags' ending.
- ❖ The difficulties and discrimination he faced during his career and life in the areas of race and class can help us reflect on prejudice in today's Britain.
- ❖ Racial and class discrimination are often linked in society as they were for Arthur.
- ❖ By learning about Arthur we can ask - How have and haven't things progressed? (See: Arthur, Racism and Sport presentation for more on racism)
- ❖ This presentation focuses on the effects of class on Arthur's life and achievements.



Slide 3: The industrial revolution and the 'working-class' (3)

On slide: Photos of mechanical printing press / miners / Arthur with cup

Commentary:

- ❖ Arthur's sporting career unfolded in the North of England.
- ❖ He experienced life there through a working class perspective as the Industrial Revolution intensified.
- ❖ Manning factories and mines meant a large majority of people were very poor and worked long hours in bad conditions for little pay.
- ❖ The rise in leisure time and attendance of spectator sports in the last years of the 19th Century meant more of the working class were watching sport
- ❖ But also becoming sportsmen who needed to earn a wage at the same time.

Slide 4: The industrial revolution and the 'working-class' (4)

On slide: Clip from archive footage of Sheffield United V Bury 1902 / JB Priestley's description of football's meaning to the working classes (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ In this brilliant clip, we get a sense of what Arthur would have seen as the only black face on match day. The rise in spectator sports gave hard-working people, some time to relax together.
- ❖ This quote from Yorkshire Writer JB Priestley, from his book *The Good Companions*, gives a fantastic description of what football, did then, and always has, meant to everyday people:
- ❖ *"...it turned you into a member of a new community, all brothers together for an hour and a half, for not only had you escaped from the clanking machinery of this lesser life, from work, wages, rent, doles, sick pay, insurance cards, nagging wives, ailing children, bad bosses..."* - *The Good Companions*' 1929, JB Priestley
- ❖ The wealthy minority, who reaped the most benefits from the mechanical and technological advancements of the time, also controlled the sporting world.
- ❖ Unlike today, in the early days of sport, there was no money to be made. Conditions were tougher and it was not well regulated.



Slide 5: Losing privilege

On slide: Photos of Arthur's Ghanaian family

Commentary:

- ❖ Despite coming from a wealthy family in Ghana, Arthur had no friends in high places to give him a helping hand in Britain.
- ❖ By choosing to follow his passion and become a sportsman, Arthur in a sense became 'working-class'.
- ❖ Being a working-class sportsman lost Arthur his privileges of status and education that were of particular value to him as a black man at that time (facing the extra disadvantage of racial discrimination and negative stereotyping).
- ❖ In Victorian times, being a sports man was not a respected profession; rather, it was seen as a frivolous pursuit. Early in his sports career, Arthur applied for a job in his homeland but was turned down as he was considered 'unreliable'.
- ❖ It is likely, had Arthur capitalised on his background and education, he would have lived a more comfortable life.
- ❖ However, the choice to become and progress as a Northern, working-class sportsman, also enabled Arthur (unknowing) to become a pioneer (more about this later).

Slide 6: Hardship of being a working-class sportsman (6)

On slide: Clip about Arthur and handicap system (1minute) (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ As both an amateur and professional sportsman, Arthur coped with tough conditions.
- ❖ British sport was far more corrupt then. A handicapping system meant that the best athletes would have to start further from the finishing line than their rivals, thus ensuring a close finish and a more even spread of bets.



Arthur Wharton: 1865 to 1930

The World's First Black Professional Footballer

www.arthurwharton.info

- ❖ Arthur was blocked from winning some of his races. This unfairness sometimes made him explode with anger. He famously showed his frustration by smashing a glass vase he had 'won' for finishing 'second' in a race he could have dominated if he had not been given an unfair handicap. In an interview with the athletic journal, 21st June, 1887, Arthur recalls being offered twenty pounds to lose a race. He refused.
- ❖ Athletes were supposed to accept corruption in sport but he used his sporting talents to maintain his integrity and call more shots than he would dare.

Slide 7: Hardship of being a working-class sportsman (7)

On slide: Racist quotes about Arthur from newspapers

Commentary:

- ❖ Arthur was the target of racial slurs in the newspaper that mocked his nature and his performance and it's likely he had to endure unfair treatment by officials and those who didn't know him personally. (See - What the papers said - perceptions of Arthur presentation)
- ❖ The kit and the rules of football were different then and the game was more aggressive. A footballer's wage was so low that players often had other jobs to make ends meet.
- ❖ Backhanders and corruption in the very new area of spectator sports meant, along with racial discrimination, Arthur would have to be extra fearless and clever in his choices as a sportsman.
- ❖ It was also much harder for a Northern player to get a place in an English national team at that time so this also prevented him getting the sporting opportunities and recognition he deserved.

Slide 8: Hardship of being a working-class sportsman (8)

On slide: Clip of Arthur's experiences as a miner (1minute) and photo, Arthur as a miner (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ Becoming a sports star meant Arthur's career was always finite and poverty will have contributed to his downfall into bad health in later life.



Arthur Wharton: 1865 to 1930

The World's First Black Professional Footballer

www.arthurwharton.info

- ❖ Lack of financial reward meant that once Arthur retired from his athletics career, he would have to find other work to survive. (Like other working class men of his time in the North, he spent many years as a miner).

