

# THE SPORTING LIFE

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Ambitious people push boundaries. This is no exception for African Americans who have created ground-breaking genres of music from the 1900s to the present, telling the black experience and changing how we are viewed worldwide. It is important that the black experience be still told worldwide, to fight against the prejudice still prevalent in today's society. It is simply fact that African Americans have been contributing to black culture in the past and today. And through all that, African Americans have accomplished great feats, like hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar and the Muslim activist Malcolm X. When great people like these contribute to the culture, their acts strike a chord deep within our people, aiding in our ongoing battle for inclusion and respect.

Amid all this, black Canadians are somewhat overlooked for what they have accomplished, compared to more famous figures from the USA. As an athlete, however, I think of Ferguson Jenkins and Sam Langford. Despite obstacles in their careers, these two black Canadians achieved high distinction in their respective sports, and in the process, helped to define Canada's identity within our country and abroad.

Sam Langford is hailed as one of the greatest boxers to have ever lived. Born in tiny Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia, Langford left his home to get away from an abusive father. Langford began working at a Boston drug store to eke out a living. He then worked as a janitor in a boxing gym called Lenox Athletic Club. Soon Langford was "learning the ropes". He started his boxing career in 1902 at nineteen. Sam quickly won the Boston amateur featherweight belt and moved from amateur up to professional. Before he knew it, he was a boxing legend.

Sadly, Sam was marginalized. He was barred from competing for the World Heavyweight Championship because he was black. Boxers would even forfeit fights against him simply because of his skin tone and the low prizes. But Sam Langford was not without his accomplishments. He was the best in the Colored division, holding the title of a record five times between 1910 and 1918. Boxers and sports historians unanimously agree that he is the most talented boxer they ever witnessed firsthand.

Alongside Sam Langford, another Canadian Hall of Famer is Ferguson Jenkins. Jenkins was born in Chatham, Ontario in 1942. His mother was descended from African American slaves who had escaped via the famous Underground Railroad to settle in southwestern Ontario. Jenkins' family background strikes a chord with me; my grandparents suffered under the apartheid regime in South Africa. In 1965 Jenkins debuted in Major League Baseball. He played for many famous teams, including the Chicago Cubs, Texas Rangers, and the Red Sox. Ferguson's accomplishments include winning many awards and being selected as All Star for three seasons with the Chicago Cubs. Jenkins' was the first Canadian inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, carving his name into stone into Canadian and American sporting history.

Sam Langford and Ferguson Jenkins carried Canada "on their backs" in their respective fields and earned it a place to the world. Both these athletes faced racism in their careers. Langford was barred from competing for the world's biggest title, and Jenkins suffered discrimination in the minor leagues. But what matters is what they achieved: the best version of themselves they could possibly be. In doing so, Sam Langford and Ferguson Jenkins helped shape Canada's diverse identity and heritage. They were proudly Canadian and unapologetically Black.

## 2016 RBC BLACK HISTORY MONTH STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

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