

BLACK BASEBALL AND THE NEGRO LEAGUES

As it flowed from its origin, part of the river of baseball history diverged at one point and formed a separate branch that paralleled the main stream for a half-century. Finally the waters were rejoined, making the river whole again.

During this separation, baseball was not complete. The majority of Americans went with the flow of the main stream, following its course intently, with only an occasional excursion to see the parallel branch.

Thus for a half-century, white Americans sat watching Major League Baseball, only vaguely aware of the shadowy world of black baseball that existed beyond the scope of their vision. To most white baseball observers, black ballplayers were as unreal as the shadows on Plato's wall. In this world of reflected images, there existed exceptionally talented players whose ability was unsurpassed anywhere.

Best known among these great black ballplayers in today's baseball world are Hall of Famers Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson. But as Satchel himself said, "There were many Satchels, many Joshs." And indeed there were. There, in the shadows of black baseball, were players who were yesteryear's equivalent of Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Barry Bonds, Lou Brock, Bob Gibson, Reggie Jackson, Lee Smith, David Justice, Gary Sheffield, Cecil Fielder, Tony Gwynn, Ken Griffey Jr., Frank Thomas, Barry Larkin, Fred McGriff, Albert Belle, Ricky Henderson, Mo Vaughn, Derek Jeter, Andruw Jones, C.C. Sabathia, and so many others. The list is almost endless.

Try to imagine post-World War II baseball without its black stars. Visualize baseball today without black stars complementing the white stars. Obviously, all great black ballplayers were not born after 1947 when Jackie Robinson re-integrated Major League Baseball. They were always there, required by custom and circumstance to play in their separate leagues.

This period of separation is remote from the memory of the majority of the current populace. Today's younger generation, as well as most of the older generation now, do not fully understand the sociological factors which prohibited black and white baseball players from engaging in competition together. Consequently, they know and understand even less about the men who were destined to demonstrate their abilities to a comparatively small segment of American society. Just who were these men who displayed their talent in virtual obscurity?

During the half-century of dual baseball development, more than 4,000 men plied their trade in the arenas of black baseball, many of whom were of major league caliber. Many of these possessed sufficient skills to have been first-line players in the major leagues, and the best of this group would have achieved stardom. Approximately two dozen of these stars shone with such magnificence as to have merited selection to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Extrapolating the past from the present, if the black leagues and the white leagues had been merged into a 30-team configuration, an average black team during this period of separation would have had 14 players on their roster who possessed major league talent. Seven of the first nine could have won starting positions in the major leagues, with the top three players being "stars." For any given year, two out of every three teams would have a player in their line-up with Hall of Fame qualifications. The better teams would have exceeded these parameters, while lesser teams would have failed to meet them.

Still, the greats, the near-greats, and the not-so-greats were there, unnoticed by the vast majority of America, until Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947 and finally opened the National Pastime to all men, regardless of the color of their skin.

What little exposure most white fans in larger cities got to the Negro Leagues came in the form of exhibition games against white major leaguers during barnstorming tours held during the off-season.

White major leaguers, looking to augment their baseball salaries, played exhibitions against black teams made up of the best Negro League players. That the black players not only held their own, but often beat the white teams, would hardly have been a surprise in a perfect world. Since that perfect world didn't exist, there was a lot on the line for the Negro Leaguers in those games. Buck O'Neil, black baseball's most famous spokesman, described the dynamics of these games in an interview with MLB.com:

"What a lot of people don't know is that we won a majority of those ballgames," O'Neil recalled. "Now that didn't mean we were better players than the Major Leaguers. We won the majority of the ballgames because the Major Leaguers were just making a payday. We

wanted to prove to the world that they weren't superior because they were Major Leaguers and we weren't inferior because we played in the Negro Leagues. We stretched that single into a double, that double into a triple. We stole home. The Major Leaguers couldn't afford to twist an ankle or break a finger in an exhibition ballgame, but, honey, we went all out."

In smaller cities and towns, black teams would often play against factory-league teams or local semi-pro teams—many of which were good enough to be considered of minor league quality. These exhibitions would take place both during and after the regular season.

