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## **Banned, Black, And Barnstorming: How Traveling Black Teams In The Great Depression Changed Kansas**

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BANNED, BLACK, AND BARNSTORMING:  
HOW TRAVELING BLACK TEAMS IN THE  
GREAT DEPRESSION CHANGED KANSAS

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the Fort Hays State University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

In the 1870s and early 1880s, almost seventy African American men played for white owned ball clubs. By 1890, White owners reached an unwritten agreement to prevent African Americans from playing with white baseball players. Not until April 15, 1947, when Jackie Robinson took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers did a black baseball player play professionally with white players. It took the general manager of the Dodgers, Branch Ricky, almost a decade to get Robinson in a big league uniform. This meant for nearly sixty years, African Americans had to play separately.

Before the creation of the Negro National League (NNL) in 1920, a few black businessmen attempted to create a baseball league for the country's black population. In 1910, Beauregard Mosley sought to create the National Negro Baseball League (NNBL) with franchises in cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. The league would divide profits by giving the winner fifty percent, the loser thirty percent, and the owners twenty percent of the ticket sales. The league would employ its own umpires, with African Americans making up fifty percent. However, the NNBL never played a game. For the NNL, almost none of the owners found anyone willing to back a professional black league.

The NNL had sparse attendance was sparse in many of the cities and advertising was difficult to obtain for black teams. Since many of the stadiums sat in dangerous parts of town, fewer people came out to watch games. The Kansas City Monarchs became the exception for league teams. They tended to draw more than any other NNL team, and often outsold white baseball games in the region. Several times clubs appeared and disappeared within a year. In Cleveland, between 1922 and 1933, they had seven

different clubs in the NNL. Since owners often underpaid players, teams lost players every year. Players went to the team offered them the most money. This movement of players meant teams could fold because they could not field a proper club.

This era was the golden age of barnstorming teams. Since the Depression left many in the cities without disposable incomes, black teams took to the road. Only the state of Kansas allowed games between blacks and whites in the 1920s and 1930s. These tours included teams such as the Kansas City Monarchs and the Kansas City Colored Clowns, to teams referred to as only the “colored boys.” Baseball teams traveled all across the state to play. Kansas even allowed interracial games and eventually an interracial team well before the rest of the country. Many Kansas demonstrated more progressive attitudes with regards to race relations, though segregation and racial animosity still played a daily role in black players’ lives.



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I would also like to thank my parents for inspiring my love of history and baseball from a young age. I would like to thank my fiancé, Gina Haag, for inspiring me to push forward when I lacked motivation at times. In addition, I would like to thank any other friends and family who supported me in my journey.

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## INTRODUCTION: BANNED AND FORGOTTEN

“The bus was our home, dressing room, dining room, and hotel.” – Roy Campanella<sup>1</sup>

Almost since its inception, baseball ingrained itself in the fabric of national culture. A common picture of American life is children playing the game in sandlots and fields across the country. The sport has an innocence to its mystique and legend. On the baseball field, all are equal. The only thing that matters is if you can get people out when you are on the mound and get on base when you are up to bat. However, the sport has a much more complicated past. In Kansas, baseball provided an escape and a better life for black players. White players could practice their craft and potentially get a contract with a professional team. For the state as a whole, it started to form a crack in some of the segregation laws and racial tensions within the game. Outside of the game, black players had to continue to live and work within Jim Crow laws that made up the rest of the society.

Sports has always caught the imagination of the American public. Historians have written extensively on the history of sports. Benjamin G. Rader wrote a complete history of American sports in his book *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*. Radar argues that sports, society, and culture have always intertwined in American history. Sports have evolved to become a way for Americans to escape their daily life, a symbol of patriotism, and a reflection of the cultural norms.

In particular, the people of the United States consider baseball a cultural symbol, embodying both the good and bad of the country’s history. Baseball, like the United States, experienced segregation. From almost the start of organized baseball, white owners forced black players out of the various leagues that existed in the late-nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985.), 78.

and first-half of the twentieth centuries. This meant they had to form their own separate teams and leagues. Like segregation in the rest of society, separate but equal did not exist. Black players and teams drifted towards barnstorming, the practice of playing baseball games outside of an organized league.<sup>2</sup>

The origin story of baseball starts with Abner Doubleday, who invented the sport in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839. Most likely, this most likely is baseball's creation myth. The truth is it evolved from the English game of rounders over the course of American history. Modern historians today contribute the first official game of baseball to Alexander Cartwright in 1845. Whatever the origins, the first professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, started in 1869. By the end of the nineteenth century, the modern day National League came into existence and the sport resembled modern day baseball.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1870s and early 1880s, almost seventy African American men played for white owned ball clubs. By 1890, white owners reached an unwritten agreement to prevent African Americans from playing with white baseball players. Not until April 15, 1947, when Jackie Robinson took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers did a black baseball player play professionally with white players. It took the general manager of the Dodgers, Branch Rickey, almost a decade to get Robinson in a big league uniform. This meant for nearly sixty years, African Americans had to play separately.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of The Negro Baseball Leagues* (New York: Carrol and Graf Publishers, 1994), xv-xx; Charles Alexander, *Our Game: An American Baseball History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991)

John Thorn. *Baseball in the Garden of Eden: The Secret History of the Early Game*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013 ), xii-xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 38-39.

Before the creation of the Negro National League (NNL) in 1920, a few black businessmen attempted to create a baseball league for the country's black population. In 1910, Beauregard Mosley sought to create the National Negro Baseball League (NNBL) with franchises in cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City. This league would divide profits by giving the winner fifty percent, the loser thirty percent, and the owners twenty percent of the ticket sales. The NNBL would employ its own umpires, with African Americans making up fifty percent. However, the NNBL never played a game. Essentially, none of the owners found anyone willing to back a professional black league.<sup>5</sup>

In the segregated United States, African Americans searched for their place in society. In the 1920s, the popularity of sports reached a new height in American history. This rise in a sporting culture, along with the proper amount of financial backing, allowed the creation of the Negro National League (NNL). The league formed on February 13, 1920, in Kansas City, MO. The founders picked Kansas City due to its large black community and their previous support for teams<sup>6</sup>. Under its first president, Rube Foster, the NNL succeeded in its first half decade of existence. Foster gathered the most prominent members of the African-American community, Abel Linares, Charles A. Mills, Tenny Blount, and Daytonian Moses Moore, to help him run the league.<sup>7</sup>

The NNL had franchises in several cities, such as Chicago, Kansas City, and St. Louis. This association incorporated many of the most prominent black teams, but several still found themselves on the outside looking in. Most of the teams involved in the NNL

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<sup>5</sup> Leslie Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2013), 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Isabel Wilkerson. *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 35-42.

did not have secure financial backing or stadiums of their own. Many teams attempted to lease stadiums from major or minor league baseball teams.<sup>8</sup>

Since most teams had no permanent stadium, barnstorming became a common occurrence to make ends meet even before the NNL ran into financial problems during the Great Depression. After Foster died in 1930, the leadership weakened and fragmented. With weak leadership, the league owners made increasingly poor financial choices. After the stock market crash in October 1929, the NNL saw attendance decline significantly.<sup>9</sup>

Booking agents created the schedule in the NNL. The position allowed them to become the most influential figures in the sport. Without these agents, teams could not create a full schedule. With agents as an intermediary, teams could circumnavigate racism that many stadium owners exhibited towards blacks. It also enabled them to gain exhibition matchups against white teams. The money often went to players first. This practice allowed them to take their share of the profits before the owners saw any of it. When the owners did get their profits, many mishandled them.<sup>10</sup>

Attendance was sparse in many of the cities and advertising was difficult to obtain for black teams. Since many of the stadiums sat in dangerous parts of town, fewer people came out to watch games. The Kansas City Monarchs became the exception for league teams. They tended to draw more than any other NNL team, and often outsold white baseball games in the region. Several times clubs appeared and disappeared within a year. In Cleveland, between 1922 and 1933, they had seven different clubs in the NNL. Since owners often underpaid players, teams lost players every year. Players went to whatever

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 38-40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 41-43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 41-43.

team offered them the most money. This movement of players meant teams could fold because they could not field a proper club.<sup>11</sup>

The lives of these players were not easy. Players worked long hours, slept little, and spent months on the road away from their families. Most did it for the love of the game and a chance to improve their lives more than they could in any other job. However, they encountered racism every step of the way. Segregation was as much part of the fabric of American society as baseball. Black players had substandard everything compared to white players, older mitts, fewer bats, and fewer balls. Kansas was one of the many states that saw barnstorming baseball teams throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The teams and the often-rural towns they served had a symbiotic relationship. Both the towns and players benefited from the black teams playing across the state every year.

