

beyond its inaugural season. In fact, most did not move beyond the proposal. Yet, several proposals offered over three decades reflect a persistent interest in a league of black baseball clubs. Their failures provide insight into some of the challenges that had to be overcome before the Negro National League could be organized in Kansas City in 1920.

Proposed Leagues

The first known proposal for a black baseball league that included Kansas City as a possible member was published in May 1890 by the *Indianapolis Freeman* in a note taken from an unspecified newspaper.

The Afro-Americans will establish a circuit of baseball clubs in Chicago, Louisville, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Cleveland next season. It ought to be a success as each of these cities have over 10,000 Afro-American population.—So says an Exchange.²²

During 1890 and 1891, some of the best players from Kansas City's top black team, the KC Maroons,* moved to Nebraska, where they played for the Lincoln Giants, one of the first professional black baseball teams in the region. In 1892, some of these players and others, including Bud Fowler, joined clubs in the integrated Nebraska State League. Later in the decade, other black ballplayers also joined the rosters of minor league clubs in the Kansas State League.²³ With some of the top players joining the Lincoln Giants or minor league teams, it is perhaps not surprising there was no mention of a league that would include Kansas City during most of the 1890s.

At the end of the decade, two more proposed black leagues received limited mention. In June 1898, Charles Smith, who had played for the KC Colored Porters, called a meeting to discuss what he envisioned as a local league. "The managers of the [KC] Unions, [KC] Bradburys, [KC] Times Hustlers, Colored Porters and any other good teams are invited to be present."²⁴ It was the only mention of the league, and only the Bradburys were still active by the end of July.²⁵

A proposed league of area cities was announced the following year in St. Joseph, Missouri, about 45 miles north of Kansas City. Bud Fowler and Jeff Banks controlled the St. Joseph Black Wonders to open the season, but in June, they transferred the team to H.H. Walker. In addition to taking control of the Black Wonders, Walker and Bud Brown attempted to organize a "colored baseball league, which will be made up of eight teams." The plan was to have two teams each in St. Joseph and Kansas City, plus a club from Lexington, Missouri and teams from Atchison, Horton, and Topeka in northeastern Kansas.²⁶ As with the two earlier proposals, it did not move beyond the announcement.

In 1900, a new proposal originated in St. Joseph. Bud Fowler was again managing the Black Wonders, and he was behind an attempt to organize a regional league. Only a St. Joseph newspaper mentioned the Inter-State League of Colored Ball Players, probably based on information provided by Fowler. The league was said to include teams in Missouri (Kansas City, Lexington, Richmond, and St. Joseph), Kansas (Lawrence and

* The abbreviation KC refers to Kansas City, Missouri. KCK refers to Kansas City, Kansas.

Topeka), Iowa (Des Moines), and Nebraska (Omaha). This time, games among the teams were reported as official league contests, but only in St. Joseph newspapers. On June 24, the Black Wonders played the Jenkins' Sons of Kansas City, Missouri. Two months later, the Black Wonders defeated the Lexington Tigers.²⁷ Other than these two games, newspapers in league cities apparently published nothing about the league, suggesting it was never formally organized.

Seven years passed before the subject of a black baseball league including Kansas City teams was raised again for the 1908 season. This time, the geographical scope was broader. "A movement has been put forward by white and colored capitalists to form a stock company to substantiate a National Colored League of Professional Ball Clubs in eight of our leading cities." The possible cities listed were principally in the Midwest—Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Louisville, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Toledo. Those behind the effort were Frank Leland of Chicago's Leland Giants, Elwood Knox of the *Indianapolis Freeman*, and Ran Butler of the Indianapolis ABCs. A meeting was held in the offices of the *Freeman* on December 18 to discuss the league. Temporary officers were elected, but little else was decided. Before the next meeting in mid-February, there were already hints in the *Freeman* that few people were stepping up to help organize the league, and all of the managers were strongly urged to attend the second meeting. "Little, if anything, can be accomplished if every individual who is asked to attend does not put in his appearance. It should not be expected of two or three to do the work of all." The effort was also hurt by the poor health of Frank Leland, who suffered a heart attack in mid-February.²⁸

At the follow-up meeting in February 1908 in Indianapolis, Conrad Kuebler, the white owner of the St. Louis Giants, was elected president of the National Colored Baseball League. Six teams were admitted—Cleveland, Columbus, and Springfield, Ohio; Danville, Illinois; Louisville, Kentucky; and Nashville, Tennessee. No Chicago. No Indianapolis. No Kansas City. Not even Kuebler's St. Louis Giants. Nor were any league games ever played. Some managers wanted to wait until 1909, and others wanted to start as planned in 1908. In the end, two smaller "minor leagues" were organized—the Missouri-Illinois Sporting Baseball League around St. Louis and the Ohio State Colored Baseball League, with teams in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Springfield, and Xenia. "In the effort to form a National League last winter it was seen that many of the towns mentioned were entirely out of place, and that many of its supporters were so inexperienced in the idea that they feared to venture even one step towards placing it in working order." In addition, a simultaneous effort was underway in Pittsburgh to organize the Colored National League, possibly including teams in Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. That effort was also unsuccessful. Yet, hope springs eternal in baseball. "The National Colored Baseball League is bound to be a sure thing of the future, even though things may not look good just now."²⁹

After another hiatus of two years, the idea of a black baseball league was raised several times through 1914. By this time, Kansas City had its first truly professional black baseball teams, the KCK Giants and KC Royal Giants. In January 1910, two promoters in St. Louis

announced plans “to organize an eight-club league composed of colored teams” for the upcoming season. In addition to the St. Louis Giants, they hoped to attract interest from teams in Chicago, Joplin (Missouri), Kansas City, Little Rock, Lincoln (Nebraska), Louisville, and Paducah (Kentucky). The duo also “leased a big strip of land ... where they will build a big swimming pool, bowling alley and skating rink, exclusive for colored people.”³⁰ As with the attempts to organize leagues at the turn of the century, this bid apparently ended with an announcement made by promoters to a local newspaper before other teams had met to discuss the proposal or perhaps even been consulted.