Baseball was originally a gentleman's game played by members of rival athletic clubs for recreation. In the aftermath of the Civil War, baseball enjoyed a great surge in interest, activity, and growth. Americans of all classes, creeds, and races joined in the game that quickly grew to become our National Pastime. Baseball was then an amateur sport: some black Americans played on all-black clubs, while others played on integrated teams.

However, black ballplayers were excluded from participation by the National Association of Base Ball Players on December 11, 1868 when the governing body voted unanimously to bar "any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons." This was the first appearance of an official color line in baseball.

When baseball openly admitted the professional status of top clubs in subsequent seasons, pro teams were not bound by the amateur association's ruling. Thus, during the nineteenth century, black ballplayers appeared on integrated teams and some black teams played in integrated leagues. Two brothers—Moses Fleetwood Walker and Welday Walker—even played in the major leagues in 1884 for Toledo of the American Association. Gradually, however, black players began to be excluded from the white leagues and, by the beginning of the new century, there were no black players in what was grandiloquently called Organized Baseball.

Nevertheless, black Americans continued to play baseball. By necessity they played on all-black teams and, eventually, formed all-black leagues. The first black professional team was the Cuban Giants in 1885, but black teams played as independent clubs until the first black league was organized in 1920. In the decade prior to the founding of the first black major league, many independent black clubs had developed impressive enough rosters to be considered of big-league quality. The critical change was the first great migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest during and after World War I. That massive social change ensured that there were large enough concentrations of black Americans to support organized leagues.

That year Rube Foster, considered the father of black baseball, founded the Negro National League. Three years later, in 1923, Ed Bolden formed the Eastern Colored League. These two leagues operated successfully for several years before they fell victim to financial difficulties. Three other black major leagues—the American Negro League (1929), the Negro Southern League (1932) and the East-West League (1932) operated for a single season but were not able to continue on a sound fiscal basis.

Many of the best players in the original Negro National League migrated to the Negro Southern League after the NNL's break-up; the NSL operated before and after 1932 as a minor league. And most of those players left the NSL after only one year to return to a newly reformed Negro National League, which began play in 1933. The Chicago American Giants played in both incarnations of the Negro National League, as well as the NSL in 1932. The Indianapolis ABCs also played in the first NNL and the NSL.

The new NNL and the Negro American League (chartered in 1937) both thrived until the color line was broken. During their existence, the Negro Leagues played eleven World Series (1924–27 and 1942–48) and created their own All-Star Game in 1933. The East-West Game became the biggest black sports attraction in the country.

The most famous of the Negro League clubs were the Homestead Grays and the Kansas City Monarchs, the latter ironically owned by a white businessman. Homestead, which featured such great players as Josh Gibson, Buck Leonard and Cool Papa Bell, won three Negro League World Series (1943, 1944, and 1948), and nine straight NNL pennants from 1937–45. That unparalleled streak included five years in which the Grays won both halves of a split season schedule. In three other years (1939, 1940, and 1942), the NNL did not play a