Historians Gerald Gems, Linda Borish, and Gertrud Pfister have written on the importance of sports in America, going into more detail than Rader. They break down the evolution of American sports, starting with dueling in colonial America all the way to the billion-dollar industry it is today. These authors examine sports as an essential part of the country's history, noting that the manner in which people approached, played, and watched sports throughout history, provided readers with a better understanding of each historical era.<sup>12</sup>

Janet Bruce in *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Baseball*, chronicled the history of the organization from its conception to its downfall. The University of Kansas published her work in 1985, but no historian since as written a better history of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 41-43; *The Negro Leagues Book*, edited by Dick Clark and Larry Lester (Cleveland: The Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), 31.

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Gems, Linda Borish, and Gertrud Pfister, *Sports in American History* (Champaign, IL: Sheridan Books, 2008)

Kansas City Monarchs. Bruce's examination is important to the history of Kansas black baseball, as the Monarchs became an important part of society, not just in Kansas City but Kansas too. She used a collection of newspapers, player interviews, and other scholarly works to write her manuscript. One of her most frequent scholarly sources is Holway's *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*.<sup>13</sup>

In *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*, John Holway compiled several interviews he did over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, forming a history of these players. He spent most of his efforts digging through newspapers in archives in an attempt to gather the individual statistics of the players he had interviewed, hoping to tell the stories of the best players of the era. When he interviewed the players, he let them guide the conversation. This first work by Holway provided one of the best collections of interviews from black baseball players. In his second book, *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers*, published in 1988, Holway added more information to provide a better history and a collection of more first-hand accounts from players.<sup>14</sup>

In the early 1990s, Dick Clark and Larry Lester wrote *The Negro Leagues Book*. They researched and published the book with funding from The Society of American Baseball Research. Clark and Lester collected all of the records, statistics, and rosters from the 1890s to 1960. This work provides a great jumping off point for anyone interested in the Negro Leagues. It also shows that baseball historians began to invest

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<sup>13</sup> Janet, Bruce. *This Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Baseball* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985.)

<sup>14</sup> John Holway. *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers*. (Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1988)



more money into researching black baseball after the works of Holway and Bruce in the 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

In 1994, a similar book came out called *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*. This book, like *The Negro Leagues Book*, contains statistics, records, and rosters. The author, James Riley, took it a step further. He created a short biography for all the players he included, presenting the information in an encyclopedia form. Riley provides a useful resource when researching individual players. If a reader had found a player's name in a newspaper, they could consult Riley's text to find out more information on the player. For example, if a researcher found a player like Josh Gibson in a newspaper, they could use Riley's book to find out where and when Gibson played.

In 2004, Alan Pollock published his work, *Barnstorming to Heaven: Syd Pollock and His Great Black Teams*. Pollock had a benefit most historians lacked; his father spent his time as an owner in the 1930s- 1950s, and he has spent his youth traveling alongside him. This gave him access to countless primary sources. His father had left him documents, letters, and photographs from his time as an owner in the 1920s and 1930s. Pollock also formally interviewed his father, collecting additional insights, thoughts, and trivia before Syd Pollock died in 1968.<sup>16</sup>

In 2006, Lawrence Hogan published *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball*. In this work, Hogan combined a few different approaches to the study of black baseball. He wove a narrative into his analysis of the

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<sup>15</sup> Dick Clark and Larry Lester. *The Negro League Book*. (Cleveland: The Society of American Baseball Research, 1994)

<sup>16</sup> Allan Pollock, *Barnstorming to Heaven: Syd Pollock and His Great Black Teams*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006.)

leagues and teams, relying heavily on autobiographical stories from the players. He also researched player statistics and included them in his book. Hogan, like many black baseball historians since 2000, used Holway as his main secondary source.<sup>17</sup>

In 2008, Neil Lanctot published *Negro League Baseball*. He broke down the history of black baseball into separate themes. He started by focusing on the initial segregation of the sport and how black players felt. He then discussed the struggle of black society to create a successful league. He ends the book by examining the long path towards integration. Though he tended to focus on urban areas instead of both urban and rural settings, Lanctot believed that black baseball provided a separate economy for black communities during the era of segregation and the Great Depression.<sup>18</sup>

In *The Negro Leagues*, Leslie Heaphy furthers the conversation of black baseball's history. The book, published in 2013, gives the entire history of black baseball. She starts with the first black men to play with professional white teams and then details the history of their segregation. Most of the sources she used come from local and national newspapers and secondary books, like Holway's. Her primary thesis examines how black baseball leagues provided a way for black people to forget their segregated lives.<sup>19</sup>

In 2016, the University Press of Kansas published Mark Eberle's *Kansas Baseball, 1858-1941*. Eberle used the story of ballparks to tell the history of Kansas baseball. Eberle also discussed baseball and race. He believed that the game gave

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Hogan, *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball*. (Washington DC: National Geographic, 2006)

<sup>18</sup> Neil Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Leslie Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2013)

minority communities a sense of identity and something to root for. He noted that baseball “mirrored the social, cultural, and economic development of Kansas.”<sup>20</sup>

The study of black baseball started with a few historians driven by a passion of the subject. John Holway became one of the first people to study the subject in detail. Since most of the players were still alive in the 1960s and 1970z, he was able to gather countless interviews. This research allowed him to lay the foundation of future historical research. It even forced Major League Baseball and The Hall of Fame to start acknowledging many of these players. They began to enshrine Negro League greats in the Hall of Fame following the creation of a selection committee in 1995. Since the early 2000s, many books have been published chronicling black baseball. This coincides with Major League baseball increasing its recognition of the Negro Leagues and its players. Additionally, more recent authors’ books have been better able to examine broader social aspects of black baseball, allowing new scholars to develop better and deeper analysis of the subject.

One of the most famous institutions in all of sports, The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY, is the premier institution for the study of baseball history. In 1971, the organization created a committee to elect Negro League players. This committee selected nine players before disbanding by 1977. One of the members, Dick Young, admitted that they had a quota to fill and disbanded because they filled it.<sup>21</sup> By the late 1980s, the Hall of Fame only elected eleven black players from before 1950. Between 1977 and 1995, the Hall of Fame only elected two more players from the Negro Leagues. From 1995 to 2001, the Hall of Fame created a new committee that had a mandate to select one Negro

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Eberle, *Kansas Baseball 1858-1941* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2016)

<sup>21</sup> It was not until 2001 that Major League Baseball collaborated with the Hall of Fame to study pre-1960 black baseball players and leagues.

league player a year. The organizations hired twenty-five researchers to comb through all the Negro League box scores they could find, which they compiled it into a collected source book for consideration by the nominating committee. The data led to the selection of new Negro League players voted into the Hall of Fame. This new study also resulted in a new committee that has elected seventeen players since the mid-2000s.<sup>22</sup>

The best sources scholars have on the Negro Leagues and its players come from the individuals themselves, like Jackie Robinson and Wilmer Fields who wrote their stories down before they died. These autobiographies give unique insights into the challenges black players faced before integration. In addition to these player autobiographies, Allan Pollock's book, *Barnstorming To Heaven*, examined how team's daily operations worked.<sup>23</sup>

Even though many scholars have noted examples of breaking down racial barriers through sports in the United States, segregation and discrimination remained embedded in American history. Black baseball players were neither an exception from the rule or unique in most circumstances. Anyone interested in understanding black baseball in the 1920s and 1930s must also have an understanding of black history in America during this time period.