Six months later, Topeka newspapers carried reports of a league referred to as the Colored Central Western League (or some variation of these words). The league reportedly included teams in Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha, St. Joseph, St. Louis, and Topeka. The officers were listed as Dr. W.S. Carrion of St. Joseph (president), “Topeka Jack” Johnson of the KC Royal Giants (secretary), and Tobe Smith of the KCK Giants (treasurer). The Topeka club in the league was the Tigers, and their home field was referred to as Colored League Park in local press announcements probably submitted by the team. The Tigers reportedly opened their league schedule on June 18–19 by splitting a pair of games with the St. Joseph Bearcats. A doubleheader between the Tigers and an unspecified Kansas City team on July 3 was also reported as league action.³¹ However, I found no reports of the league in newspapers from the other cities listed as members.

The following year, newspapers in Topeka once again reported that the Tigers were members of a league during April and May 1911. “The fast local colored team, the Topeka Tigers, has been admitted to the Middle West Baseball league, an organization of colored baseball clubs that includes teams in St. Louis, Chicago, Kansas City and several other towns, including Topeka.”³²

“The colored league games in Topeka will open tomorrow with Jack Johnson’s fast team, the [KCK] Giants, at League park. ... Johnson’s team is second in the colored league pennant race, the Chicago team being only a few points in the lead.” The KCK Giants defeated the Topeka Tigers, 10–7. “It was the first game of the newly formed league of colored teams to be played in Topeka.”³³ Once again, I found no reports of the league in newspapers from other cities listed as members. Instead, there were calls for a national league to be organized during the 1911 or 1912 season.

In April 1910, *The Indianapolis Freeman* published its First Annual Base Ball and Sporting Supplement. “In this edition you will note the great interest that is being taken in the game [of baseball] by the Afro-American in every part of the country. Substantial clubs of class are being organized everywhere and their plan is to introduce organized [league] ball before long.” The supplement featured reports and photos of various teams around the country and other articles, such as a brief recounting of black players on integrated major league and minor league clubs and black teams in integrated leagues. There were also articles by Andrew “Rube” Foster and J.M. Batchman, who wrote that the quality of black baseball on the field had reached a high level, but more attention needed to be directed at the business side of the sport, especially with regard to forming successful leagues.³⁴ Efforts to organize a national league of black teams would begin later that year.

In November 1910, Beauregard Mosley of Chicago's Leland Giants outlined a plan for a National Negro Baseball League in the *Chicago Broad Ax*.^{*} Three weeks later, a call was issued for a conference in Chicago on December 28, where a preliminary arrangement was made to organize the league in 1911. The cities considered for the league, with only one team allowed from each city, included Chicago, Columbus, Kansas City (Kansas), Kansas City (Missouri), Louisville, Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis. A follow-up meeting was planned for New Orleans during Mardi Gras.³⁵

Mosley was elected president of the organizing committee, and Felix Payne of Kansas City was chosen as secretary. Tobe Smith also attended as a representative of Kansas City, Missouri, although he and Payne were both associated with the KCK Giants. The top black team on the Missouri side was the Giants' rival, the KC Royal Giants. Rube Foster served as the proxy for the Dixie Base Ball Club of Mobile.³⁶

In January 1911, Mosley wrote an impassioned plea published in the *Chicago Broad Ax* and *Indianapolis Freeman* for support of the league by teams and boosters in the face of increasing segregation.

[The] Negro comes to his own rescue by organizing and patronizing the game successfully which would of itself force recognition from minor white Leagues to play us and share in the receipts; for with 6 or 8 National Negro Clubs playing clean, scientific Baseball[,] the Public would soon ask itself the question[,] which of the National Leagues are the stronger[?]³⁷

That same month, a team from Pensacola, Florida (probably the Giants) applied for admission to the league. It was among the final references to the 1911 National Negro Baseball League. The last mention was a newspaper note that "Secretary, Felix H. Payne, of the Negro National League" invited Mosley to Kansas City for the Fourth of July.³⁸

In February 1911, as news of Mosley's proposed league faded, Charles Mills, manager of the St. Louis Giants, wrote to the *Indianapolis Freeman* about his interest in organizing a Negro League for 1912.[†] In December 1910, Mills had written to the *Freeman* in support of Mosley's effort to organize a league in 1911. To assist with his 1912 project, Mills enlisted St. Louis businessmen Floyd Ross, Noah Warrington, Robert Jones, and Norman Dunlap. Ross assumed the duties of committee chair, and Mills served as secretary. They envisioned a league of six to eight cities—Chicago, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Louisville, Memphis, St. Louis, "and two other cities that must not be more than 300 miles apart." Other baseball executives responded to his call, and two weeks later, the organizing committee for the Southwestern Negro League of Professional Ball Clubs was formed—President Floyd Ross (St. Louis), Secretary Harry Daniels (New York), and Treasurer F.J. Weaver (KC Royal Giants). Charles Mills (St. Louis Giants), Noah Warrington (St. Louis), and Elmer Pettis (French Lick Plutos) would serve as Advance Agents. The

^{*} Frank Leland resigned from the Leland Giants in October 1909. Beauregard Mosley and Rube Foster were running the team. Leland organized another Giants team in 1910 (*Indianapolis Freeman*, 2 October 1909, p 7; Revel and Munoz 2016).

[†] Charles Mills later took his St. Louis Giants into the 1920 Negro National League (Revel 2017).

geographical scope of the proposed league also broadened to include Chicago, Cincinnati, Kansas City, Louisville, Minneapolis, New Orleans, "Oklahoma," and St. Louis.³⁹

Also published in the *Freeman* that February was a plea for a national league from Topeka Jack Johnson, who was returning as manager of the KCK Giants after a year as manager of the rival KC Royal Giants. Johnson's baseball career included playing for and managing teams in Topeka, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Kansas City. He wrote that a Negro National League would be "one of the greatest things that has ever happened for the Negro, if it goes through. ... It certainly has been proven from the big leagues on down to the minors, that there is nothing in the world that beats organized baseball and harmony."⁴⁰ Despite his letter and longstanding interest in black baseball leagues, the KCK Giants apparently were not included in the negotiations for the 1912 league, just as the KC Royal Giants had not been active in Beauregard Mosley's plans for a league in 1911. Nor were Mosley and Rube Foster involved in planning the 1912 league.

