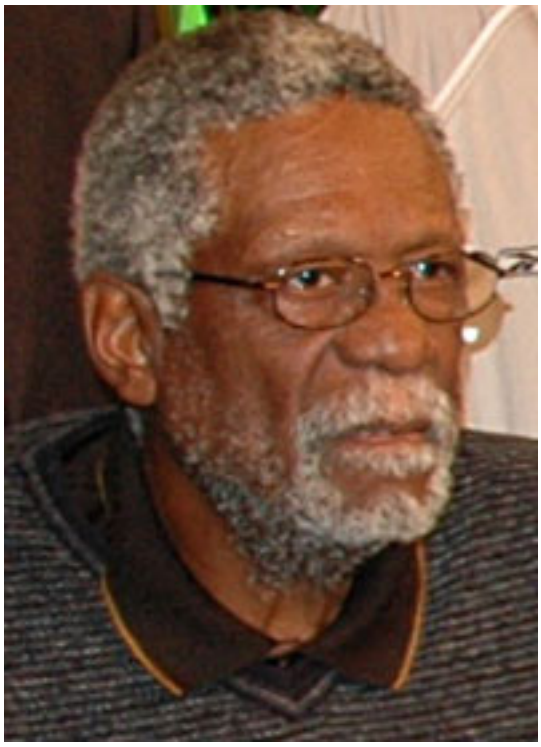

It can be easily said that Bill Russell is the greatest basketball player in NBA history: 11 championships in 13 years is the proof. It's worth celebrating Russell even more in light of his receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Obviously, one would imagine that it meant something beyond special for Russell to receive that honor from President Obama. In an interview with ESPN, Russell admitted that he drove cross-country to his fathers' grave after learning of the honor. Russell said he simply had a conversation with his father there, and came to finally agree with his father that he had done "pretty good." For those who watched or listened to Russell's dignified, excellent path, in real time, of the 1950s and 1960s, I would imagine that they especially agree.

While it feels a slight shame that the current generation of youth have to be repeatedly made aware of the importance of Bill Russell, such is time. Yet it likely only takes a sit down in front of a couple video clips of Russell's genuinely wise communication and timeless laugh for anyone to have a whisper in their mind that this man might be special. In later years, Russell's icon status has grown though he doesn't seem to over market himself for the simple purpose of face time. Russell seems to just kind of hang around and pass out knowledge and wisdom. Many will recall the petrifying effect of Russell's icon aura on Kevin Garnett in an interview prior to Garnett's championship achievement in 2008. Garnett gasped for words and basked in the presence of a hero for a basketball big man.

Hero for some, Icon for all, Russell earned his success in such a way that all who utter the word "can't" way too often, can only resign when presented with what Russell managed and overcame. Even on the shiny surface of his 11 championships with the Boston Celtics, Russell had to overcome perhaps the most uniquely gifted player in the history of the game in Wilt Chamberlain to achieve those championship rings. The battles between Russell and Chamberlain were, perhaps, the best that the more traditional age of basketball had to offer. Chamberlain was just beginning to bring a new kind of soul into the league, while Russell

represented a style of play that would fit in any generation. Chamberlains nifty moves and giant status amongst a shorter overall league, worked on many, but not Russell. Russell was the quintessential basketball player (and why I support the Greatest Of All Time suggestion), and did so by making ideal use of both his mental and physical gifts.

Crossover dribbles and other flashy moves have made basketball more appealing for short attention viewing, but Russell's simple mix of footwork, timely jumping, and attention to his teammates, would work just as effectively in present day or the canvas basketball shoe days of the past. You can see the skills of Russell's game in a few players in the league right now. It just so happens to be that Kevin Love of the Timberwolves carries on those sound fundamentals, as has former Timberwolf Kevin Garnett for the most part in his career.

While the artistry of basketball has slimmed from a model of full court movement –which Love recognizes through his post rebound outlet passes – to a model of one-player shake and bake; there is still plenty of great basketball to be seen. Yet the one thing that cannot as easily be duplicated of Russell is his leadership the community. Rarely do we see an individual maintain a personality throughout his younger and elder years, but Russell has always been an ambassador.

Basketball is a truly American game, and Bill Russell has just solidified his face somewhere immediately behind Mohammed Ali as one of the most successful athletes of any color representing the history of the United States. He now has the medal to prove it.

This was simply a brief mention of our need to celebrate Bill Russell, but every young man playing basketball today should go beneath the "shiny surface" and educate their mind on the path and experiences of Bill Russell's career. Times have changed a bit, but just as Russell's fundamentals are timeless, so are the lessons of his path…as well as the "pretty good" results.