One of the best books on the Great Migration is *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. In the book, Isabel Wilkerson examined why

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<sup>22</sup> John Holway, *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers*. (Westport, CT: Meckler Books, 1988) XIII.; "Negro League Researchers" *Baseball Hall of Fame*, <http://baseballhall.org/node/759>

<sup>23</sup> Allan, Pollock. *Barnstorming to Heaven: Syd Pollock and His Great Black Teams* (Tuscaloosa: University Of Alabama Press, 2006)

six million African Americans decided to move north. She discussed how this was an attempt for African Americans to improve their lives by finding better jobs and homes.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Promised Land: The Great Migration and How it Changed America*, Nicholas Lemann looks at the Great Migration on a larger scale. He attempted to analyze the long-term impact of the migration on the United States. He argues that the African Americans left in search of a better life. They settled down in large numbers in Northern cities, which led to the large populations of African Americans in the same cities today.<sup>25</sup>

One of the best books on Jim Crow is *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South*. The book was edited by William Chafe and Raymond Gavins. They collected several interviews from African Americans who lived through Jim Crow America. Chafe and Gavins provide firsthand accounts of what African Americans felt while living segregated from white society.<sup>26</sup>

A great secondary source on Jim Crow is *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* by Jerrold Packard. Here, Packard discusses the reasons why Jim Crow laws came about, life under them, and how they finally started to fall apart. It gives great insight on why Jim Crow America started to fall apart. He also connects those laws to some of the trouble African-Americans go through today.<sup>27</sup>

This era was the golden age of barnstorming teams. Since the Depression left many in the cities without disposable incomes, black teams took to the road. No other states in the country allowed games between blacks and whites. These tours included

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<sup>24</sup> Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. (New York: Vintage Publishing, 2011)

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America*. (New York: Vintage Publishing, 1992)

<sup>26</sup> William Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad. *Remembering Jim Crow*. (New York: New Press Publishing, 2001)

<sup>27</sup> Jerrold Packard. *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin Publishing, 2003)

teams such as the Kansas City Monarchs and the Kansas City Colored Clowns, to teams referred to as only the “colored boys.”<sup>28</sup> Baseball teams traveled all across the state to play. Teams played interracial games too. Many Kansans were quite progressive when it came to race relations, but every black player still had to confront racism, segregation, and oftentimes jealousy of their superior athletic ability.

In 1885, the Cuban Giants, a team out of New York state, organized themselves and became the first all-black team to have national fame. They barnstormed around the country playing any challengers they could. The team owner paid each player regularly instead of paying them based on gate receipts, a common practice among teams of this type in this era. Even though white baseball clubs had agreed not to use black ball players, they had no problem playing exhibition games against black teams. American Association teams<sup>29</sup>, such as the Philadelphia Athletics, often played black teams in their off-season. These games helped bring in money for both teams.<sup>30</sup>

Black teams often had white owners who profited off the black players. It provided black players a chance to prove they were just as talented as the white players. In 1928, Ted Page, a black player originally from Kentucky, played in a game against a white all-star team. The white team had two headliners, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Page played against the two during their most successful years as a Yankee. Page’s team won the game four to three. He even out performed Ruth in the box score. Page also played for the Baltimore Black Sox in 1929 and 1930. During his years in Baltimore, he recalled they always played teams of major league all-stars in barnstorming matchups. In 1929,

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<sup>28</sup> Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 5.

<sup>29</sup> The American Association operated from 1882 to 1891. This Athletics team was an early version of the modern day club in Oakland. “The American Association. *Baseball Reference*. [http://www.baseballreference.com/bullpen/American\\_Association\\_\(19th\\_Century\)](http://www.baseballreference.com/bullpen/American_Association_(19th_Century))

<sup>30</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 21-23.

they played the World Series winner Philadelphia Athletics in late October following the championship and came away victorious.<sup>31</sup>

The Cuban Giants stopped playing in Trenton, New Jersey after the city failed to support them, and they took to barnstorming to pay their bills. They continued to draw well on the road, which caused the team to spend most of their time traveling around the Northeast United States. Their popularity in host cities even allowed them to travel to Cuba for the entire winter to play baseball. While the team drew thousands of fans through the gates when they played white teams, some refused to play the Cuban Giants. The St. Louis Browns declined to play the Cuban Giants in New York, as the owner felt that it was improper for whites to take the same field as blacks. Beliefs such as these became more frequent in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>32</sup>

To draw more fans, black teams began to develop the theatrics that would later make teams like the Indianapolis Clowns famous. Many teams started to pretend to practice with an invisible baseball before games. Even running out and diving for the ball their teammates pretended to hit. Newspapers, such as the *Cleveland Gazette*, reported on the “comical coaching” of some of these teams. The first and third base coaches often yelled the instructions at players to create excitement and laughter among the crowd. The black teams did this to market to the largely white crowds who came out to watch in the late-nineteenth century. They presented the crowds with common racial characterization of an African-American to northern white society. These nineteenth century teams drew more fans in the gate, increasing profits for the owners, while also allowing the players to

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<sup>31</sup> “Interview with Ted Page”, Holway, John. *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1975) 154-155.

<sup>32</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 31-32.

the keep getting paychecks. Their theatrics also played into the accepted stereotypes of blacks in America, lacking intelligence and having little sense of professionalism.<sup>33</sup>

For black baseball players, teams, and society, barnstorming provided many benefits. It allowed them to make better lives for themselves and their families. Black baseball players had a chance to play a game that normally would have been closed to them due to segregation. During the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Kansas, interracial games became a common occurrence in barnstorming matchups. Whites and blacks both attended these games together. Barnstorming baseball provided a symbiotic relationship for both white and black people and resulted forced interracial interaction, which helped Kansas be ahead of its time in race relations.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 34-35.



## CHAPTER 1: THE LIFE OF BARNSTORMERS

“They ought to be good. They play all year.” –George Haas<sup>34</sup>

Fans of American or National League teams had no trouble catching their club play a game during the Great Depression. Fans of Negro League teams had a different reality. Credibility came into question when umpires and players faced scandals. Teams laid claim to cities, like the Kansas City Monarchs or St. Louis Stars, but more often than not, they played a majority of their games on the road. Negro League teams faced more financial problems than their white counterparts did. They encountered issues with stadiums, furnishing equipment, and occasionally paying players. These teams had to take the show on the road to make ends meet and keep their players’ paychecks coming.

While Babe Ruth and the Yankees dominated the Major Leagues in 1927, the Negro Leagues fell on hard times. As early as August of 1926, Nat Strong of the Eastern Colored League (ECL)<sup>35</sup> predicated his league might not make it past the next season due to financial problems. Many black team owners found themselves in large amounts of debt. This occurred in both the ECL and the Negro National League. To pay the bills teams began to play white teams and even travel overseas to play in Japan. According to the *New York Age*, a national newspaper, the only black team to have a successful financial year in 1930 was the Homestead Grays out of Pennsylvania.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the professional teams based themselves in large cities but had difficulty finding a stadium or baseball field that was both affordable and accessible to their fans. Some teams, like the Cuban Stars, never had a park to call their own. Black teams mostly

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<sup>34</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 213.

