

**THE NEGRO  
LEAGUES  
AND EARLY BASE  
BALL**

# THE ORIGINS OF “BASE BALL”

- The exact origins of the sport are unknown; different cultures around the world have been playing sports involving balls and sticks for thousands of years
- It is thought that baseball likely shares the same origin as the game of Cricket. The theory is that the original idea for these games was brought to England by people from the Flemish region of Netherlands and Belgium. These people played a similar ball and stick game, and the word “Cricket” is believed to be derived from their word, “krick,” which means a club or stick. It is generally accepted by historians that American base ball evolved from an English game known variously as base, base-ball, or rounders.
- The origins of our modern idea of American baseball came in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. One major contribution comes from Abner Doubleday, who is credited with the idea of the diamond shaped field. The rules were later put together by bookseller Alexander Cartwright, who created a base ball team known as the Knickerbockers in 1839. Very quickly, the game of base ball became a popular success.
  - The Knickerbockers began the process of formalizing the rules they used (eliminating “soaking” or hitting base runners with the baseball and establishing foul territory, etc.) in 1845. Establishing foul territory was a significant step in separating what would become the New York Game from the Massachusetts Game and Town Ball, which was popular in Philadelphia. The Knickerbockers modeled their club after the gentlemen’s clubs that had been organized in cricket. They seemingly had more rules and regulations about gentlemanly behavior than the game itself, such as being fined for using inappropriate language.
- The oldest Major League Baseball teams, the Atlanta Braves and the Chicago Cubs, date back to about 1871, several decades after the sport’s official beginnings. It would be quite some time before the concept of a Negro League would be fully organized and established.
- At this time, the sport was slightly different than the sport we know today. For starters, the name itself was written as “base ball,” instead of the one word “baseball” that we know today.
- By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, baseball teams were appearing in different countries, such as Cuba, Australia, and Japan.
- Baseball gloves or mitts were seldom used until the 1890s, and did not begin to resemble modern gloves with webbing until the 1920s.

# THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEGRO LEAGUE

- In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the sport of base ball was booming in America; people of all groups and backgrounds wanted to take part.
- African-Americans began to play baseball in the late 1800s on military teams, college teams, and company teams. They eventually found their way to professional teams with white players. Moses Fleetwood Walker and Bud Fowler were among the first to participate. However, racism and “Jim Crow” laws would force them from these teams by 1900. Thus, black players formed their own units, “barnstorming” around the country to play anyone who would challenge them.
  - While these early teams were predominantly African American, there were also many Latin Americans playing alongside them.
- The term “Negro League” is usually used to describe the more organized league structure developed around 1920, but is also used to apply to predominantly African American teams in general.
  - The first official African American team established was the Cuban Giants in 1885. Consisting of no Cuban players, as well as being located in New York, the Cuban Giants were very skilled players. They had little trouble defeating the white teams around them.
- However, these African Americans teams remained fairly disorganized until Andrew “Rube” Foster, a former player and manager, began organizing a more official league in 1920. This league became know as The Negro National League, and rival leagues began popping up around the country. n 1920, an organized league structure was formed under the guidance of Andrew “Rube” Foster—a former player, manager, and owner for the Chicago American Giants. In a meeting held at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City, Mo., Foster and a few other Midwestern team owners joined to form the Negro National League. Soon, rival leagues formed in Eastern and Southern states, bringing the thrills and innovative play of black baseball to major urban centers and rural country sides in the U.S., Canada, and Latin America. The Leagues maintained a high level of professional skill and became centerpieces for economic development in many black communities.

# THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEGRO LEAGUE CONT.

- From 1920-1955, over 30 communities-- located primarily- in the Midwest, northeast, and south--were home to franchises organized into a number of leagues, some lasting only one-year. However, the term "Negro Leagues," refers to the highest level of play for black baseball during segregation. Over the years, many of these teams reorganized or moved to different communities, changing names, personnel-, and ownership.
  - ORGANIZED LEAGUES:
    - Negro National League--1920-31
    - Southern Negro League --1920
    - Eastern Colored League --1923-28
    - Negro Southern League--1926, 32, 45
    - American Negro League--1929
    - East-West League--1932
    - Negro National League--1933-48
    - Negro American League--1937-60
  - Texas Region Team: Houston Eagles
- In 1945, Major League Baseball's Brooklyn Dodgers recruited Jackie Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs. Robinson now becomes the first African-American in the modern era to play on a Major League roster.
  - While this historic event was a key moment in baseball and civil rights history, it prompted the decline of the Negro Leagues. The best black players were now recruited for the Major Leagues, and black fans followed.
- The last Negro Leagues teams folded in the early 1960s, but their legacy lives on through the surviving players and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, where team and player memorabilia and history is housed in Kansas City, Missouri.

# TEXAS LEAGUES

- Early black baseball teams in Texas were primarily barnstorming semiprofessionals but included some of the best baseball in the nation. The Fort Worth Wonders formed in 1905 and featured at different times George “Dibo” Johnson and Louis “Big Bertha” Santop from Tyler, who both would find recognition as some of the greatest black baseball stars of the era.
- Several times during this period attempts were made to form professional leagues in Texas. One of those was a circuit started in 1916 called the Colored Texas League. Fort Worth native Hiram McGar served as league president and also manager of the Fort Worth Black Panthers. Other cities in the league included Cleburne (Yellow Jackets), Dallas, Waco, Houston, San Antonio, Beaumont and Galveston. The teams played a 142-game schedule but travel was difficult and expensive, and it is unknown whether the league finished the season.
- In 1920, another attempt at organization led to the formation of the Texas Negro League. McGar again was a leader in the organization and was assisted by A.S. Wells of Dallas. Wichita Falls (Black Spudders), San Antonio (Black Indians), Beaumont, Houston (Black Buffalos), Dallas (Black Giants) and Fort Worth formed the nucleus of teams the first year. Austin (Black Senators), Abilene (Eagles), Paris (Giants), San Angelo and Waco also would field teams in later years. This organization lasted through the 1927 season, when poor economics and other circumstances led to its disbanding.
- The next attempt at forming a professional black league happened in 1929. Quincy Gilmore, a former secretary of the Negro National League, called several black community leaders and met at the Pythian Temple in Dallas. Shreveport, Dallas, Houston, Tulsa, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, Wichita Falls and Fort Worth were all represented and all agreed to form teams. These teams, as had been done in former leagues, would play in the ballparks of the white Texas League teams when they were on the road and would usually adopt their nickname, though prefaced with the word black.
- It was recorded that one game in Dallas between the Black Giants and the Fort Worth Black Panthers drew almost 6,000 fans. William Tresivant of Fort Worth served as the league’s first commissioner, and the league lasted through the 1932 season. The Great Depression caused too many financial difficulties for the league to survive, as was the case with many other minor leagues, both black and white.



Louis “Big Bertha” Santop



Fort Worth Black Panthers Uniform

# TEXAS LEAGUES CONT.

- The Depression did not deter black ballplayers from playing the game they loved but caused them to return to barnstorming and amateur organizations. The Fort Worth Black Cats, the Mineola Black Spiders, the Waco Tigers, the Jasper Steers and the Dallas Brown Bombers played all over Texas and as far north as Canada. These teams and a few others were recognized as having some of the greatest black baseball talent not in the Negro National or American leagues, and many of these players went on to play in those leagues
- When integration of Major League Baseball occurred in 1947, many of the great stars of the Negro professional leagues turned their attention to playing in the major leagues. This led to an economic decline of professional black leagues, but it was also the only time a Texas city was part of the Negro American League. In 1949, the Newark Eagles were sold and moved to Houston. The Houston Eagles had a two-year run before being sold and moved to New Orleans, but manager “Red” Parnell and Bill “Fireball” Beverly led the team to a competitive finish.
- Integration for the Texas League happened shortly thereafter when Dave Hoskins was signed to play for the Dallas Eagles. Maury Wills and Eddie Moore signed with the Fort Worth Cats in 1955, and many other teams followed suit. Shreveport was the lone holdout in the Texas League, and teams visiting Shreveport were given roster exemptions to add white ballplayers to their teams because black players were still not allowed to play in Shreveport. Although integration removed the need to organize professional black leagues, black semiprofessional leagues still offered opportunities not yet offered to all.
- The South Texas Negro League and the West Texas Colored League were two examples of strong semiprofessional competition throughout Texas. For many years, a Texas “colored” team championship was held in Waco but was moved to Fort Worth when a tornado tore through Waco’s Katy Park. These segregated leagues also led to an unexpected story when Jerry Craft, who currently is the mayor of Jacksboro, became the first white player in an all-black league. His story is being chronicled by author Kathleen Sullivan in her tentatively titled book *Our White Boy*, due to be printed by the Southern Methodist University Press Sports Series.
- Today the black community is challenged with reintroducing baseball to the black youth. Football and basketball have a stronghold with many in these communities; however, Major League Baseball’s RBI program and other efforts have been formed to spur renewed interest in baseball.