In March 1911, an unsigned commentary in the *Indianapolis Freeman* supported the proposed Southwestern Negro Baseball League and noted that the Southwest encompassed "Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas and the contiguous States, that could very well be included."⁴¹ In May, George Walden, manager of the KC Royal Giants, wrote in the *Freeman* that Fortune J. Weaver of Kansas City was still serving as treasurer of the committee, though the treasurer's funds were "very low." Walden encouraged support for the project. "I hope every baseball enthusiast feels as I do regarding the 1912 league. I am sure we will land it without the least trouble. Let's put our shoulders to the wheel, boys, and make it a success."⁴²

In addition to being the league's treasurer, Fortune Weaver was President and General Manager of the Afro-American Investment Company and owner of the KC Royal Giants. He followed Walden's call for a 1912 league with a letter of his own to the *Freeman* in June 1911. That same month, Lester Walton wrote in the *New York Age* about a possible black baseball league. He commented on attendance at three weekday games in St. Louis between the local Giants and the Chicago Giants. At the time, Sunday was the big day for games between black clubs. However, Walton pointed out that more people attended the Giants' games those three weekdays than attended major league games that week for the St. Louis Cardinals in Cincinnati and the St. Louis Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles) at their home park. In February 1911, Topeka Jack Johnson had also contended that, "Week-day baseball can be worked up to a paying basis the same as Sunday ball has. From the fact that ... most cities of the league would put out good strong clubs, [they] would be attractions that would draw at any time and at any place where baseball is known at all."⁴³

In February 1912, after another letter from Weaver was published to encourage support for a league, Logan J. Galbreath, a white baseball promoter in Kansas City, offered his assistance in setting up a black baseball league. He listed Weaver as a reference. Galbreath cited his experience organizing "several different successful [white] baseball leagues in the past six years" and saw "a great future before the colored people for such an enterprise." When he was not promoting leagues, Galbreath managed barnstorming teams based in Kansas City, including a racially integrated World Nations team and bloomer girl teams.⁴⁴

As with the earlier attempts, however, this move to establish a black baseball league in 1912 failed, even though the effort lasted a full year. In April 1911, President Floyd Ross, called “owners and managers and stockholders of all Negro professional baseball clubs in the United States” to a meeting in October to organize what he still referred to as the Southwestern League. By July 1911, Frank Leland had joined the effort as president, and Charles Mills took over again as secretary. Weaver retained his position as treasurer. The new Committee on Organization scheduled a meeting in September “to further plans for the organization of a colored baseball league.” If the committee met that autumn, I found no summary of its actions. The list of league cities varied somewhat through the yearlong process, which suggests a lack of commitment by clubs. The cities included various combinations of Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, French Lick (Indiana), Indianapolis, Kansas City, Louisville, Memphis, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Omaha, and St. Louis. In February 1912, Weaver made a final attempt to keep the effort alive, calling for a league of six teams during its first year. The six cities he mentioned were Chicago, French Lick, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Louisville, and St. Louis. As owner of the KC Royal Giants, he was presumably excluding the rival KCK Giants from the list of six clubs.⁴⁵

There was another failed attempt to organize a league in November 1913, but virtually nothing was published about the effort. Newspapers around the country carried a story distributed by United Press. The National Colored Baseball League was reportedly incorporated in Pierre, South Dakota, with \$50,000 in capital. However, the league was headquartered in Chicago, home to its promoters—William Cowan, Walter Farmer, Frank Hamilton, George Holt, and Julius Taylor. The league was said to include teams in Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and “possibly Kansas City.”⁴⁶

In 1914, Topeka Jack Johnson announced plans at the end of July to organize a league that would play a short season in preparation for a full season in 1915. A meeting was planned “in the near future” to elect officers and draft a constitution for the Middle West Colored Baseball League (or Western Colored Players’ League). The geographical scale of this league was smaller than the recently proposed national leagues and was expected to include teams from Atchison, Kansas City, Leavenworth, and Topeka in Kansas and Kansas City and St. Joseph in Missouri. Once again, nothing came from the proposal, and in April 1915, Johnson was working to get his Topeka Giants into the local City League as its first black team. That effort would also fail, as the white managers unanimously objected to the Giants joining the organization.⁴⁷

Some were opposed to it because they claimed it would force one of the white teams that was in last year to stay out. Others said that the white fans objected, and still others that some of the players objected to playing against “shines.” ... Johnson was present and stated that he only wanted his team to be given the same consideration the other teams received, and that he saw no reason why it should be excluded just because a few fans or a few players objected.⁴⁸

After the vote, Johnson left the meeting, graciously wishing the league well.* Three days later, the mayor of Topeka appointed Johnson to the city police force as a patrolman.⁴⁹

Reports of proposed black baseball leagues including Kansas City were absent from newspapers in 1915. However, a league of baseball teams from four black elementary schools in Kansas City, Kansas was organized in April. The *Kansas City Independent* commented on the context of the league in the community. “This is the first time in the history of K. C. K. that there has been a colored baseball league. ... Let all the colored baseball fans go and encourage the teams in the school league, as we have no other.”⁵⁰

Instead of a league of adult baseball clubs, an attempt was made in September 1915 to hold an intercity tournament in Kansas City. At least this might give some degree of legitimacy to a team claiming regional bragging rights as the top black club. Most of the teams mentioned were from the Kansas City area—Atchison Blues, KCK Giants, KC Royal Americans (arising in the wake of the KC Royal Giants), Lexington Tigers, St. Joseph Giants, and Topeka Giants. It was similar to the list of cities in Johnson’s proposed league. The Iola Go-Devils from southeastern Kansas also planned to participate.⁵¹ However, newspaper coverage of the tournament was spotty and confused.