<sup>35</sup> The Eastern Colored League played from 1922 to 1928. It had teams located east of the Mississippi River; Michael Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs, 1902-1931: The Negro National and Eastern Colored Leagues* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014)

<sup>36</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 195-200.

used unkempt and nearly condemned facilities. Slumlords often owned the stadiums, or teams had to use old stadiums white teams had long abandoned. This led to one of the most cited reasons attendance numbers dropped, fans disliked the shoddy ballparks. Nicer parks were located in white neighborhoods, away from the target black audience. Almost none of the black teams owned their own stadium, usually leasing one from a white owner. For example, the Yankees owner leased out stadiums in New York, Kansas City, and Newark. White park owners also typically refused to fix the fields black teams used. On July 7, 1929, a fire in injured 100 people at Hamtramck Stadium in Detroit.<sup>37</sup>

Like most businesses, professional black baseball fell on hard times during the Great Depression. Many African Americans around the country could no longer afford to go to baseball games at stadiums. High unemployment rates and competition from other forms of entertainment, especially radio, hit the pocket books of the NNL hard. Several teams folded by 1931, as they could no longer afford to pay players or turn a profit.<sup>38</sup>

The financial and administrative troubles left teams with few choices. They could play more or disband. Most team owners began scheduling games throughout the year. They played in organized leagues in California, Florida, and the Caribbean in the winter. During the rest of the year, when they did not have league games, teams barnstormed around the country. Newspaper reporters provided box scores from as many games in their area as they could get. However, since barnstorming occurred every day and often in small towns, reporters had a hard time keeping track of every game. Usually, only a local paper from the town that hosted a game kept a record of it. However, small town

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 248-249.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 225-227.

reporters often provided less reliable information and game statistics, ignored wins by black teams, and providing biased coverage of the players.<sup>39</sup>

Black professional teams played a large part in barnstorming, but company teams barnstormed alongside them. Local companies and businesses commonly sponsored baseball clubs. They also practiced segregation, sponsoring both a black and white team. Black industrial and postal workers began to form their own clubs that played when they could. In Wichita, the Cudahy Company, a meat packer, sponsored the colored Cudahy Rex. Often local Y.M.C.A.'s and churches sponsored town ball teams as well.<sup>40</sup>

Often black teams faced subpar competition from white teams while barnstorming. The top white professional teams often refused to play black teams, which forced black teams to play semiprofessional white teams, which were more likely to play black teams, since they needed to make money too. Many in black baseball debated if barnstorming against white teams was profitable, or even necessary. In 1928, Cum Posey, of the Kansas City Monarchs, felt that top black teams could survive just by playing white opponents. In the same year, Fay Young, of the American Giants, disagreed with Posey. He felt that the white opponents diluted the product on the field.<sup>41</sup>

Life for the Pre-Great Depression barnstormers consisted of playing mostly black teams as they traveled around the country. Each traveling team had a promotor that would help them schedule games to play. Doing double duty, the promotor sometimes acted as the team's coach and ran the business side of the organization. Promoters used promotional tactics to help draw fans. In one example, Syd Pollock hired a local male

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<sup>39</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 217-218

<sup>40</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 217-218; Jason Pendleton, *History of Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 94-95.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 229-230.

pitcher to play with an all-women's team in 1942. He then paid the female team to go against his Negro baseball club. Promotional tactics like this proved successful and often resulted in some of the largest crowds these teams saw while barnstorming. The crowds went from a couple hundred to, at times, thousands of people.<sup>42</sup>

When black teams played exhibition games, they often performed theatrics to attract fans. A precursor to the Harlem Globetrotters, players "messed" around on the field. Teams commonly played shadow baseball, putting forth full effort with no ball or bat. Other times players, like King Tut<sup>43</sup>, showed up to play games in three-piece suits, prison garbs and other outlandish outfits. Black players commonly used their athletic ability to perform trick plays against their white opponents. White newspaper reporters liked to describe black teams as being like circus clowns. However, many white reporters had positive reviews of barnstorming antics. White people came in droves to watch black baseball players put on a show.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the popularity of interracial games, black teams faced unavoidable racism. The lighter the skin color of a player, the more likely white society accepted them. Wilmer Fields' teammates often asked him to go into white establishments to buy food. In 1940, he attempted to purchase food in Mississippi, but the white owner noticed he was with another black player. The owner kicked Fields out of the store. If the team had a white driver, they might get around racist storeowners by having him go into the store for the players to buy food. This only happened when the driver got gas, as owners got suspicious if he only purchased food. Usually players had to dine at one of the black

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<sup>42</sup> Alan Pollock, *Barnstorming to Heaven*, 73-75.

<sup>43</sup> King Tut was a member of the traveling Ethiopian Clown team, which had no home city. Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 11-22.

restaurants they came across. If they had no black restaurants to choose from, players ate at the ballpark. Depending on the town, this could result in substandard or undercooked food. If teams were lucky, they could find black families to cook for the team. When on the road, sometimes the only food source could be a roadside fruit stand they passed by.<sup>45</sup>

Players could not escape racism at the games either. Both white and black fans packed stands to watch many of the exhibition games. It was not strange to see black players escorted off the field by police officers after fights broke out, or white fans threatened black players. When most black teams entered the stadium, they had to enter from the back. When they played white teams, black teams often held back so as not to show up the other team. For example, if a ball was hit to third base, instead of throwing directly to first the third baseman threw to the second baseman who then through it to first. They wanted to win, but not over-match their opponents. If they humiliated a white team on the field, the white teams might not ask the black teams back, or white fans might become aggressive towards them.<sup>46</sup>

Betting in the stands occurred among many white fans. They would bet on what a black player would do on the field. Occasionally, if a white fan lost the bet, they became antagonistic towards the player who failed to do what the fan bet. Fans' actions ranged from verbal to physical abuse. Wilmer Fields remembered often hearing the words "nigger" or "darkie" yelled from the stands. While they were often the whites equal or better on the field, fans reminded players they were not their equals off it.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the racism, popular teams, like the Kansas City Monarchs, found no shortage of challengers when they took to barnstorming. They played white or black

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<sup>45</sup> Wilmer Fields, *My Life in the Negro Leagues* (Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing, 1992),20-22.

<sup>46</sup> Fields, *My Life*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Fields, *My Life*, 12, 15-16.

teams all across the Midwest and the Great Plains. In Kansas, they played everyone from church league teams to semi-professional teams. When top-tier teams like the Monarchs traveled, communities became more involved. One game in 1935, in Pittsburgh, Kansas saw the Monarchs draw thousands. People came from all over the area to watch them. Children of any race were fans of the Monarchs, flocking to greet the players, following them around town, and carrying their equipment. The community responded with food and clothing for the players. After the game, towns would offer carnival-like celebrations. Since the Monarchs hardly ever lost, these celebrations became commonplace.<sup>48</sup>

Travel was one of the biggest differences between white and black teams. See Posey, a top Homestead Gray official and promoter, tried to defend the packed schedules by claiming the only way teams survived was by playing every game possible. Dave Malarcher, a player in the 1920s and coach in the 1930s, argued that as the barnstorming schedule increased the standards of living lowered. He claimed that players went without food and sleep for long periods.<sup>49</sup>

Barnstorming brought long and difficult road trips for the players. Black teams famously traveled in team busses, the first of any professional baseball teams to do so. Double headers became common. Often the team would play one game in the morning and then move on to another town to play a night game. Then these players could find themselves on a bus for hundreds of miles to make the next day's games. Road trips began to feel short if not more than a couple hours. The promoters scheduled games like this to maximize profits for their cash strapped teams.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 28-31.

<sup>49</sup> Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 153-155.