Dave Hoskins



Maury Wills

# PLAYER & TEAM PROFILES

- From the late 1800s through the end of the official Negro Leagues, more than 2,500 men and women contributed as players, coaches, managers, and officials in African American Baseball.

# ANDREW "RUBE" FOSTER



- He was recognized as the father of the Negro Leagues, and Foster's career exemplifies the essence of black baseball. As a raw talent rookie pitcher soon after the turn of the century, the big Texan was credited with 51 victories in 1902, including a win over the great Rube Waddell, the game in which Foster received his nickname.
- The son of Sarah and Andrew Foster, the youngster had been named after his minister father but would ever afterward be called by his earned nickname. Soon after completing the eighth grade in Calvert, Texas, the youthful Foster began his baseball career pitching with the Waco Yellow Jackets in his native state. In 1902 he traveled North and joined Frank Leland's Chicago Union Giants. His first appearance with the team was as an unsuccessful pinch hitter, but whatever first impression he made was quickly erased when he took the mound, as he lost only one game in three months with the team, after which he pitched briefly with a white semipro ballclub at Otsego, Michigan, before returning to the top black teams the following season.
- Foster is known as the best African American pitcher of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, partly due to his calm and calculated appearance on the mound. He is known to have smiled while facing batters during tough situations, as he believed that it unnerved the other team's players.
- He used his talents to manage the Chicago American Giants in the 1920s, who earned the first three pennants in the Negro National League.
- After establishing the best black baseball team, Foster organized the first black baseball league, the Negro National League, serving as president and treasurer while overseeing its development into a first-class enterprise. While booking games for his own team, he had encountered difficulties with East Coast promoter Nat Strong, and considered the formation of a black league as the solution to scheduling problems created by Strong's iron-handed control of teams in the East.
  - As president of the league, Foster was unsalaried but took 5 percent of the gate receipts of every league game and distributed as he chose
- The sharp mind that he had exhibited in his prime years began to show effects of the stressful situation under which he had labored for years, and his mental deterioration began to manifest itself in 1925, when he thought that his players had "laid down on him." By early September of 1926, Foster was in a mental hospital for psychopaths, after having shown evidence of mental unbalance for several weeks. For the next four years after his nervous breakdown, he was never to leave the state asylum at Kankakee, Illinois, until his death two weeks before Christmas in 1930. Fans and admirers lined up for three days to view the casket.
- Rube Foster's career covered the entire spectrum of baseball participation, from the playing field to the front office, and he excelled at each level. He was black baseball's greatest manager, the man most responsible for black baseball's continued existence, and a man almost bigger than life itself. In recognition of his contributions to baseball, Foster was voted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1981.