Slide 9: Becoming 'one of us' (9)

On slide: Clip of Arthur's football talents (1minute) (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ By following his passion for sport, Arthur became subject to the same hardships other working class sports men did in the north at that time. His choices and actions helped to sow seeds of change both on a grass-roots level and in a wider context.
- ❖ By surviving and achieving as a black man in the public eye, crucially through sports, Arthur took power away from racism by providing a true picture of a black person to everyday people.
- ❖ The development of spectator sports in Britain (alongside newspapers/the printing press and transport networks), encouraged social mobility and a wider awareness of the outside world for the working-classes.
- ❖ For some people, going to a football match in say London, will have been the first time they ventured outside their city to see something of the outside world. Arthur will likely have been the only black face many would have seen.
- ❖ There were no 'social networks' like we have now so what was written about Arthur's in the newspaper was important to aid a change in perception.

Slide 10: Becoming 'one of us' (10)

On slide: Below quote

Commentary:

- ❖ Aside from the racist slurs (that often came from national papers who didn't know Arthur), he received much praise, positivity and support from the local and Northern sporting press, who treated him as one of their own and were less likely to focus on his ethnic origin. Examples...
- ❖ *"Arthur is a most sociable fellow when you know him, but you have to get to know him first..."* Athletic Journal, 'Men I have met', 26 June, 1888



Arthur Wharton: 1865 to 1930

The World's First Black Professional Footballer

www.arthurwharton.info

- ❖ "... a modest and unassuming man, a genial companion, and a friend whom any person might feel proud to number amongst his acquaintances". Ashton Herald, 15/2/1896
- ❖ Arthur did not fit the racist stereotype of a black man, (of being stupid, childish and more animal than human). From many reporters (especially those who knew him) Arthur came across as a bold, articulate and intelligent man of integrity in his sporting conduct.
- ❖ In a sense, the code of good sportsmanship, allowed everyday people to see the equal capabilities of a black man in a context they knew.
- ❖ Being liked and respected on a personal level gave Arthur some power as a sports man, particularly through football.

Slide 11: Becoming 'one of us' (11)

On slide: Rotherham pubs that Arthur managed / Arthur with team mates, Darlington FC

Commentary:

- ❖ Then, as now, teams could gain an advantage by making approaches to talented players, offering 'sweeteners' to encourage a player to join their club. In Arthur's day players were offered incentives such as the tenancy of a pub.
- ❖ Arthur was clearly sought-after as he is known to have become an established landlord of, at least, 3 pubs and one tobacconist during his football career.
- ❖ The way Arthur lived successful amongst white working-class people in Britain and contributed to their leisure time (sport) and the economy and war effort (his various jobs, most notably his long stint as a miner and his time as a home guard) also changes the perceptions of the people in the communities in which he lived in.
- ❖ Arthur will have almost certainly been much better educated than many of his fellow working-class sportsmen and work mates as most will have not had the extensive education his family afforded him, once again, crushing the stereotype of a black man.
- ❖ Arthur even became politically active, while playing for Stockport he engaged in the early days of football Trade Unionism alongside fellow sportsmen.



Arthur Wharton: 1865 to 1930

The World's First Black Professional Footballer

www.arthurwharton.info

- ❖ By living amongst everyday British people, Arthur was proof that immigration and integration could work.
- ❖ He became 'one of us'.

Slide 12: Changes in football (12)

On slide: photo - Football Unities, Racism Divides

Commentary:

- ❖ Nowadays, professional football appears classless in terms of how sports stars are treated, but watching and enjoying football in Britain remains a working-class pastime.
- ❖ Sadly, racist chants and putdowns from spectators and (sometimes on the pitch), has increased with the number of non-white players in football (from the 1950s). Initiatives like Football Unities, Racism Divides and Kick It Out, have been working for some years to educate and change perceptions

Slide 13: Race and class (13)

On slide: Clip of rapper Akala in debate with Tommy Robinson, founder of the EDL (1mintue) (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ Throughout the 20th century the vulnerability of the working-class position in society has been used to incite racism and xenophobia for political gain. This is currently happening in relation to the recession around Europe, for example in Britain with far-right groups like the BNP and in Greece, through the Golden Dawn Party. (For more detail see presentation: 'Arthur, Racism and Sport').
- ❖ When Arthur's story is understood in the context of class, as well as race, we can see how both are interlinked discriminations and how knowledge of Arthur and other pioneers like him, can change generations of understanding.
- ❖ (clip) Here, modern day race and class pioneer, rapper, Akala, explains this powerful connection and how class has been used politically in Britain to incite racism.



Slide 14: Writing our own histories (14)

On slide: Clip of singer/songwriter writer, Plan B (Ben Drew) talking about current attitudes to class (2 minutes) (INTERNET ACCESS NEEDED)

Commentary:

- ❖ It wasn't until the 1980s (some 50 years after his death) that Arthur's achievements started to be researched and celebrated more widely.
- ❖ Phil Vasili, who wrote Arthur's Biography, believes Arthur was not fully represented in sporting history because he was a threat to exposing the falsehood of the racial stereotyping that marked Africans as an inferior race, and also because of the lack of power that the working classes, had in 'writing their own histories'.

"...Wharton's accomplishments were quickly forgotten is sad testament to the degenerative effect of racism in relation to history. By concentrating on the colour, culture and ethnicity of an athlete, instead of their unmediated achievement, so much is missed". (Vasili, May 2013)

- ❖ These days the working-classes have the means to become more political in society and 'write their own histories'.
- ❖ (clip) By becoming a sportsman, Arthur lost his privilege and became 'working class'. Arthur was forgotten in part because he was black and also because in his time, the working classes had no power to write their own histories.
- ❖ In this final clip we hear singer/songwriter Ben Drew, Plan B, explain what many in modern day Britain feel - that the political and upper classes use national media to perpetuate a derogatory view of the working-class in the same way as they have and still use race (albeit more covert these days), for their own political ends.
- ❖ What Drew describes, parallels Arthur's experience of racial slurs in the newspapers of his times.