<sup>50</sup> Fields, *My Life*, 10-15

Despite the work of promoters and owners, disorganized barnstorming schedules plagued the teams. Owners always looked to maximize profits, so they took teams all over the country. In September of 1932, the Pittsburgh Crawfords had a 1,200-mile road trip in a little less than two days. In 1932, the Kansas City Monarchs traveled across the country in forty days and played at least one game each day. Players had little choice in the matter. If they complained, another player was ready and waiting to take their spot. Players had no guaranteed contract, which allowed owners to get rid of players whenever they wished. Some teams, like the Homestead Grays, had two cities they called home, which forced them to travel more.<sup>51</sup>

The road manager had the responsibility for figuring out where the team ate and slept every night. White team promoters often called the black team road managers “uppity” blacks. When a black team had a white road manager, the opposing promoters called them “nigger lover.” This was the atmosphere black teams constantly encountered in their travels. Black business managers had to present themselves as higher class than their players. Since white people typically thought less of blacks, they took any chance to insult an African-American’s behavior. This resulted in teams missing potential matchups or losing out on promised profits if they did not remain quiet about their treatment.<sup>52</sup>

To save money, teams almost never stopped at hotels. Busses became traveling homes for most of the players. Roy Campanella once said, “We never bothered to take off our uniforms going from one place to another. The bus was our home, dress room, dining room, and hotel.”<sup>53</sup> During the season, they would almost never be home with their families. They found themselves in a different city every day, sometimes even

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<sup>51</sup> Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 155-157; Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 60-61.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 78.

visiting two cities a day. They spent more time on the bus than on the field. Players found enjoyment by playing cards or singing on the bus. As Hall of Fame member Buck Leonard put it, “It would kill our worries and our tiredness to sing as we went from one town to another.”<sup>54</sup>

Life on the bus was hard. Teams used older model busses, lacking air conditioning or any basic amenities. They carried their luggage with them, putting it on top of the bus. When it rained, players commonly had to dry out their clothing at the ballpark while they warmed up. This included their uniforms, which became more soaked with sweat from the hot bus rides than when they actually played. In addition, players had a hard time finding drinking water. They had to carefully choose what stores they stopped at, so more often than not they stopped at parks to get water. This contributed to the mental and physical exhaustion that players dealt with during the season.<sup>55</sup>

Travel was one of the biggest differences between white and black teams. See Posey, a top Homestead Gray official, tried to defend the packed schedules by claiming the only way teams survived was by playing every game possible. Dave Malarcher, a player in the 1920s and coach in the 1930s, argued that as the barnstorming schedule increased the standards of living lowered. He claimed that players went without food and sleep for long periods.<sup>56</sup>

Not every team had busses of equal standard. Some of the eastern teams could afford radios or reclining seats. However, many reporters of the era claimed that most team busses broke down frequently. For example, the Black Barons bus once caught fire

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<sup>54</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Fields, *My Life*, 13-15.

<sup>56</sup> Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 153-155.



in a tunnel resulting in the loss of all the uniforms and equipment. It was not until the 1950s, that busses became more reliable for these teams.<sup>57</sup>

Life was hard for the players during the trips themselves. The busses were large and the drivers often had to focus on keeping the bus on the road. This caused several teams to have a player act as a navigator. For the Kansas City Clowns, that meant that player had to sit on a milk can while the team traveled, navigating for the driver. This included reading signs, maps, and warning them about terrible road conditions.<sup>58</sup>

However, not every player had to travel on the team bus. Owners and managers allowed more famous players, like Satchel Paige or Josh Gibson, to travel on their own if they could afford a car, though this was an uncommon occurrence. Only the top players ever got paid enough to live life that well. Many players had families to support. They saved all the pay they could to send back, which could be upwards of \$1,000 to \$1,500. They used baseball as a way to improve their families' lives, rather than spending money on luxuries such as cars.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the terrible traveling conditions, most players enjoyed their time barnstorming. Many young black men considered the uncomfortable travel better than the alternatives. They loved the game of baseball, which helped them maintain a positive attitude during barnstorming season. Though away from their family for long periods of time, it gave players a way to support their families.<sup>60</sup>

By 1940, a good player could take home one hundred to one hundred and fifty dollars a week. If the player was really good, they could make a comfortable living

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<sup>57</sup> Lanctot, *The Negro League*, 153-155.

<sup>58</sup> Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> Heapy, *The Negro Leagues*, 75-77.

playing the game. The amount of games they played earned the players additional income. Most players could get by on a dollar or two a day. Satchel Paige was one of only a few who could afford a nicer life. Cool Pape Bell recalled that he had a brand new convertible that he drove to games. Players of his marketability had paychecks regardless of what the gate money brought in. For players on poorly run teams, the paycheck sometimes would not come for many young black men, this was the closest they ever got to escaping their lives as citizens in American society.<sup>61</sup>

Teams faced racism wherever they went. Newspapers covered black teams differently than white teams. Typical headlines referred to players as Negroes, colored boys, or most commonly “darkie.”<sup>62</sup> The reporters referred to these teams in derogatory racial terms to warn its residents of a large number of incoming African-Americans. Newspapers made jokes that you could not see players at night, along with other jabs at their skin-color. More often than not, rural Kansas residents had little interaction with black people. In fact, most of their experience interacting with black people came when black teams came to the area. Towns usually segregated any black population from the rest of the city. If a city did have black residents, they would show up to support the black team, or a young ball player might hope to impress them with a tryout.<sup>63</sup>

One way newspapers often referred to black teams was by calling them Negroes, rather than by their team name, such as “Negros like to hit fastballs,”<sup>64</sup> not the team likes to hit fastballs. They had to tell the reader black players made up the entire team. Whenever they wrote about white teams, it would be something like “Hutchison is a solid

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<sup>61</sup> Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues*, 75-77.

<sup>62</sup> “Negroes Here Tuesday,” *The Belleville Telescope*, August 10, 1933.

<sup>63</sup> “Negroes Here”

<sup>64</sup> “Snell to Feed ‘Em Slow Balls” *The Hutchison News*. August 24, 1929.; “More Sports Sunday” *The Hutchinson News*. June 10, 1939.

defensive team,”<sup>65</sup> not the whites play the field well. The way the newspaper covered the black teams was just another way teams faced racism. They came to each town known as the “black” team, like a circus act sideshow for the people. These teams often came to fairs and other large gatherings to play, billed next to midget car races and other entertainment shows. However, black teams were normally more talented than any white team they played, and typically had far more experience and talent than their competition.

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When the black teams did lose, reporters took the opportunity to rub it in. They emphasized the inexperience of white teams if they won, to show the significance of a victory. They also made sure to note if the team consisted of local teenagers. In October 1931, a local high school team beat a traveling black team. The newspaper made sure everyone knew that the school threw the team together at the last minute due to most of the normal players falling ill. The town celebrated it as a city would celebrate a team bringing home a league championship in the National or American League. However, since Kansas had no professional teams, the barnstorming matchups of these barnstorming matchups could be some of most exciting entertainment they would get all year.<sup>67</sup>

The reporter’s language varied depending which team they talked about. Before games, newspapers reporters would play up the chances of the local white teams. The local press played up the home team as “snappy”, but talented underdogs.<sup>68</sup> The papers

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<sup>65</sup> “Snell to Feed ‘Em Slow Balls” *The Hutchison News*. August 24, 1929.; “More Sports Sunday” *The Hutchinson News*. June 10, 1939.

<sup>66</sup> “Snell to Feed ‘Em Slow Balls” *The Hutchison News*. August 24, 1929.; “More Sports Sunday” *The Hutchinson News*. June 10, 1939.

<sup>67</sup> “Junior Ball Team Wins Batfest From Darkies” *The Belleville Telescope*, October 1, 1931.

<sup>68</sup> “Wichita Cudahys Are Beaten by Negroes” *The Hutchinson News*, July 17, 1939.

billed the black teams as talented, but sloppy when it came to game fundamentals.<sup>69</sup> Though black teams usually won, newspaper reporters tended to include black victories in short segments and not giving many details of the game. When the Aces-Up, a black team, played in Hutchinson, the game got a longer pre-game article, due to the fame of the team. However, after the team won, the same newspaper reporters covered it with a couple of sentences. The editor did not include a box score, or even summary of the game beyond the final score. On the same page, the editor covered a white team victory over a barnstorming black team, providing a play-by-play of the entire game.<sup>70</sup>

How newspaper reporters covered black teams provided just a small glimpse of the racism the black teams faced. The locals loved the idea of professional or semi-professional teams coming to play in their town. However, they disliked when black teams won. They would cover the teams in less friendly ways because of this. The black teams had no choice but to accept this, as they needed the money that came from these barnstorming games. From town to town, people varied on the level of hate they showed, but it never appeared to affect the size of the crowds that showed up.<sup>71</sup>

Even though black barnstorming players had a better life than the average black person did, they still faced hardships. While the pay was sometimes good, most players had to send money back home to their families. Since they sent most of it back home, this led to most players living only a small portion of their salary. The choices where they could eat were subpar as well. Most players, no matter how good, lived on junk food while traveling. Some unlucky players had team managers who would take a cut of their

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<sup>69</sup> “Wichita Cudahys Are Beaten by Negroes” *The Hutchinson News*, July 17, 1939.