TOP 100 BLACK BASEBALL/NEGRO LEAGUE PLAYERS

Alpha List

Allen, Newt	Elite-18	Charleston, Oscar	Titan-3	Grant, Leroy	LDC-1	Mendez, Jose	ATG-5	Smith, Hilton	Elite-13
Bankhead, Sam	ATG-12	Cooper, Andy	ATG-14	Harris, Vic	ATG-8	Monroe, Bill	ATG-10	Stearnes, Turkey	Elite-7
Barnhill, Dave	ATG-33	Crutchfield, Jimmie	ATG-27	Hill, Pete	Elite-4	Moore, Dobie	SBC-4	Strong, Ted	ATG-40
Beckwith, John	Elite-19	Dandridge, Ray	Elite-3	Holland, Bill	LDC-8	Oms, Alejandro	ATG-22	Suttles, Mule	Elite-12
Bell, Cool Papa	Titan-9	Davis, Piper	ATG-2	Hughes, Sammy T.	Elite-23	O'Neil, Buck	ATG-11	Taylor, Ben	Elite-17
Bell, William Sr.	LDC-5	Davis, Steel Arm	LDC-7	Irvin, Monte	Elite-2	Paige, Satchel	Titan-2	Thomas, Clint	ATG-7
Benjamin, Jerry	LDC-12	Day, Leon	Elite-10	Jenkins, Fats	ATG-15	Parnell, Roy	ATG-38	Tiant, Luis	ATG-36
Benson, Gene	LDC-2	DeMoss, Bingo	Elite-21	Johnson, Heavy	ATG-44	Petway, Bruce	ATG-16	Torriente, Cristobal	Elite-6
Brewer, Chet	ATG-25	Dihigo, Martin	Titan-12	Johnson, Home Run	Elite-26	Poles, Spot	Elite-16	Trent, Ted	ATG-30
Brooks, Chester	ATG-34	Dismukes, Dizzy	ATG-29	Johnson, Judy	Elite-11	Radcliffe, Alex	ATG-3	Warfield, Frank	ATG-19
Brown, Barney	ATG-21	Dixon, Rap	ATG-13	Jones, Slim	SBC-5	Radcliffe, Double Duty	ATG-1	Wells, Willie	Titan-7
Brown, Dave	ATG-37	Donaldson, John	ATG-4	Kimbro, Henry	ATG-24	Redding, Dick	Elite-15	White, Chaney	ATG-26
Brown, Larry	SBC-2	Duncan, Frank	ATG-17	Leonard, Buck	Titan-5	Robinson, Neil	ATG-23	Wickware, Frank	ATG-35
Brown, Willard	ATG-18	Duncan, Frank	LDC-11	Lloyd, John Henry	Titan-4	Rogan, Bullet	Titan-8	Williams, Smokey Joe	Titan-6
Byrd, Bill	Elite-20	Earle, Frank	ATG-43	Lundy, Dick	Elite-5	Rogers, Nat	LDC-9	Wilson, Artie	SBC-6
Campanella, Roy	Elite-14	Easterling, Howard	ATG-42	Lyons, Jimmie	ATG-20	Sampson, Tommy	ATG-41	Wilson, Jud	Elite-8
Cannady, Rev	Elite-25	Foster, Rube	Elite-1	Mackey, Biz	Titan-11	Santop, Louis	Elite-9	Winters, Nip	ATG-6
Carr, George	SBC-1	Foster, Willie	Titan-10	Malarcher, Dave	ATG-47	Scales, George	ATG-9	Wright, Bill	Elite-22
	LDC-2	Francis, Bill	LDC-10	Marcelle, Oliver H.	Elite-24	Seay, Dick	LDC-3		
	ATG-39	Gardner, Jelly	ATG-28	Mathis, Verdell	ATG-32	Shively, George	ATG-31		
		Gibson, Josh	Titan-1	McNair, Hurley	LDC-6	Smith, Chino	SBC-3		

Titan Greatest of the Great Elite Hall of Fame-Caliber Career ATG All-Time Great LDC Long and Distinguished Career SBC Short but Brilliant Career

The Titans

GIBSON, JOSH Joshua; B12.21.1911 Buena Vista GA; D1.20.1947 Pittsburgh PA; BR/TR/6-4/210; d1929; HF 1972; b-Jerry; s-Josh Jr; C, OF, 3b, 1b
 Hom 1929-31; Pit C 1932-36; [Dom 1937]; **Hom** 1937-40; [Mexico 1940-41]; **Hom** 1942-46
 Legendary hitting feats and fine all-around defensive skills lend weight to the argument that Gibson was the greatest catcher ever, black or white. Gibson, anchor of the great Homestead Grays and Pittsburgh Crawfords clubs, stroked out at 36, still a remarkable hitter but no longer in shape to catch.

PAIGE, SACHEL Robert LeRoy; B7.7.1906 Mobile AL; D6.8.1982 Kansas City MO; BR/TR/6'4"/180; d1927; HF 1971; ML 1948-49; 1951-53;1965; P
 Bir 1927-30; Bal BS 1930; Cle C 1931; **Pit C** 1931-37; KC 1935-36; [Dom 1937] Santo Domingo All-Stars 1937; New E 1938; [Mexico 1938]; [Satchel Paige's All-Stars 1939];
KC 1939-48; NY BY 1943; Mem 1943; Phi S 1946; KC 1950; Phi S 1950; Chi AG 1951; KC 1955; [OB minors 1956-58 1961 1965-66]

The most famous and probably greatest Negro Leagues moundsman, the seemingly ageless Paige toiled for 25 years in baseball's Jim Crow era. Paige, a right-hander with great control of a humming fastball, curve, and change-up, was the model of a pitcher for many years—and not just for black fans.