According to reports in the *Kansas City Journal*, the tournament opened on Sunday, September 5, at Association Park in Kansas City, Missouri. The first game of a doubleheader was to feature the KCK Giants versus the St. Joseph Giants, and the second game would be between the KC Royal Americans and the Lexington Tigers. The following day, the *Journal* reported that in the first game the KC Royal Americans had defeated the Lexington Tigers, 6–5 in 10 innings, and the KC Royal Americans, not the St. Joseph Giants, had also defeated the KCK Giants, 10–1 in 5 innings, called because of darkness. The Labor Day games on Monday were to feature the Atchison Giants (Blues) and Topeka Giants, with the winner taking on the KC Royals for the tournament championship. Rain forced the postponement of the games until the following Sunday, when it was reported that the first game would be between the St. Joseph Giants and the Atchison Nationals (Blues), with the winner playing the KC Royals. The *Journal* reported that the St. Joseph Nationals (Giants) had defeated the Atchison Federals (Blues) but lost to the KC Royals in the championship game. Apparently, the Topeka Giants and Iola Go-Devils did not make the trip to Kansas City, but no reasons were given for their absence.⁵²

The tournament was beset with other problems besides rain and the confusing reports provided to the newspaper. The *Kansas City Sun* offered insight into a problem that made it so difficult to organize a regional tournament, let alone a black baseball league.

Judging from the amount of squabbling indulged in by the participants of the recent baseball elimination contest between Negro clubs[,] the prospects for a first-class religious organization are better than for a league of such clubs of the national pastime.⁵³

* Topeka Jack Johnson would later take a team from Topeka into the Colored Western League of 1922. He also served as the league’s president (Eberle 2017, pages 76–81).

In 1917, the United States entered the First World War, which sharply curtailed baseball and any proposals for a new baseball league. Before that happened, there were newspaper reports in early 1916 of Rube Foster's announcement that a "new colored baseball league will have teams in St. Louis, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Chicago." The season was to run from May 3 to October 15. Foster made the announcement in January, while he was on tour with his Chicago American Giants in California. It received little newspaper coverage because Foster was traveling that spring and could devote little time to the effort back in the Midwest. With Foster's absence, the league was not organized.⁵⁴

In Kansas City, there was also one final attempt in 1916 to organize a local league referred to as the Colored Western League or Negro Western League. It was composed of four teams. The *Kansas Elevator* listed the KCK Giants, KC Royals, Independence Avenue Wizards, and Lexington Tigers in the only known team standings published for the few games played through the end of June. However, the total number of wins does not equal the total number of losses, indicating an error in the record of at least one club. A short time later, newspapers listed the league clubs as the KCK Giants, KC Royal Americans, the Independence (Missouri) Wizards, and the Fort Leavenworth Army Service Schools Colored Detachment No. 2. The soldiers had been invited to join the league at the start of the season, but they declined. At the beginning of July, they replaced the Lexington Tigers, who reorganized as the Hendricks Giants in mid-July.⁵⁵

**NEGRO LEAGUE PLAYS
GAMES NEXT SUNDAY.**

The Negro Western League will resume its schedule Sunday, July 2, at Association Park and during the absence of the Blues, will play games each Sunday and holiday. A double-header will be played next Sunday. The teams at present stand as follows:

	Won.	Lost.	Pct.
Kansas City Royals.....	3	0	1.000
Lexington Tigers	1	2	.333
Kas. City, Kas., Giants..	1	2	.333
Indep. Ave. Wizards.....	0	3	.000

Following official league games in newspaper stories was made even more challenging because the KC Royal Americans split into two clubs for most of the 1916 season. * A team sometimes referred to as Hick's Royal Americans apparently was the splinter group that was not part of the league. Instead, they played a variety of teams at Shelley Park. On July 22, the *Kansas City Journal* reported, "The Royal Americans have reorganized after having been split up most of the season and will have their full strength to put against the United States army club at Fort Leavenworth." The game would reportedly decide first place in the Negro Western League. However, Hick's Royal Americans were also scheduled to play at Shelley Park that same day and on subsequent weekends. Amid all this confusion, which team claimed the league championship is unknown.⁵⁶

* In addition to the two KC Royal American teams, there were two local teams of black women known as the Royal American (R.A.) Bloomer Girls and the Ever Ready (E.R.) Bloomer Girls. The second team apparently took its name from a local men's club named Black Pete's Ever Ready Giants. The two women's teams played several games that summer at Shelley Park, as well as games that preceded Negro Western League contests at Association Park (references included in endnote 56).

Earlier that season, the *Kansas Elevator* pondered the failure of black teams to organize a national league in a column of miscellaneous thoughts titled, “What the Elevator Would Like to Know.”

If there will ever be a Negro national base ball league, and if this would not be possible if an honest manager could be found, and if Negro baseball teams will ever amount to a hill o’ beans until they are placed and conducted upon business principles, and if the public would not welcome and support first class Negro baseball?⁵⁷

Challenges to Establishing a League

Prior to 1920, black baseball clubs in Kansas City participated in only one local league, despite attempts to organize a national league (Table 1). One problem for organizers of a national league was that distances between cities could be too great for economical travel by train. That had been the reason given by organizers of the proposed National Colored Baseball League in 1908 for rejecting teams from the Northeast and Deep South. Regional leagues were more feasible.⁵⁸ Travel costs were a problem for the 1887 National Colored Base Ball League and a concern for organizers of the 1911 and 1912 leagues. In addition, some black clubs did not own a ballpark, so their schedules would have to consider the dates when white major league and minor league clubs played at home. Avoiding those dates might allow the black clubs to lease league ballparks, if they had the money.⁵⁹ Thus, travel costs and ballpark use were two challenges that confronted league organizers.

Table 1.—Multistate Negro Leagues proposed or organized before 1920 and mentioned in the text. Kansas City was a potential member of the three unsuccessful leagues.

League	Year	Games Played
Southern League of Colored Base Ballists	1886	Yes
National Colored Base Ball League	1887	Yes
National Colored League of Professional Ball Clubs (National Colored Baseball League)	1908	No
National Negro Baseball League	1911	No
Southwestern Negro League of Professional Ball Clubs (Negro National League)	1912	No

Yet, teams in Kansas City also found it difficult to organize among themselves and teams from nearby cities, where they frequently played. Even the 1916 Negro Western League had only four clubs, and one team had to be replaced midseason. There were numerous white leagues with teams from Kansas City during the early 1900s, including intercity leagues and interstate leagues, along with strictly local leagues. Leagues of clubs from a relatively small geographical area were little more than agreements among teams to play each other a set number of times, with games against other opponents still scheduled

on off days. So why was it so difficult to organize a league at any geographical scale among the black clubs? As is often the case, there is no single answer.

