

# THIS GAME IS NO SECRET

The 6th annual “This Game is No Secret” runs from Feb. 2nd to the 8th, 2026. Teams across the country will again honor the legacy of Coach McLendon by wearing t-shirts with those words five words — **THIS GAME IS NO SECRET**. It is an opportunity for players, coaches, and fans to learn more about Coach McLendon, who is one of the greatest coaches in basketball history.



*John B. McLendon Jr.*

## WHAT WAS THE SECRET GAME?

In 1944, coach **John McLendon** at the North Carolina College for Negroes (now North Carolina Central) felt he had one of the best teams in the nation. The Eagles routinely defeated their opponents by lopsided margins. Only, there was no way for McLendon to know how his team in Durham, North Carolina stacked up against the nation's other heavyweights. The Eagles, like other black colleges, were banned from competing in the NCAA tournament and the NIT.

Across town, the Duke University Blue Devils won the Southern Conference championship that year, but they were hardly the best team on campus. Rather, another all-white squad on campus, the Medical School intramural team, was plowing through its opposition. These former college basketball stars from across the nation were at Duke because the Army and Navy had started World War II training programs there.



*Kelvin Sampson talks about the  
2nd Annual "This Game is No Secret"*

Despite Jim Crow laws that banned interaction, the YMCA chapters from Duke and North Carolina College had begun to meet on occasion in 1943, according to Scott Ellsworth's book, *The Secret Game* (published in 2015). During one of these meetings, a Duke student was boasting about the Medical School team's excellence. From this conversation, a game was born.

McLendon, the legendary coach who revolutionized the game with an up-tempo style and fastbreak offense, wanted to see how his team would fare. He set up the game in the North Carolina College gym. (The basketball arena at North Carolina Central is now named in his honor). He arranged a referee and scorekeeper. A black reporter who found out agreed not to write about it, and McLendon scheduled the game for a Sunday morning, March 12th, when most of Durham - including the police force - would be attending church. There were no spectators.

After a nervous start from both teams, the Eagles hit their stride. Their frenetic pace and fastbreak offense overwhelmed the squad from Duke, no different than other opponents. The Eagles won the game 88-44. Following a short break, players from the two teams mixed their squads and scrimmaged again.

No other news reporters or local police learned about the game until years later. A scorecard does not exist. Without question, the Secret Game was a landmark event, and within the next 25 years, college basketball was racially integrated in the south, due in part to the courage of those who arranged and participated in this game.



*"This Game is No Secret" promo video*



***The No. 1 pick in 2025 NBA Draft, Duke's Cooper Flagg***