Career: 1902-1926

Positions: p, 1b, of, manager, executive, owner, founder, officer (Negro National League)  
Teams: Chicago Union Giants (1902), Cuban X Giants (1903), Philadelphia Giants (1904-1906), Leland Giants (1907-1910), Chicago American Giants (1911-1926)

Bats: Right

Throws: Right

Height: 6' 2" Weight: 200

Born: September 17, 1879,  
Calvert, Texas

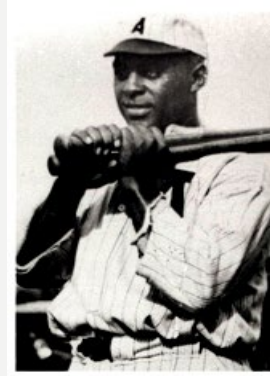
Died: December 9, 1930,

Kankakee, Illinois

National Baseball Hall of Fame  
Inductee (1981)



# OSCAR "CHARLIE" CHARLESTON



- As a hitter, the popular barrel chested, spindly legged slugger par excellence was often compared to Babe Ruth. Earlier in his career, his speedy, slashing style on the basepaths earned him comparison with Ty Cobb, and defensively his superb play from a shallow centerfield position was reminiscent of Tris Speaker. Jocko Conlon, a Hall of Fame umpire, made this comparison, calling him "the great Negro player of that time" and concurring that he was a beautiful center fielder, comparable to Speaker, and a great hitter. After the 1924 season, Former Charleston teammate Ben Taylor, a longtime star first baseman and manager, declared that Charleston was the "greatest outfielder that ever lived ... greatest of all colors. He can cover more ground than any man I have ever seen. His judging of flyballs borders on the uncanny."
- His father was a construction worker and his mother's father was a carpenter who had been employed in the construction of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Oscar was the seventh of eleven children and, as a youngster in Indianapolis, he was batboy for the local ABCs ballclub. At age fifteen, he left home and served a stint in the Army, where he ran track (23 seconds for the 220-yard dash) and played baseball while stationed in the Philippines with the 24th Infantry. In 1914 he was the only black baseball player in the Manila League.
- Returning home, the young athlete joined the Indianapolis ABCs in 1915 as a pitcher-outfielder and made a strong showing in his rookie season. His aggressive play on the diamond was evident even in his first year in top competition, when he and Bingo DeMoss were arrested for assaulting an umpire and causing a riot. Later in his career Charleston was known for engaging in fights at various times with a member of the Ku Klux Klan and several Cuban soldiers. His fearlessness was an attribute that helped the team win a championship the following year, with Charleston contributing a .360 average in the playoff series over Rube Foster's Chicago American Giants.
- In his prime, the well-honed blend of power and speed was unparalleled by any player in black baseball. One of the fastest men in the game and an instinctive, aggressive base runner, he was rough and tumble, sliding hard with spikes high. At bat he had few equals and, as an excellent drag bunter, he also used his tremendous speed to bunt his way on base. In the field his combination of great range, good hands, powerful arm, and superior baseball instincts was unsurpassed, allowing him always to get a good jump, robbing batters of "sure" hits.
- Although approaching his fortieth birthday and well past his prime, Charleston hit for averages of .363, .450, .310, .304, and .356 with the Pittsburgh Crawfords and was selected to the first three East- West All Star games as a first baseman. Although records are incomplete, the hard-hitting slugger ended his twenty-seven year career credited with a .357 lifetime batting average and 151 home runs. He also fashioned a .326 batting average in exhibitions against major league opposition and .361 batting average for nine Cuban winter seasons, including a .405 mark in 1921-1922.
- After his days as a playing manager ended, he continued as a bench manager with the Philadelphia Stars through 1950, taking a year off in 1945 to take the helm of Branch Rickey's Brooklyn Brown Dodgers. He returned to the managerial ranks in 1954, guiding the Indianapolis Clowns to a championship in his last season before falling victim to a heart attack. During his thirty- nine year career he was associated with fourteen different teams, as player and manager. He also assisted Branch Rickey in scouting the Negro Leagues to find the player to break baseball's color line. He was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1976, a fitting tribute to a man who might well have been the greatest all-around ballplayer in black baseball history.