The “squabbling” among clubs noted by the *Kansas City Sun* during the 1915 tournament points to one impediment, and strong rivalries or even outright animosity between clubs were not limited to Kansas City. However, the most serious challenge to organizing a league was adequate and stable funding that could sustain clubs through entire seasons for multiple years.⁶⁰ Paying travel expenses was only one of the financial challenges teams faced. The overarching problem of financial support doomed the 1887 National Colored Base Ball League, not the travel costs alone.

There were several reasons why early black baseball clubs in Kansas City generated little financial support. This revenue would come from the business community and from fans who would regularly pay to attend games. Early black teams in Kansas City complained about their lack of support from the black community, which comprised only 10% of Kansas City’s population (Table 2). One reason for this weak support was that it was split among three to five teams usually vying to be the top black club from 1898 through 1916.⁶¹ The financial support (and the best local talent) were spread too thin.

Table 2.—Federal census data for Kansas City in both Kansas and Missouri (from Gibson and Jung 2005).

Year	Population				
	Total	White		Black	
1890	171,032	152,133	89.0%	18,672	10.9%
1900	215,170	190,993	88.8%	24,076	11.2%
1910	330,712	297,673	90.0%	32,852	9.9%
1920	425,587	380,220	89.3%	45,124	10.6%

Loyal fan support was also difficult for the teams to develop because most of the black clubs in Kansas City did not persist through consecutive years. Three exceptions were the KC Unions (8 years), the Lincoln High Schools–Jenkins’ Sons–KC Monarchs (11 years), and the KCK Giants (10 years). However, even teams that organized multiple years, especially amateur and semipro clubs, sometimes folded partway through the season.⁶² Teams had to sustain a reliable schedule the entire season to develop and hold fan support.

Two interconnected issues contributing to the limited funds for early clubs were tied to the nature of operating purportedly amateur (semipro) teams. One issue was that these teams played for side bets and gate receipts at enclosed parks. This meant the losing team could walk away with little or no money. There was no guaranteed minimum payment to either team. Clubs might even experience a loss through the side bet, which was sometimes a winner-take-all arrangement that also required the loser to pay for use of the enclosed grounds. However, any money earned remained with the team and was not shared with a league office.

Scheduling issues were the other financial shortcoming of the early semipro clubs, which played primarily on Sundays and holidays to accommodate the six-day workweek. Not being part of a league also allowed independent teams to play when they chose to play and rest when players were injured or busy with other activities. These irregular schedules set on a week-by-week basis limited revenue and contributed to some players jumping among teams to increase their playing time and earnings. However, some semipro teams had trouble playing games throughout the week, because their players held other jobs or owned businesses, which provided them with regular income but limited playing time. For example, Arthur “Chick” Pullam of the Jenkins’ Sons and the original KC Monarchs worked for the US Post Office, and teammate Thomas McCampbell owned a drugstore.

In 1906, black teams in Los Angeles, Monrovia, Pasadena, and San Diego attempted to organize a league under conditions similar to those of the early semipro clubs in Kansas City. “Side bets will be made in each contest until such time as the receipts will pay the expenses. Games will be played on Sundays only.” The league included the Los Angeles Giants, one of the region’s best semipro teams. Nevertheless, this league was not successful.⁶³ To build a successful league, especially a multistate league, would require regularly scheduled games during the week to generate as much revenue as possible and develop a loyal fan base. This, in turn, would allow the teams to pay better salaries to their players, so they would not need other employment during the season.

In 1911, Lester Walton noted, “strong colored teams are good Sunday attractions, but the difference of opinion has invariably come up over the question of whether the fans would put in an appearance in sufficient numbers on week-days.” He predicted that they would for strong clubs, such as the St. Louis Giants and Chicago Giants.⁶⁴

The shift from semipro clubs to professional teams would address these challenges and take black baseball in Kansas City a step closer to joining a national league. Perhaps the first call to establish a professional black baseball team was published in area newspapers in 1886. It was an ambitious proposal from nearby Lawrence, Kansas.

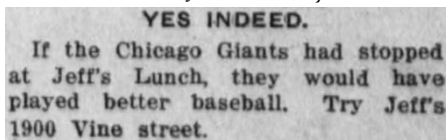
[T]he colored men [in Lawrence] will organize a nine composed of the best colored players and travel extensively through the states, playing exhibition games. This will be the only professional colored base ball club in the west. It will consist of such players as [James] Hightower and [Bud] Fowler of Topeka, [Frank] Maupin of Kansas City, one man from St. Louis and several professionals from different parts of the country. ... They could compete with the league nines, and could probably make money for the managers. The colored men have proved their ability to beat the best amateur nines in Kansas, and could organize a nine that would be “worthy of the steel” of any organization in the country.⁶⁵

The first professional black team in the region was the Omaha Lafayettes of 1889, which became the Lincoln Giants in 1890–1891. The Giants traveled the region, including Kansas City, for games.⁶⁶ The first truly professional baseball club in Kansas City was the KCK Giants, first organized in 1908. The KC Royal Giants joined them in 1910 and were replaced by the KC Royal Americans in 1913. Being professional clubs facilitated their

ability to import players from other cities and states. They were not restricted to local talent, supplemented by occasional players from nearby towns willing to play infrequent games. A professional club could develop the financial resources to recruit the best players available, making them more competitive. In turn, this would allow them to attract good clubs from other cities to play in Kansas City, generating more interest among fans. Only a professional club would be able to compete in a national league, which would also require them to travel for days at a time. Previously, the KC Unions (1897, 1899) and Bradburys (1902) had made tours, but most of their games were sporadic and centered on Kansas City.⁶⁷ The later professional clubs took extended trips through the Midwest and South to generate the revenue necessary to sustain a professional club and test their skills against the top clubs in Chicago and elsewhere.⁶⁸ A league and its teams would have to be professional organizations established on sound business principles to provide the essential financial support.

With regard to support from businesses, Kansas City's semipro clubs had managers but not owners. However, a few black clubs received unspecified support from white-owned businesses, which was reflected in the names of the teams—Bradburys (Bradbury Piano Company), Jenkins' Sons (J.W. Jenkins' Sons Music Company), KCK Nelsons (Nelson Shoe Company), and KC Times Hustlers (*Kansas City Times*).