CHARLESTON, OSCAR Oscar McKinley "Charlie"; B10.14.1896 Indianapolis IN D10.5.1954 Philadelphia PA; BL/TL/6-0/190; d1915 HF 1976; CF, 1B, M
Ind ABC 1915-18; Lin S 1915-16; Bow ABC 1916; Chi AG 1919; **Ind ABC** 1920; STL G 1921; **Ind ABC** 1922-23; **Har** 1924-27; Hil 1928-29; Hom 1930-31; **Pit C** 1932-38; Tol C 1939; Ind C 1940; Phi S 1941 1942-44 1946-50

Was Charleston the greatest center fielder in baseball history? He could do it all in every facet of the game, and gained well-deserved comparisons to Ruth, Cobb, and Speaker. Winning titles in several different leagues, he played 27 years and was as famous in Latin America as in the U.S.

LOYD, JOHN HENRY "Pop"; "El Cuchara"; B4.25.1884 Palatka FL; D3.19.1964 Atlantic City NJ; BL/TR/5-11/180; d1906; HF 1977; SS, 2b, 1b, C, M
 Cub X 1906; Phi G 1907-09; Chi LG 1910; **Lin** 1911-15; Chi AG 1914-17; Lin S 1915 Bro RG 1918-20; Bac 1919; Col B 1921; Bac 1922; Hil 1923; Bac 1924-25; **Lin** 1926-30; Har S 1931; Bac 1931-32

A great shortstop comparable to Honus Wagner, Lloyd was the Dead Ball Era's top Negro Leaguer. He combined smarts and skills in every area of the game into a dominating; package, slashing hits all over the field and fielding flawlessly. Babe Ruth once called Lloyd the greatest baseball player ever.

LEONARD, BUCK Walter Fenner; B9.8.1907 Rocky Mount NC; D11.27.1997 Rocky Mount NC; BL/TL/5-10/185; d1933; HF 1972; 1b, OF
 Bro RG 1933; **Hom** 1934-50; [Mexico 1951 1955]; [OB minors 1953]
 A popular left-handed-batting first baseman who played 17 years for the Homestead Grays, Leonard hit for average and power, took walks, fielded his position as well as anyone in any league, and possessed smarts and character. He was a star south of the border as well as in the U.S.

WILLIAMS, SMOKEY JOE Joseph "Joe"; "Cyclone"; "Yank"; B4.6.1886; Seguin TX; D2.25.1951; New York; NY; BR/TR/6-4/190; d1911; HF 1999; P, M Chi G 1910-11
Lin 1912-23; Moh 1913; Chi AG 1914; Bac 1916; Hil 1917; Bro RG 1924; **Hom** 1925-32; Det W 1932
 The right-handed Williams was early black baseball's best pitcher, as famous in his time as Satchel Paige became. In early years, with the Lincoln Giants, "Cyclone" threw harder than anyone, and years later, with Homestead, won with smarts and command. Williams was especially good in competition against white major leaguers.

WELLS, WILLIE James "The Devil"; "El Diablo"; B8.10.1905; Austin TX; D1.22.1989; Austin TX; BR/TR/5-8/160; d1924; HF 1997; s-Willie Jr; SS, 3b, 2b
STL S 1924-31; Det W 1932; Hom 1932; KC 1932; Chi AG 1933-34; KC 1934; Chi AG 1935; **New E** 1936-39; [Mex 1940-41]; **New E** 1942; [Mex 1943-44]; Chi AG 1944; Mem 1944; NY BY 1945-46; Bal EG 1946; Ind/Cin 1947; Mem 1948; [Can 1949-51]; Bir 1954
 Wells succeeded "Pop" Lloyd as the Negro Leagues' greatest shortstop. He won three titles with the St. Louis Stars, then contributed to other great teams (Homestead, Kansas City, Chicago, and Newark). While not blessed with a great throwing arm, Wells played excellent defense, hit the ball, worked hard, and knew the game.

ROGAN, BULLET Wilbur; B7.28.1889; Oklahoma City OK; D3.4.1967; Kansas City MO; BR/TR/5-7/180; d1920; HF 1998; P, OF, 1b, 2b, SS, M, U
KC 1920-38
 Some feel that Rogan was the hardest thrower in black baseball. A star for nearly 20 years with the Kansas City Monarchs, the durable righty threw several pitches with great efficiency and also hit well enough to play the outfield. In addition, he served as player-manager for several years.