Career: 1915-1941

Positions: cf, 1b, manager (1942-1954)

Teams: Indianapolis ABCs (1915 1918, 1920, 1922-1923), New York Lincoln Stars (1915-1916), Bowser's ABCs (1916), Chicago American Giants (1919), St. Louis Giants (1921), Harrisburg Giants (1924-1927), Hilldale Daisies (1928-1929), Homestead Grays (1930-1931), Pittsburgh Crawfords (1932-1938), Toledo Crawfords (1939), Indianapolis Crawfords (1940) Philadelphia Stars (1941, 1942-1944, 1946-1950); Brooklyn Brown Dodgers (1945), Indianapolis Clowns (1954)

Bats: Left

Throws: Left

Height: 6' 0" Weight: 190

Born: October 14, 1896, Indianapolis, Indiana

Died: October 6, 1954, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

National Baseball Hall of Fame Inductee (1976)

# ROBERT LEROY "SATCHEL" PAIGE



- Regarded as the nearest thing to a legend that ever came out of the Negro Leagues, this tall, lanky right-hander parlayed a pea-sized fastball, nimble wit, and a colorful personality into a household name that is recognized by people who know little about baseball itself and even less about the players who performed in the Jim Crow era of organized baseball. His name has become synonymous with the barnstorming exhibitions played between traveling black teams and their white counterparts.
- His generally accepted birth date is July 7, 1906, in Mobile, Alabama, but no one really knows the true date, and Satchel maintained an air of mystery about his age throughout his career. The only certainty about his birth is that it was sometime in the 20th century. As one of a dozen children, he learned early to fend for himself. He rarely attended school and frequently got into mischief.
  - When he was a youngster he carried suitcases at the train station for tips. Once he attempted to steal a man's satchel but the owner ran him down and cuffed him about the head while recovering his property. A friend who witnessed the incident gave him the nickname "Satchel," which young LeRoy hated. In later years he concocted various versions of the origin of his nickname that were more socially acceptable.
- He was advertised as guaranteed to strike out the first nine batters he faced in exhibition games, and he almost invariably fulfilled his billing. Satchel frequently warmed up by throwing twenty straight pitches across a chewing gum wrapper that was being used for home plate. His "small" fastball was described by some hitters as looking like a half dollar. Others said that he wound up with a pumpkin and threw a pea. But Biz Mackey had the best story about how small his fastball looked. He said that once Satchel threw the ball so hard that the ball disappeared before it reached the catcher's mitt. The stories are endless. But the facts are also impressive.
- As the oldest rookie ever to play major league baseball, he registered a 6-1 record and a 2.48 ERA down the stretch to help pitch the Indians to the pennant and World Series victory that year.
- In 1971, on the proudest day of his life, Satchel was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, becoming the first player elected from the Negro Leagues. In the years after his induction, Satch was continuing to follow his own rare advice, "Don't look back, something might be gaining on you," when, indeed, something finally did catch up with him. On June 8, 1982, death stilled the baseball immortal.

Career: 1926-1950

Position: p

Teams: Chattanooga Black Lookouts (1926-1927), Birmingham Black Barons (1927-1930), Baltimore Black Sox (1930), Cleveland Cubs (1931), Pittsburgh Crawfords (1931-1937), Kansas City Monarchs (1935-1936, 1939-1948, 1950, 1955), Santo Domingo (1937), Santo Domingo All-Stars (1937), Newark Eagles (1938), Mexican League (1938), Satchel Paige's All-Stars (1939), New York Black Yankees (1943), Memphis Red Sox (1943), Philadelphia Stars (1946, 1950), major leagues (1948-1949, 1951-1953, 1965), Chicago American Giants (1951), minor leagues (1956-1958, 1961, 1965-1966), Indianapolis Clowns (1967)

Bats: Right

Throws: Right

Height: 6' 4" Weight: 180

Born: July 7, 1906, Mobile, Alabama

Died: June 8, 1982, Kansas City, Missouri  
National Baseball Hall of Fame Inductee (1971)