In contrast, the early professional teams in Kansas City were owned by black business owners. The co-owners of the KCK Giants were Tobe Smith, who owned Tobe Smith's Transfer Company, and Felix H. Payne, a nightclub owner and gambler. Fortune J. Weaver, owner of the KC Royal Giants, was president of the Afro-American Realty and Investment Company. L.S. Jefferson, who owned the KC Royal Americans with his wife, was the proprietor of the Hole in the Wall restaurant and Jeff's Lunch in the neighborhood at 18th and Vine Streets. Jefferson was also vice president of the Negro Progressive Business Association in Kansas City. His ads in the *Kansas City Sun* usually touted the cleanliness of his restaurants, but in July 1920, one ad featured the "Chicago Giants, often confused with the American Giants, Rube's team." The KC Monarchs had just swept the visiting Giants in a five-game series.⁶⁹



YES INDEED.
If the Chicago Giants had stopped
at Jeff's Lunch, they would have
played better baseball. Try Jeff's
1900 Vine street.

These black business owners brought a level of stability to their professional baseball clubs that was lacking for the semipro clubs. They also had a financial stake in the black community beyond their teams. These owners could not only apply their business skills to the operation of their baseball teams, they were unlikely to risk their professional reputations in the community by operating unreliable clubs. For example, L.S. Jefferson wrote to the *Indianapolis Freeman* to correct an inaccurate report submitted by someone else regarding the KC Royal Americans' record during a tour through Oklahoma and Texas in 1915. His note, written in a telegraphic style, appeared under the headline, "The Truth about the Kansas City Royal Americans' Trip."

Dear Sir—The [truth about the] statement written by Mr. Barney Reed, about the Kansas City Royal American baseball club's southern trip. We

won 14 out of 22 games. Lost three straights [sic] to Dallas and two to Fort Worth. The same was published without my knowledge. Hoping you will publish this letter so that the public will know that we are not advertising games that we didn't win. I remain, yours truly for clean baseball, Mr. and Mrs. L. S. Jefferson, owner, Royal American Baseball Club.⁷⁰

Yet, organizing professional teams was only a first step, because not all professional teams were stable. In June 1911, Fortune Weaver wrote to the *Indianapolis Freeman* about the need for a league to overcome the problem of unstable teams. "Without a league[,] Negro baseball is bound to go down. There are too many would-be managers and too many unreliable players." Weaver went on to explain two instances of unreliable teams that had contracted to play the KC Royal Giants in Kansas City. In May, the Pekin Tigers of Cleveland "had gone to pieces in West Baden, [Indiana] and didn't have enough men to show in Kansas City." In June, the manager of the Plutos from French Lick, Indiana, telegrammed George Walden, manager of the Royal Giants, that the Plutos were "crippled in St. Louis, and homeward bound." Weaver closed with a plea for a black league. "Now, this kind of business is killing Negro baseball. I am informed that other team managers are having the same trouble with teams they have booked. I tell you, boys, there is only one remedy for these troubles, and that is the Negro League."⁷¹ Conversely, it could be argued that stable teams would be needed before a stable league could be organized.

Another problem associated with the stability of professional clubs alluded to by Weaver and others was that teams sometimes disbanded because players jumped their contracts to join other clubs. Players on semipro clubs in Kansas City had done this for decades, but it could be more troublesome for the professional teams. However, in August 1911, the KC Royal Giants were guilty of contributing to the very problem of unstable teams Weaver had complained about earlier that summer. The Royal Giants picked up players who jumped from the Pensacola Giants while they were in Kansas City, which led the Florida club to disband.⁷² In 1910, the KCK Giants released three players who attempted to play for the rival KC Royal Giants in a morning game and then travel across the city to play for their own club. They were late for the second game.⁷³ Team jumping was one of the issues Beauregard Mosley sought to address in the 1911 league by prohibiting these players from joining other league clubs.⁷⁴

In addition to using the "stick" of banning players who jumped their contracts, it would be necessary to offer a "carrot" to players in the form of decent salaries. During the effort to organize a league in 1911, Charles Mills, manager of the St. Louis Giants, advocated fair wages for players. "[L]et the officials and ball players co-operate with each other during the baseball season, and with their salaries establish a business, buy land, [and] buy homes to prepare themselves for future happiness." Mosley suggested three classes of player salaries that "shall in no case exceed 80 per cent of the earnings of the Club" in the 1911 league. However, it would take time to develop a financially sound league and its fan base, and some clubs would take longer than others. As Topeka Jack Johnson noted in 1911, "Of course we cannot expect to cope right along with the big leagues the first season or two, but we can follow their method and system as far as we go." A note in the *Indianapolis*

Freeman predicted a longer period. “It will not be possible to pay excellent wages in building up the game with the race, but in our opinion it will only require the next half dozen years to so develop the people that they will give better support, thus enabling managers to pay satisfactory wages.”⁷⁵

Adequate revenue and player issues were not the only challenges confronting potential league teams. There was also blind self-interest among some owners, who focused solely on their clubs and their personal income. Billy Lewis published an editorial in the *Indianapolis Freeman* in 1913 regarding the absence of a black baseball league composed of Chicago, Cincinnati, Evansville, Indianapolis, Kansas City (Kansas), Kansas City (Missouri), Louisville, Memphis, Nashville, St. Louis, “and a few others.”

There is a disposition to be a little too independent in such matters. The managers seem to prefer going it alone, wearing a chip on their shoulder sometimes[,] rather than manifesting a disposition to unionize.⁷⁶

In addition, some team managers seemed hesitant to commit to a league for the first time. Just prior to the organizational meeting for the National Colored Baseball League in February 1908, the *Indianapolis Freeman* chided the managers.

“Can it be anything if you will not step in and help it to be something?” You should not ask who is going to attend the meeting, but come yourself. ... It should be clear to every man that we can only have this organization by coming together.⁷⁷

A willingness to submit to league control was also a challenge because of contentious rivalries among clubs. The two main rivals in Kansas City were the KCK Giants, who were active in the proposed 1911 league, and the KC Royal Giants, who participated in planning for the 1912 league. Factions in Chicago were perhaps even more antagonistic toward each other.⁷⁸ The rivalry between the KCK Giants and KC Royal Giants was not new among Kansas City’s black clubs. Arthur Hardy, who had played for the Topeka Giants, recalled that the KCK Giants had been organized principally to challenge the original KC Monarchs (the renamed Jenkins’ Sons).

