

Tuskegee Airmen Honored

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By Contributing Writer Jude Harder

In honor of Black History Month the FastBreak Foundation, American Family Insurance and KSTC Channel 45 honored two very special heroes at Target Center Sunday night as the Timberwolves battled the Toronto Raptors.

In 1941 the Tuskegee Airmen became the first African American airmen to be allowed into the United States military, and between 1942 and 1946 over half of the 994 trained and graduated pilots from the Tuskegee Institute (Alabama) were sent overseas to aid the United States' effort during World War II.

These educated and strong willed men battled discrimination and prejudicial stereotypes to serve their country despite the racial inequalities of the times.

Target Center had the privilege of having two of them under its roof on Sunday night: Vernon Hopson and Joseph Gomer.

Gomer was 22 when he enlisted in the Army and was stationed in Italy where he was a fighter pilot until he retired at the end of the war. He later went on to work for the US Forestry Service, where he earned merit for his work in providing equal opportunity.

"I think it's wonderful that people are finally remembering and learning a little bit about history," Gomer said at halftime. "I like to see our young people be all that they can be."

Hopson joined the Air Force at the age of 18 and was an escort for bombers deploying to the Pacific Ocean. Upon the end of the war Vernon remained in the Air Force where he became an Air Traffic Controller.

Last week, Hopson was also present at the FastBreak Foundation's Black History celebration at Brooklyn Center's Northport Elementary. At the school, Hopson stressed the importance of staying focused on your dreams and placing heavy importance on education.

Timberwolves President Chris Wright presented the heroes with team signed basketballs and personalized jerseys at halftime of the game.

"We take great pride in recognizing inspirational leaders in our community and in our nation's history, and Black History Month provides us with a terrific platform to celebrate these individuals and their accomplishments," Wright said earlier this month. "It's especially important that our young fans are educated about black history and able to incorporate the lessons they can learn from these great pioneers into their daily lives."

The examples set by men like Gomer and Hopson are what make our country and the world a better place and give others the will to fight back when they are held down.

"There are no barriers, no ceilings," Gomer said. "We opened doors and broke down their barriers, and really encourage everybody to be all that they can be."

