

A close-up portrait of Oscar Robertson, an older African American man with grey hair, looking thoughtfully to the side with his hand resting on his chin. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

# portfolio

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## Oscar Robertson

BUSINESS ALUMNUS FOREVER  
CHANGES THE GAME

### Teaching Excellence

FACULTY EXPAND HORIZONS  
TO IMPACT CLASSROOM

### Emerging Leaders


UNDERGRADUATES EMBRACE  
UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

## ALUMNI PROFILE

With His Knack for Leadership, Oscar Robertson  
Finds the Keys to Success On—and Off—the Court  
BY WENDY BECKMAN AND JENNY S. REISING

# the big





The triple-double. Player of the century. The “Oscar Robertson Rule.” Think of “The Big O”—basketball great and University of Cincinnati alumnus Oscar Robertson—and these are just a few of the accomplishments that come to mind. But Robertson’s off-court leadership and business success are what have continued to set him apart from the rest of the playing field.

Robertson serves as CEO of five companies, including Oscar Robertson Solutions, LLC, Oscar Robertson Foods, Inc., Oscar Robertson Document Management Solutions, and Orchem Corporation, all in Fairfield, Ohio, and Oscar Robertson Media Ventures in Los Angeles. In recognition of his business leadership, the Center for Entrepreneurship Education and Research at UC presented him with the Lifetime Achievement Award for Entrepreneurship in May 2008. ▲

## A LIFE OF LEADERSHIP

Finding success on and off the basketball court takes hard work, a strong team, improvisation and discipline—lessons that Robertson learned early on while playing for the basketball team at Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis. “The coach was strict and set up the rules,” Robertson recalls with a smile. “He said, ‘If you don’t come to class, you’re off the team. If you don’t get good grades, you’re off the team. If you do anything off the court to embarrass the school, you’re off the team.’ So I think that being involved in sports means being structured in life.”

Robertson, who graduated in the top 10 percent of his high school class, carried these lessons with him to UC, where he led the Bearcats to the Final Four in his junior and senior seasons. He was also the first player to lead the NCAA in scoring for three consecutive seasons and win consensus player of the year honors three times.

After graduating with a bachelor’s degree in business administration, Robertson took his leadership skills to the Olympics, where he co-captained the gold medal-winning basketball team in 1960 along with Jerry West. In his second NBA season, he averaged the first and only triple double (30.8 points per game, 12.5 rebounds and 11.4 assists) in NBA history—before three-point shots existed.

As president of the NBA Players Association (1965–1974), Robertson made a lasting impact on the game by leading a class-action antitrust lawsuit against the NBA in 1970. He forever changed the business of all professional sports with the 1976 “Oscar Robertson Rule,” which removed restrictions on player movement imposed by the league’s master agreement with its players, and elevated the salaries of star athletes to that of stars in the entertainment world.

But Robertson paid a personal price for his actions. “After I got out of basketball, I was not able to participate in basketball at all,” Robertson says. Once he retired from the sport, he was “blacklisted” by NBA owners and has never been asked to coach or manage a team. But the basketball great did not let this setback keep him from achieving business success. He simply used his well-honed leadership skills to start his own small business.

## THE KEYS TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

“Sometimes in life, you have to evolve,” Robertson says. After initial forays into construction, real estate development and banking, he has found his niche in small, carefully chosen businesses. For example,



Orchem Corporation is a leader in the “green” movement and in the fight against infectious diseases. It’s also the leading minority-owned specialty chemicals manufacturer in the U.S. Robertson explains what piqued his interest in a scientific company.

“I first got involved because in high school, kids were playing on football fields that were infested with disease,” he says. “Especially in fields with artificial turf, the infection never goes away, and the schools don’t want to take responsibility if a kid gets hurt playing football. I got involved in this company because I wanted to make sure they neutralize the fields.”

Today, Orchem is garnering national attention for its introduction of Spectrum 24, a broad-spectrum antimicrobial, antifungal and antiviral disinfectant that can provide up to 24-hour residual effectiveness. It is particularly timely in light of the H1N1 epidemic.

But Robertson is modest about his company’s achievements, having learned through trial and error that success does not happen overnight. “We’re not setting the world on fire because it’s very difficult to do, especially in today’s economy,” he says. “But we’re holding our own.”



## HELPING OTHERS GET IN THE GAME

As for other entrepreneurs looking to start their own businesses, Robertson has some words of advice. “Success comes from using other people’s money, not your own. So try to get people to invest in your company,” he says. He also emphasizes patience as a virtue, cautioning entrepreneurs not to expect to hit a home run every time and to be wary of quick returns on investment. “People today want their money back instantly. But my attorney always told me if you can get 7 or 10 percent back on your investment, wonderful; if you start getting 15 or 25 percent back, don’t do it,” Robertson explains. “And I found out that he’s right.”