<sup>70</sup> “Wichita Cudahys Are Beaten by Negroes” *The Hutchinson News*, July 17, 1939.; “Aces Up Will Play Larned Here Tuesday” *The Hutchinson News*, August 29, 1921. ; ”The Aces-Up Won Game” *The Hutchinson News*, May 27, 1921.

<sup>71</sup> Phil Dixon “Negro Leagues In Kansas Speech in Great Bend” June 22, 2016.

pay. Crooked owners and managers led to players having little loyalty to a team. If the team could not pay them or find food for them, they would leave for better opportunities. Each town presented a new problem of trying to find places to sleep and eat. Many teams hit the road as soon as the game was over to make it to their next game. It was not unheard of for teams to drive across Kansas nonstop to make the next match. Life was better for players but still far behind the standards for white baseball players.<sup>72</sup>

Another issue teams faced on the road was the conduct of their own players. Since whites already thought lesser of blacks, black owners worried about what the white town residents thought about the players. They worried that any bad behavior in public by these famous black players could be detrimental to the entire league. Even Rube Foster, founder of the Negro National League, claimed, “colored baseball players were harder to handle.”<sup>73</sup> Black baseball team management had to worry about appearance while on the road barnstorming. The carnival like atmosphere of the exhibition games led to reports of players leaving the field to drink with fans in the stands. Owners and umpires caught players with sharpened spikes on their shoes to injure opponents. Pitchers openly admitted that they threw at batters to hurt them. Occasionally, fights broke out on the field when tensions ran high between teams. Accusations of poor on-field conduct ravaged attendance at times.<sup>74</sup>

A far too common occurrence was attacks on umpires during black baseball games. In 1929 alone, police intervened on two separate occasions when black managers attacked umpires who could not control the game being played. For example, in September of 1925, an umpire decided to hit a player in the face after the player disputed

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<sup>72</sup> Jackie Robinson, *I Never Had Made It*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1972), 36-37.

<sup>73</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 36.

<sup>74</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 36.

a call. The umpire defended his actions by claiming that he protected the other umpires from the aggressive action of the player. In another game, a player physically beat an umpire when he thought the man made a bad call. Many newspapers claimed the ineffectiveness of the umpires helped lower attendance during games between members of the Negro Leagues.<sup>75</sup>

Fans in the stands began to complain that the game was full of unnecessary disputes. Players, like Jim Taylor and J.L. Wilkinson, thought that this would spell the end to black teams. The aggressive actions by players and umpires caused games to increase in length. A common complaint was that games would take longer than two hours. Ironically, the common complaint about baseball in 2016 was that games were too long at three hours.<sup>76</sup>

Knowing that players would not change their behavior on their own, wealthy blacks in society attempted to change the culture of the game. Roy Wilkins, a reporter in Kansas City, and Cum Posey, a NNL league official, were some of the most out-spoken. They complained that the players cussed too much, drank after midnight, and frequented prostitutes. However, white baseball players commonly behaved this way too. Babe Ruth had a famous love for drinking and women.<sup>77</sup>

The society placed black players under a microscope. White fans would find any reason to hate a black player whether on the field or off. Owners worried the behavior effected the ticket money of each game.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 203-206, 247-248.

<sup>76</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 247-248.

<sup>77</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 247-248.

<sup>78</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 247-248.

Off the field, whites did not have to worry about their conduct towards the black players. Often, in smaller towns, players faced a significant amount of racism. Most rural towns lacked black owned businesses. If teams were lucky, they could find a couple black families to take in players. Many whites, who cheered on the players at games, kicked them out of restaurants and treated them as second-class citizens.<sup>79</sup>

Players usually got a couple dollars a day for food. Since many restaurants did not serve blacks, teams got creative to feed their players. When white restaurants did serve players, they forced them to go to the backdoor to get their food. Teams had to have a white driver or a light-skinned player buy food for the whole team. At the same restaurant, they could see white teams they just played sitting in the front room. Someone who just watched them play might own the restaurant. Since many restaurants refused to serve players, they went to grocery stores. Even then, players often found no service.<sup>80</sup>

To prevent issues of accidentally stopping at white run businesses, some teams kept a “black book,” containing a listing of every black hotel and restaurant in areas they visited. It also included black families that might host players. Often, teams barnstormed in the same towns year after year, so the “black book” helped keep the trips more organized. Most teams included the “black book” with a ledger about how much to pay each player. Management and promoters could run a more efficient business.<sup>81</sup>

The teams had to find a balance when barnstorming across Kansas. Often these teams had more talent and playing experience than the town ball teams, which created a disparity in skill level. This disparity could lead to teams deciding to mess around with

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<sup>79</sup> Lanctot, *Negro League Baseball*, 156-157.

<sup>80</sup> Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues*, 78-79.

<sup>81</sup> Pollock, *Barnstorming*, 139; Alexander Nazaryan “How the Green Book Saved Black Lives On the Road” *Newsweek*, March 9, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/2017/03/17/green-book-jim-crow-era-travel-guide-saved-black-lives-565430.html>

their opponents. One example was on June 10, 1926, in Hays. The Ninth Cavalry black team played the Hays team. The home team took a seven to one lead into the last two innings. The coverage of the games notes that the team started to play at a higher level. They proceeded to score eight runs to take the game from Hays. The reporter pointed out that the hitters did not seem to be putting forth the same effort before the last two innings. This is an example of the talent some of the teams had. They could take most of the game off then when they needed to come back and win. The high skill levels came in handy as many of these teams did not want to beat teams too badly, or else they risked the town not asking them back to play again.<sup>82</sup>

When they did find hotels, black typically faced substandard conditions. George Giles recalled, “We’d have the lights on at night so the cockroaches wouldn’t come out.”<sup>83</sup> He was not the only player to keep the lights on while sleeping or worry about cockroaches. Bed bugs were common in both urban and rural settings. Often hotels failed to clean the sheets or rooms where they stayed.<sup>84</sup>

Life was hard for black players. Most of their life they spent with the odds stacked against them. For the opportunity to play baseball, they worked harder than their white counterparts did. This included traveling more than any white player could imagine. However, they came across unique challenges and problems. Black players could not escape social and economic segregation that was as much a part of the fabric of American culture as baseball.

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<sup>82</sup> “Hays Loses Third Game” *Ellis County News*, June 10, 1926.

<sup>83</sup> Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues*, 77.

<sup>84</sup> Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues*, 77.



## CHAPTER TWO: MORE BASEBALL, BETTER LIFE

“These are ball players, let ‘em in.”- Cool Papa Bell<sup>85</sup>

Rural Kansas entertainment options are hard to come by even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. During the 1930s and 1940s, Kansans looked to many forms of entertainment to keep themselves occupied on their day off. During the summer, if the townspeople got lucky, traveling baseball teams might come through the town. They took on all comers, white or black. From the area around Kansas City all the way in Western Kansas, semi-professional and professional teams traveled across the state to play baseball. More often than not, these teams, made up of black players, traveled to towns every summer. They would play all the local teams they could schedule. Barnstorming allowed teams to practice their skills, gain extra money for themselves and their families, be on an equal or superior level with whites on the field, and play the game they loved.