So a bunch of doctors in Kansas City, Kansas, got together and decided they were going to get a team to beat the Kansas City Monarchs. The Kansas City, Kansas, doctors couldn’t play baseball, but they wanted to see the Monarchs beaten, so they brought the Topeka Giants almost intact to Kansas City, Kansas, and we became the Kansas City Giants.⁷⁹

Hardy was referring to the year 1909, when Topeka Jack Johnson joined the KCK Giants. The team had actually been organized a year earlier by Tobe Smith and Felix Payne, neither of whom was a doctor. However, Ernest and Thomas McCampbell of the KC Monarchs had graduated from the Kansas Medical College in Topeka.⁸⁰ These are the sorts of details often confused or lost from old memories that surround an accurate central element, in this case, a rivalry between the professional KCK Giants and the semipro KC Monarchs in 1908–1909.

After years of operating independently, it was difficult for team owners and managers to surrender their independence and cooperate with each other in the operation of a league. This was especially true for financially successful barnstorming teams.⁸¹ In addition, trusting league officers to wisely use a portion of their money made owners and managers uncomfortable, as suggested by an editorial in the *Indianapolis Freeman* in 1907.

Alas! a National Colored Baseball League is all a dream, and the reason for that [may] be, like in other cases, that we are afraid to trust one another with the money. So, therefore, there will never be any National Baseball Association among us.⁸²

Among the other compromises owners and managers would have to accept was the need for teams in the league to be of comparable quality to provide competitive pennant races. When Lester Walton wrote in the *New York Age* in 1911 about a possible black baseball league, he noted that the St. Louis Giants had defeated the Chicago Giants in three well-attended games. Although Chicago had swept the series, Walton emphasized the importance of the close scores.

If it comes to pass that a colored league is organized the promoters must keep this one thought ever before them—that it will never do to provide some cities with strong teams and other cities with inferior clubs. The fans will take pleasure in separating themselves from their hard-earned currency if they get value for their money, but they would not stand for one-sided contests daily.⁸³

A strong legal and business foundation capable of overcoming all of these challenges was essential for a league to be successful.⁸⁴ In addition, owners had to be willing to work with each other for the benefit of the league. In 1908, the organizing committee for the proposed National Colored Baseball League also noted the importance of support from the press.⁸⁵ The backing of both local and widely read newspapers, such as the *Indianapolis Freeman*, was not enough on its own, however. For example, local and national newspapers did not provide coverage of the short-lived Southern League of Colored Base Ballists in 1886. Conversely, there was coverage in *Sporting Life* and local newspapers for the 1887 National Colored Base Ball League, but it also failed because of its financial shortcomings. It was not until after the First World War that a stable national league of black baseball clubs would be organized under the full set of these conditions, and it would include a team from Kansas City.*

In February 1920, experienced baseball executives, including Rube Foster of Chicago and J.L. Wilkinson of Kansas City, who were willing to work together, albeit hesitantly in the beginning, joined with newspaper publishers and Topeka lawyer Elisha Scott to organize the Negro National League at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City (now the Negro

* A league known as the National Association of Colored Base Ball Clubs of the United States and Cuba in 1907–1908 and the International League of Colored Baseball Clubs of America and Cuba in 1909 included only four clubs from the New York and Philadelphia area—Cuban Giants, Cuban Stars, Philadelphia Giants, and Brooklyn Royal Giants (Ashwill 2014a, 2014b).

Leagues Baseball Museum's Buck O'Neil Education and Research Center). The league would be anchored by stable teams, such as the Chicago American Giants, Detroit Stars, Indianapolis ABCs, Kansas City Monarchs, and St. Louis Giants (later renamed the St. Louis Stars). Foster moved players among some of the teams to support a reasonable level of competition, as advocated by Lester Walton.⁸⁶

Thus, their plan included financially stable teams with owners willing to cooperate to establish a stable league—simultaneous stability at both levels was essential. Everything had to come together at the same time—the professional teams (and league) run on sound business principles, the strong support from local newspapers, the balanced competition among clubs. In addition, the 1920 effort benefitted from the emigration of blacks from the South to cities in the Midwest and Northeast in the early twentieth century. The increase in population (illustrated in Table 2) expanded the potential fan base of people employed in these industrialized centers who would seek affordable entertainment.⁸⁷ In Kansas City, the larger population could support the KC Monarchs at home, in combination with revenue generated by the team at league games in other cities and at their barnstorming games. After the First World War, there was also a resurgent interest in baseball across the country as soldiers returned from Europe. This did not only benefit teams when they played league opponents. The increased number of town teams would provide more potential venues for barnstorming games to fill open dates. Playing games with the many town teams of the era also set the Negro League clubs apart from teams in the major and minor leagues, and these connections established with many small communities became a lasting legacy of the Kansas City Monarchs throughout their home region.

The challenges of organizing black baseball leagues had finally been sufficiently overcome for black leagues to persist, although some, such as the 1922 Colored Western League in Kansas and Oklahoma, still struggled to get through a single season.⁸⁸ Even the Negro Leagues that persisted faced challenges. The Eastern Colored League, organized in the Northeast in 1923, folded partway through the 1928 season.⁸⁹ Teams had to be financially stable at the outset and quickly develop support from the community to sustain the club through the season. Then, they would have to work constantly to maintain that support to sustain them through multiple seasons. They had to employ sound business practices. White minor leagues of that era, especially the lower levels, faced the same challenges.