# THE HOUSTON EAGLES

- When Jackie Robinson broke the major league baseball color barrier in 1947, segregated baseball experienced a dramatic decline in popularity. Black fans flocked by the thousands to integrated games, while Negro League games floundered. The loss in popularity among black fans proved so strong that the NNL closed after the 1948 season. Some of the NNL's surviving teams joined the Negro American League, including the Newark Eagles, champions of the 1946 Negro League World Series. The once mighty Eagles saw their star players, like Don Newcombe and Monte Irvin, sign with white teams. The team owners decided to combat the loss of revenue caused by integration by moving the team to a segregated southern town with a large African-American population and a rich baseball history. As a result, Effa Manley sold the team to W. H. Young, who relocated the team to Houston in 1949.
- For two years the Houston Eagles competed in the Negro American League. The move to Houston was not warmly embraced by some of the players accustomed to living in Newark, New Jersey. Pitcher Max Manning failed to report to training camp, holding out for more money. Also, pitcher Leon Day and third baseman Ray Dandridge refused to move and were sold by the team.
- The players who joined the team in Houston did possess talent. Outfielder Bob Harvey and pitcher/right fielder Johnny Davis were two of the leading batters in the NAL, and catcher Leon Ruffin had the longest tenure of any current Negro League catcher. Unfortunately, the Houston fans knew none of the players and attendance at Eagle games remained low. Low attendance proved a common theme for all of the NAL teams, but the Eagles were also hurt by the fact that they finished in last place during both of their years in Houston. The interest in the team among black Houstonians proved so low that the Houston Informer (see HOUSTON INFORMER AND TEXAS FREEMAN), the largest black newspaper in the South, only covered the team's games sporadically under editors C. F. Richardson and Carter Wesley. Finally, after the 1950 season, the Eagles moved again, leaving Houston for New Orleans, and then closed for good a few years later.



Pitcher, Max Manning



Houston Eagles Uniform

# LOCAL LEGEND: JIMMY PORTER



- Jimmy Porter came to Carrollton in the 1920's after a brief career as a Negro League baseball player in St. Louis. Jimmy; who had been born in Tennessee in 1900, arrived in town unemployed and uneducated. In consideration of the times; he seemed destined for a life of poverty and obscurity. Although Jimmy was poor, he was anything but obscure. He played against baseball legends like Joe Demaggio, Ty Cobb and Satchel Paige. Jimmy Porter would become the best known and most loved man in Carrollton, Texas! He lead parades; was the namesake of the Jimmy Porter Park; appeared on television, and even received a house from local businessmen before his days were done.
- Shortly after his arrival to Carrollton in the 1920's, Jimmy formed a black semi-pro baseball team known as The Carrollton Cats. He played for the Cats for several years, until they eventually disbanded. Yet he continued to promote the game he loved so dearly. In fact; eventually Jimmy helped to influence city leaders to found, and was himself a coach in the Carrollton Little League. Even after his "official" coaching days ended, he continued to teach children the game of baseball by way of informal "pick up" games, that many adults in Carrollton still remember.
- Jimmy selected the teams; and he always made sure the youngest and the smallest got to bat first. He even provided the equipment. The wooden bats usually had nails driven through the barrel due to cracks; the baseballs were worn; and most his gloves were left-handed; but everyone was welcome to use his supplies. Jimmy usually did all the pitching; and he definitely did all the umping. At the end of the game; every child left with a hug from the kindly old man.
- In time, Jimmy became the most celebrated citizen in town. In 1973 Jimmy Porter Park was constructed and dedicated in his honor. The monument with his picture (now badly faded) was erected there in 1975. Furthermore, a beautiful oil painting of Jimmy was displayed in the Carrollton Community Center. In 1977; Jimmy, who had no children of his own, was awarded a lifetime membership by the Texas PTA. Furthermore, Jimmy appeared as a guest on the Today Show in 1982. As his health declined, several local citizens; many of whom had grown up playing baseball with Jimmy; had a one bedroom house built for the elderly Porter. Jimmy, who at one time had lived in an abandoned railroad car on the North edge of town, moved into his new home in 1983. He lived there for the brief duration of his life.
- Jimmy Porter died on December 11, 1984. His modest gravestone features 2 baseball bats crossed at the barrel. Every year the city of Carrollton presents a citizen who excels in community service with The Jimmy Porter Award. Those who actually knew the man remember his passion for baseball and life; and his compassion for one and all. Such was the life of Jimmy Porter.

# SOURCES & FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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