David Malarcher was born as the son of a former slave. He grew up idolizing white baseball players knowing he would never get to play against them. Until the day he died, he never lost the belief that he would have been a star in the major leagues if he had gotten a chance. In one barnstorming game, Cool Papa Bell’s beat future Hall of Fame member Dizzy Dean’s team eleven to one. Hilton Smith pitched scoreless games against four white teams in Wichita during a tournament in 1926. According to Smith, this record still stood forty years later. Hank Thompson hit Bob Feller well anytime they played during barnstorming games. Time after time black players proved against white

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<sup>85</sup> “Interview with Cool Papa Bell”, *Voices*, 123.

competition that they could compete and beat white players. Barnstorming gave players an opportunity to prove this to white crowds.<sup>86</sup>

Larry Brown played against Ty Cobb in one exhibition game. After the game, Ty Cobb came up to talk to him. He asked Brown where he played and if he wanted to “play on a real ball club.” Since Brown had lighter skin Cobb wanted him to pretend to be white. Brown took offense to this since he thought his club was just as good as Cobb’s Detroit Tigers. Even after Brown declined, Cobb persisted. Cobb even offered to pay Brown and his wife to live in Cuba, learn Spanish, and then pretend to be Cuban so he could play in the white major leagues. Brown continued to decline. Brown outplayed Cobb in a game, which proved to him what most black players knew, they could compete with white players even if the major league teams never wanted to give them a chance. Ty Cobb, a famous proponent of segregation, recognized the talents black players had to offer. When he saw Brown play, he knew Brown was a major league talent.<sup>87</sup>

Cool Papa Bell claimed black teams could consistently beat white teams because they “outgassed them.” When a black team played against a white team, they typically played an unorthodox style. They would take the extra base, slide hard into second, and do anything in their power to win. Bell liked to claim that black players played smarter baseball than white players did, a microcosm of life for black players. They had to take every advantage they could to carve out a successful life compared to whites. Black baseball players barnstormed so they could have some semblance of the life of a white

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<sup>86</sup> “Interview with David Malarcher”, *Voices*, 42-43; “Interview with Cool Papa Bell”, *Voices*, 128; “Interview with Hilton Smith”, *Voices*, 287-293.

<sup>87</sup> “Interview with Larry Brown”, *Voices*, 208.

player. Even then, successful black players never approached the life of their white counterparts. However, on the baseball field, they were the equals of whites.<sup>88</sup>

Even when the locals invited the black teams to play, the organizers occasionally had trouble finding venues to play in. Often, city authorities made on-the-spot rules concerning when blacks could use public facilities. Since they could not play regularly in the cities, most teams could not find consistent playing spaces locally. For instance, Kansas City, Lawrence, and Topeka treated blacks like second-class citizens. They subjected blacks to the worst neighborhoods and banned them from white-only businesses. Teams played in sub-par conditions, which led to less money coming through the gate. Therefore, owners of black teams, in order to increase revenue, would start to travel across the countryside, taking on all comers. White or black, the teams did not care who they played as long as it turned some profit.<sup>89</sup>

White teams had to gather their own squads. These teams usually consisted of local men of varying ages and skill levels. So for the most part, black teams dominated any team they played. In early September of 1945, The Kansas City Colored Clowns traveled to Atchison, KS. Local advertisements put the Clowns as the second act playing that weekend, but they had not recorded a loss in 167 games. The Clowns even included two sixty-three year old players, well past their prime. It was not out of the norm for black groups to keep an older player or two on the roster to draw more fans. Teams did this as late as the 1950s with players like Satchel Paige.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> "Interview with Cool Papa Bell", *Voices*, 118-120.

<sup>89</sup> "Aces Up Will Play Larned Here Tuesday," *The Hutchinson News*, August 29, 1921.; Janet Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 38-39.

<sup>90</sup> "Clowns Have No Defeats in 167 Games," *The Atchison Daily Globe*, September 1, 1945.

A black baseball player may have had a better quality of life than the average black person did, but they still became strapped for cash at times. They only made income while playing baseball. The short Negro League season led to many months without income. Therefore, this made it an easy choice for players to play as many games as they could. Several of the teams even barnstormed year round. Barnstorming helped players save up the money so they could eat and pay bills the rest of the year. However, most players could not afford to only play baseball, they had to get a second job during the off-season. For example, George Sweatt found work as a teacher in Coffeyville, KS when he was not playing baseball. While they were playing baseball, black players could live well, but then their quality of life took a step back. So most players thought the more baseball, the better. Even with the hard life on the road, it kept money coming.<sup>91</sup>

The second goal for a team while barnstorming was to keep players happy. During the Negro League season, players were on salary, receiving a certain amount of money no matter what. However, when a team barnstormed, the team paid the players based on ticket sales for each game. Since profits varied, it created a balancing act for the business managers. They wanted to turn a profit while making enough to pay their players a decent salary. Outside of the Monarchs, this was a challenge for any traveling black team. Players slept in tents, on a bus, or in a random family's house. But as long as the team paid them well they would continue playing.<sup>92</sup>

Many white players hated black so much they refused to take the field. Ironically, this led to better relations between white and black players, and even influenced the crowd and townspeople. Buck O'Neil and Newt Allen said their white opponents often

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<sup>91</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 64-65.

<sup>92</sup> "Interview with Bill Drake", *Voices*, 32.

showed a significant amount of respect for them. The play on the field helped develop a mutual respect among players that played each other often. It started to heal some of the racism that existed in the country. At least on the baseball field, black players felt equal if not more talented than their white counterparts. Most people compared the average level of the top black teams to the highest level of white minor league baseball. Several top white players, like Babe Ruth, remarked that black teams had players that could play in the major leagues if the league allowed it. However, comments like that did not change much of the racism they faced off the field.<sup>93</sup>

Playing so many games a week allowed black teams to develop some of the features professional baseball takes for granted today. Black teams were some of the first to start doing promotions to help increase attendance. The primary goal of any team owner was to get more money through ticket sales. Some of the earliest promotions included fans guessing the final score for a cash prize. Teams would host “Ladies nights” to help draw a bigger crowd. Teams thought that more women at a game would, in turn, attract more men. One “ladies night” in the mid-1920s drew over a thousand women to the stadium. Teams also flooded local papers with as much advertising as they could to attract fans. Nothing was off the table to turn a profit. One team even signed Olympic runner Jessie Owens to play a couple of games with them. The events also led to some of the theatrics teams were famous for, such as shadow ball and showing up the opponent. Players went along with most of the owner’s ideas since it potentially meant a better paycheck for them. Since most players had families to support, they enjoyed any extra income.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 60-61.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 70-75.

Some of the promotions played into the stereotypes whites had of blacks. One of the most common stereotypes harkened back to nineteenth century minstrel shows. Black players pretended to be dimwitted or slow, danced around the field, or sang songs. The minstrel shows had fallen out of practice in the 1920s, but the Depression caused a resurgence. Players would clown around and play into the belief of a “loveable darky.”<sup>95</sup> These practices conflicted with the players’ morals, as some believed that it did a disservice to all blacks to play along with such stereotypes, degrading to everyone involved. However, in the search to make money owners did anything they could to attract more wealthy white fans. When they played small towns, black teams showboated. Their behaviors were similar to the Harlem Globetrotters today. The teams created a circus-like atmosphere to attract fans.<sup>96</sup>

Some teams would travel with actual circuses. Eddie Dwight, who played with several teams in Kansas and Missouri, traveled with caravans featuring carnival-like games and food. He, along with other players, would play baseball during the day then set up and run the games at night. The combination of minstrel show skits and activities, along with clowning around on the field was most prevalent in rural areas. Besides bringing in greater ticket sales, players also saw another benefit. The rural town people were more likely to treat them better if they acted like comedic relief.<sup>97</sup>

The loss of respect was a source of conflict for many players as they tried to decide what was right and wrong. Barnstorming gave them a chance to play on equal levels to whites but clowning around perpetuated stereotypes. However, out of the circus-like games came legends like Satchel Paige. He and others became wealthy off playing to

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<sup>95</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 82.

<sup>96</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 80-82.

