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Robertson hopes book transcends basketball

By Jeremy Peter

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The legend of the "Big O" wasn't built solely on record-setting performances on the basketball court.

Before any nets snapped or flash bulbs popped, the foundation for Oscar Robertson's story was laid out a chapter at a time through hard work and a solid upbringing.

"In order to be successful, you must lead a structured life," said Robertson, who starred at the University of Cincinnati from 1957-60 and then played for the Cincinnati Royals from 1960-70. "You've got to work. It doesn't come easy. Growing up, I had school, church and basketball. We were a poor family, but we had what mattered, and there was a lot of love to go around."

Robertson gives readers a look at his life in his autobiography, "The Big O: My Life, My Times, My Game." He recently took over the publishing and distribution rights for the book from its previous printer, Rodale, after Rodale let the book go out of print. He is re-releasing it through Oscar Robertson Media Ventures and will be at Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Rookwood Pavilion at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday for a signing of both "The Big O" and his instructional book, "The Art of Basketball."

"I felt that they hardly spent any time at all on my book," Robertson said of Rodale. "We sold about 20,000 copies, but I wasn't happy with the way they promoted it. I'm going out myself now promoting the book and doing signings, and it is doing much better."

The book documents not only Robertson's playing days but also the hardships that generations of his family and friends faced before, during and after the civil rights movement. It's a part of history Robertson says gets overlooked, but he credits it for making him the man he came to be. That's why, he says, he's keeping the book in circulation - not because it's a great sports story, but because it is a first-hand look at the struggle to gain equal rights in America.

"All of the book is written from my perspective not only as a basketball player but as a black man," he said. "I think things have gotten better, but it's not always out front, the things that happened."

Robertson hopes readers of his book will come away with a healthy respect for what and who came before them.

"It is the older generation's responsibility to pass down what they have learned to the younger ones," he said. "We don't do that enough in America these days. Experience is your best teacher."

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