



"The Foursome"

The movement to build municipal golf courses in America in the early 20th century was seen as a way to democratize the game, allowing the poor and middle-class an opportunity to enjoy the values of health, recreation and camaraderie associated with playing golf... so long as you were white.

But these same values were largely denied to men and women of color.

As early as 1938 members of the Heart of America Golf Club, the association of African- American golfers in town, filed a lawsuit against the city seeking the right to play the city courses their tax dollars helped to maintain. To no avail.

Through the 1930s to the early 1950s, minority golfers in Kansas City, as in the rest of the country, had few places to play. Segregation was the order of the day. African-Americans were allowed to play on the nine, hardscrabble holes of Swope Park #2 (and then only on Mondays and Tuesdays), while whites had access to the well-kept, eighteen-hole course up the hill: Swope #1 (now Swope Memorial).



That changed in March 1950 when "The Foursome" showed up and demanded the right to play the famous A. W. Tillinghast design they had heard so much about. **Mr. George Johnson** a life-long golfer whose roots in the game traced back to an old potato farm in Wyandotte County, **Mr. Reuben Benton** a newspaperman and later, co-owner of the *Kansas City Call*, **Mr. Sylvester "Pat" Johnson** and **Mr. Leroy Doty** (pictured) both active in the Heart of America Golf Club, challenged authority and convention and (literally) risked life and limb to open public facilities to minority golfers in Kansas City.

For their courage to defy the "Jim Crow" conventions of the times, for the example they set for all who followed them to the well-maintained fairways of municipal courses in America and for the love they demonstrated for the game of golf against all obstacles, the Board of Directors is proud to include "The Foursome" in the 2014 class of the Kansas City Golf Hall of Fame.