BELL, COOL PAPA James Thomas; B5.17.1903; Starkville MS; D3.7.1991; St. Louis MO; BB/TL/5-11/150 d1922; HF 1974; b-Fred; CF, LF, 1b, P
STL S 1922-31; Det W 1932; KC 1932; **Hom** 1932; **Pit C** 1933-38; KC 1934; [Dom 1937]; [Mexico 1938-41]; Chi AG 1942; Mem 1942; **Hom** 1943-46
 Speed was Bell's key marker, and he used it on the basepaths and in center field. Arguably the fastest player ever, the well-liked Bell didn't hit with power, but drove opponents to distraction anyway. He played for champions in St. Louis and Pittsburgh and also starred during his four years in Mexico.

FOSTER, WILLIE William Hendrick "Bill"; B6.12.1904; Calvert TX; D9.16.1978; Lorman MS; BB/TL/6.1/195; d1923; HF 1996; b-Rube; Col Alcorn; P, M
 Mem 1923-24; Bir 1925; **Chi AG** 1923-30; Hom 1931; KC 1931; **Chi AG** 1932-35; Pit C 1936; **Chi AG** 1937; Mem 1938
 This tall lefty pitched for the Chicago American Giants (for a time under his half-brother, Rube Foster) for more than a decade. An early proponent of the slider, he was fast with good control. Foster was also a member of the 1931 Homestead Grays, considered by many to be black baseball's greatest team.

MACKAY, BIZ Raleigh; B7.27.1897; Eagle Pass TX; D9.22.1965; Los Angeles CA; BB/TR/6-0/200; d1920; HF 2006; C, SS, 3b, M
Ind ABC 1920; Lin 1920; **Hil** 1923-31; Phi S 1933-35; New D 1935; Was EG 1936-37; Bal EG 1938-39; New E 1939-41 1945-47 1950
 No one played better defense behind the plate than Mackey, who was blessed with a great arm, agility, and strong baseball smarts (he later managed). In addition, he was a fearsome switch-hitter with some power. Mackey played organized black baseball from age 21 until he was past 50.

DIHIGO, MARTIN B5.25.1905; Matanzas, Cuba; D5.22.1971; Cienfuegos, Cuba; BR/TR/6-3/190; d1923; HF 1977; 2b, OF, P, 1b, 3b, SS, C, M
 Cub SE 1923-27; Hom 1928; Hil 1929-30; Cub SE 1930; Hil 1931; Bal BS 1931; [Venezuela 1933]; NY C 1935-36; [Dom 1937]; [Mexico 1940-44]; NY C 1945 Dihigo could—and did—play every position on the diamond in his 22-year career, much of it spent in Mexico and his native Cuba. An all-around hitter with power and speed who also won over 200 games as a pitcher, Dihigo later served as minister of sports for Fidel Castro.

The Elites

FOSTER, RUBE Andrew "Jock"; B9.17.1879; Calvert TX; D12.9.1930; Kankakee IL; BR/TR/6-2/200; d1902; HF 1981; b-Willie; P, 1b, OF, M
 Chi UG 1902; Cub XG 1903; Phi G 1904-06; Chi LG 1907-10; **Chi AG** 1911-26
 He was a great pitcher, but Foster is most lauded for his managing skill and founding of the Negro National League. Finished on the mound by the early 1910s, Foster excelled as; manager of the Chicago American Giants. He later organized the NNL and ran the league until stepping down in 1926.

IRVIN, MONTE Monford Merrill; B2.25.1919 Halesburg AL; BR/TR/6-1/190 d1937 HF1973 Col Lincoln Mil 1943-45 ML 1949-56; CF, SS, 3b
New E 1937-42; [Mexico 1942]; **New E** 1945-48; [OB minors 1949-50, 1957]
 A star with the Newark Eagles by age 21, Irvin had the speed and defensive ability to play center field and shortstop, and hit for power as well as average. Irvin played in several Negro All-Star games, won championships in Latin America, and had an excellent career in the majors.

THE NEGRO LEAGUES