More than a dozen teams played less than two years in the 1920 Negro National League, but it survived around a core of strong clubs through the 1931 season, when it succumbed to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. Some of the teams survived as independent clubs, including the KC Monarchs, who barnstormed with portable lights for night games to draw larger crowds of fans who worked during the day. Other leagues were organized during the next few years, including a second Negro National League in 1933, which was composed almost exclusively of teams from Ohio and the Northeast. The Monarchs returned to league competition in 1937, when they joined the newly organized Negro American League.⁹⁰

Despite the challenges, the Negro National League, the Eastern Colored League, the second Negro National League, and the Negro American League succeeded in providing a venue for black players to compete at the highest levels of the sport. The leagues allowed teams and players to record meaningful documentation of their performances and be recognized for their achievements. Eventually, this offered Jackie Robinson, Larry Doby, and other Negro League players the opportunity to lead the reintegration of major league baseball in 1947. This success gave credence to Topeka Jack Johnson's prediction in 1911.

Then look at the prestige, standing and rating it will give each club under the heading "Negro National League." What a great thing it would be to have an official record and per cent kept of each club and player. Then we will not have to argue and squabble as to the real merits of John and Willie.⁹¹

Acknowledgements

I accessed newspapers online through Newspapers.com, Genealogy Bank, the State Historical Society of Missouri, and Google News Archive. I also viewed newspapers on microfilm at the Central Library of the Kansas City (MO) Public Library. I am grateful to the other authors who have written about various aspects of the organization and operation of the Negro Leagues. You made me think.

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- ²⁴ *Kansas City Star*, 9 June 1898, p 3.
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- ³¹ *Meriden Ledger*, 28 July 1910, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Capital*, 6 June 1910, p 2; 19 June 1910, p 16; 20 June 1910, p 2; 3 July 1910, p 2; 31 July 1910, p 18; 31 August 1910, p 4. • *Topeka State Journal*, 13 June 1910, p 1; 17 June 1910, p 2.
- ³² *Topeka Daily Capital*, 23 April 1911, p 2.
- ³³ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 26 May 1911, p 2. • *Topeka State Journal*, 24 May 1911, p 2, 6.
- ³⁴ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 16 April 1910, p 9–12.
- ³⁵ *Chicago Broad Ax*, 26 November 1910, p 2; 17 December 1910, p 2; 31 December 1910, p 7; 25 February 1910, p 2. • *Indianapolis Freeman*, 17 December 1910, p 4; 24 December 1911, p 11 (Supplement); 14 January 1911, p 7. • *New York Age*, 5 January 1911, p 6. • Lester (2012).
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- ⁴⁰ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 25 February 1911, p 7. • Eberle (2017, pages 73–75).
- ⁴¹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 25 March 1911, p 7.
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- ⁴⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, 18 November 1913, p 16.
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- ⁴⁹ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 20 April 1915, p 8.
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- ⁵⁶ *Kansas City Journal*, 2 July 1916, p 8B; 8 July 1916, p 8; 15 July 1916, p 5; 16 July 1916, p B9; 22 July 1916, p 5; 23 July 1916, p 6B; 29 July 1916, p 8; 30 July 1916, p 7B. • *Kansas City Star*, 9 July 1916; p 15A; 16 July 1916, p 14A; 23 July 1916, p 12A.
- ⁵⁷ *Kansas Elevator*, 20 May 1916, p 3.
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- ⁶⁰ Heaphy (2003).
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- ⁶³ *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1904, p 12; 14 September 1906, p 6; 25 October 1908, p 4 (Sporting Section).
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- ⁶⁵ *Kansas City Times*, 30 September 1886, p 3.
- ⁶⁶ Eberle (2019a, 2019b).
- ⁶⁷ *Kansas City Journal*, 13 June 1897, p 5; 8 August 1899, p 5; 15 August 1899, p 5. • *Kansas City Star*, 17 August 1902, p 7. • Eberle (2019b)
- ⁶⁸ *Kansas City Star*, 22 July 1909, p 10; 17 June 1910, p 15; 22 April 1911, p 13; 7 September 1911, p 11. • *Kansas City Times*, 1 March 1911, p 10; 2 July 1912, p 6; 24 August 1912, p 10.
- ⁶⁹ *Kansas City Sun*, 16 December 1916, p 3; 8 May 1920, p 1; 3 July 1920, p 1, 8.
- ⁷⁰ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 5 June 1915, p 4.
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- ⁷⁶ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 15 February 1913, p 7.

⁷⁷ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 15 February 1908, p 6.

⁷⁸ Lomax (2009).

⁷⁹ Peterson (1970).

⁸⁰ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 21 April 1908, p 6; 14 April 1911, p 12. • *Topeka Plaindealer*, 16 September 1904, p 3; 27 September 1907, p 3. • Bruce (1985, page 18). • Dixon (2010, pages 6, 8).

⁸¹ Morris (2010, page 513).

⁸² *Indianapolis Freeman*, 2 March 1907, p 7.

⁸³ *New York Age*, 29 June 1911, p 6.

⁸⁴ Heaphy (2003).

⁸⁵ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 25 January 1908, p 6.

⁸⁶ Bruce (1985). • Cottrell (2001). • Heaphy (2003). • Lester (2012). • Young (2016).

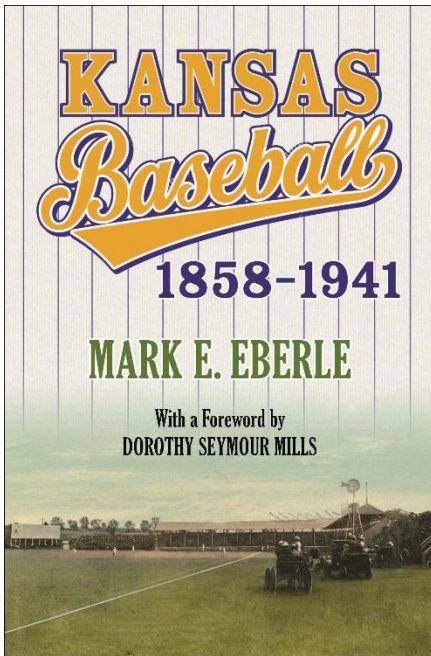
⁸⁷ Lanctot (2004).

⁸⁸ Eberle (2017, pages 76–81).

⁸⁹ Heaphy (2003). • Hogan (2006). • Lanctot (2004).

⁹⁰ Bruce (1985). • Eberle (2017). • Heaphy (2003). • Young (2016).

⁹¹ *Indianapolis Freeman*, 25 February 1911, p 7.



You can learn more about the early history of baseball played by teams throughout Kansas, including the Kansas City Monarchs, in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858-1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.