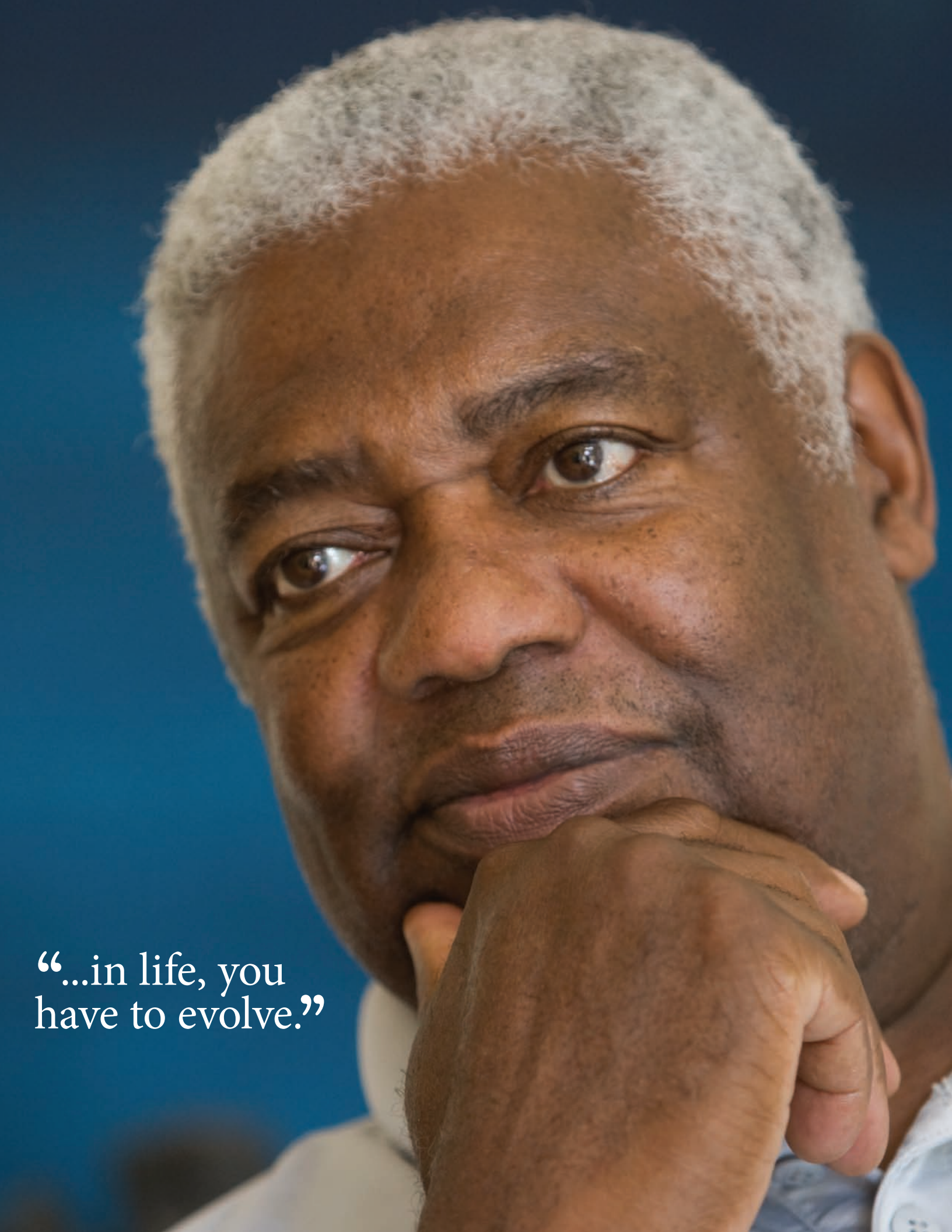
Robertson also encourages students to travel abroad to develop leadership skills and learn how to work with people from other cultures. On a personal note, his art collection, which consists of many pieces he’s collected during his travels around the world, reflects his own appreciation of other cultures.

Although Robertson takes pride in what he has achieved on and off the court, he also feels it’s important to give back. One way is through fundraising for UC. He and his wife, Yvonne, BS ’56, serve as co-chairs of UC’s \$1 billion *Proudly Cincinnati* capital campaign. And the couple’s Oscar and Yvonne Robertson Scholarship Fund at UC grants three scholarships annually. The Oscar and Yvonne Robertson Urban Education Scholarship is awarded to an undergraduate student from the College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services who plans to teach in urban schools. The Oscar and Yvonne Robertson Founders Scholarship is given to a student from the Cincinnati Scholarship competition. And the Oscar and Yvonne Robertson Incentive Scholarship is awarded to an incoming student in any program who has financial need and a minimum 2.8 grade point average.

## CELEBRATING SUCCESS

In September 2009, Robertson was inducted into the International Basketball Federation Hall of Fame in Madrid. And in 2010, he’ll have much to celebrate: the 50th anniversary of the NCAA championship, the 50th anniversary of his graduation from UC, the gold anniversary of his Olympic gold medal, and his golden wedding anniversary with Yvonne. For Robertson, whose leadership skills and hard work have led him to multiple achievements in sports, business and life, the future promises to bring continued success. ■

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