<sup>97</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 61-62.

the stereotypes white people had of blacks. Some players accepted this as an unpleasant fact that they had to play into stereotypes. Black teams played into these stereotypes so white society would accept them. Since they came off as the “loveable darkie” to whites, they began to accept them more during baseball games. Outside of games, little changed.<sup>98</sup>

On June 10, 1939, Hutchinson, Kansas hosted traveling black teams for a couple of exhibition games. The games hosted some of the best semi-professional teams Kansas. In an effort to get bigger crowds, the event billed the games as second fiddle to the midget car races that arrived with them. This is not to take away from the popularity of midget car races. Sometimes black teams had to attach themselves to other events to draw fans. In this instance, they were playing black team from Missouri and they wanted to make sure white fans would come too. The races were a chance to attract both white and black fans.<sup>99</sup>

One of the biggest benefits players had for playing on barnstorming teams was an increase in quality of life. The life for an average black man during the period was less than ideal. They could cut out a simple life for them in a black community, but the cities relegated black communities to the worst parts of the town. The teams provided a source of steady salaries and the ability to gain celebrity. Jesse Fisher explained it best when he said that every young boy wanted to be a baseball player. Even rural blacks knew about the legends and stories of the famous black baseball players. Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, and Cool Papa Bell were heroes for young black kids in the 1930s, just as Babe Ruth, Ty

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<sup>98</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 61-62.

<sup>99</sup> “Midget Cars to Race, Negroes to Play Ball”, *The Hutchinson News*, June 10, 1939.

Cobb, and Walter Johnson were for white children. Black people in communities came out in droves to see black teams compete against white teams.<sup>100</sup>

Another benefit black teams got from the traveling was a chance to try out new technologies. Starting in the early 1930s, teams began to explore playing night games.. The owner of the Kansas City Monarchs, J.L. Wilkerson, became one of the first owners in the nation to explore the possibility of playing at night. He had a desire to increase profits for his team when they barnstormed. This allowed the Monarchs to play multiple games in a day. Often they would play one game in the morning, hit the road and play another game at night. The lighting system consisted of tall floodlights attached to generators sitting in the back of trucks.<sup>101</sup>

This first system received complaints from the players. They lost the ball in the lights, and the lights illuminated the dust from the rural ball fields. However, the pros outweighed the cons. The lights allowed teams to play more and make up the lost income. Since they could play at night, they could wait out rain and play once the storm was over. No longer would they have to worry about a rainout or game called because of darkness costing them a lot of money.<sup>102</sup>

Night baseball did receive some push back from players and ridicule from white baseball. The first light systems had portable trucks transporting lights in their bed. Scrip Lee claimed this did not allow players to see the ball properly. He was one of a few pitchers who refused to pitch during night games. Outfielders claimed that they could not make out the ball in the air, making it impossible to catch.

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<sup>100</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 39-40.

<sup>101</sup> "Negro Baseball Team Is Easy" *The Hutchinson News*, April 27, 1935.

<sup>102</sup> "Negro Baseball Team Is Easy" *The Hutchinson News*, April 27, 1935.



Despite the players' complaints, fans flocked to see nighttime baseball. Some weekday night games drew crowds in the thousands, sometimes more than eight-times what a day game brought. Weekend crowds could approach 10,000, unheard of for black barnstorming baseball during the day. Due to the success of nighttime games, for the most part weekday day games were phased out by the 1940s. The night games increased the potential fan base by thousands. It was a step forward not just for black baseball for the entirety of the sport. Sometimes, other circumstances prevented a team from playing a game.<sup>103</sup>

If a team failed to appear for a game, the town usually took offense to it. On April 26, 1938, Hutchinson planned to host a traveling black team famous for large beards, most likely the Negro House of David. Fans showed up and the Hutchinson Larks took the field to warm up. The black team failed to arrive at all that night or even the next day. The local newspaper ridiculed the team a day later. The Larks claimed that this act was an unforgivable offense for a team. They said they would no longer play a team like that. The newspaper played up the distress fans went through because they team failed to show up. It noted that storms were in the area, so the fans had to brave the weather. Since it was a black team that did not come, the newspaper editor had no concerns about insulting them.<sup>104</sup>

One way teams got people to the gates was through individual player legends. One of those players was "Tut" Jackson. Tut played for the Fort Riley traveling black team. Tut, only a semi-professional player, had a reputation for being one of the best catchers in the country. He later played on professional teams, following his time in the

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<sup>103</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, 255-256.

<sup>104</sup> "Bearded Negro Team Fails To Appear" *The Hutchinson Larks*, April 28, 1938.

military. When his team came through town, the advertisements focused on Tut more than his teammates. This type of reaction was common for any big name black baseball player. Though a successful team like the Kansas City Monarchs regularly drew large crowds, most matchups relied on big name to increase attendance. If a team had a popular player like Tut, more towns wanted to schedule these teams.<sup>105</sup>

Even if these were black players, white Kansans still wanted to watch them play. Despite higher chances at their “boys” losing. If, by the off chance, the home team won, the townspeople wanted to be there. So locals showed up to root against the black teams. Black players did not mind playing the role as a villain as it provided a good source of income.<sup>106</sup>

The local teams varied in age and skill level. One of the most common practices was to gather whatever local men played the best. Some towns had company teams that played on a regular basis. Post offices, mills, and factories in cities like Hutchison or Wichita had teams that often played throughout the summer. When black teams came to these towns, company teams often jumped at the chance to play them, hoping to show off for their home city. However, they stood little chance against most black traveling teams. Local company teams were only slightly better than gathering a team of those who did not play regularly.<sup>107</sup>

These black traveling teams would play more than just white town ball teams in Kansas. They would also play other traveling black teams. This matchup between black teams would still draw white fans due to the talent on the field. Wichita and Hutchison

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<sup>105</sup> “Colored Team Here Sunday” *Ellis County News*, June 3, 1926.

<sup>106</sup> “Colored Team Here Sunday” *Ellis County News*, June 3, 1926.

<sup>107</sup> “Challenge Fever” *The Hutchinson News*, June 14, 1939.

often faced off against each other. However, cities often regulated black versus black games to the worst fields in a town.<sup>108</sup>

The Kansas City Monarchs dominate any discussion of barnstorming in Kansas. The newspapers reporters claimed they were so good, if they were white, they would be in the major leagues and had the easiest time of any team getting fans to come to their games. They used their championship pedigree in the Negro League to draw fans. In fact, some debates at the time questioned if some major league teams could even beat the Monarchs.<sup>109</sup>

When teams like the Monarchs came to town, city leaders would gather the best ball players they could find. Players from fifty miles in every direction would come to take their chances against the best players black baseball had to offer. Like with Tut Jackson, big names made the headlines. Unlike with the Fort Riley traveling team, the Monarchs had several names that drew in fans. They barnstormed with a rotating roster of some of the biggest names in the game, such as Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, and Bullet Rogan, attracting the largest crowds of any team.<sup>110</sup>

Black players had fewer chances than their white counterparts did to make it as professional baseball players. Since they could not afford the resources white teams had, they had to search the country for new talent during their travels. They would recruit by word of mouth and by playing other teams. Local black coaches kept an eye out for new talent in return for a little cash if that player made the team. Matchups often turned into a scouting event for new talent. Players like Newt Allen signed with the Monarchs because scouts saw him play during their travels. Teams offered black teenagers and men

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<sup>108</sup> "Fast Negro Teams Face Off" *The Hutchinson News*, June 29, 1939.

<sup>109</sup> "Hays Hurling Ace To Face Monarchs" *Ellis County News*, August 29, 1929.

<sup>110</sup> "Hays Hurling Ace To Face Monarchs" *Ellis County News*, August 29, 1929.

contracts if they performed well against them. Willie Wells got his start in the Negro Leagues in 1921 when a traveling team played his college squad and noticed his ability. Ted Radcliffe also entered professional baseball this way. When he was sixteen, he struck out enough opposing players that the team he faced offered him a contract in 1929.<sup>111</sup>

The Monarchs enjoyed recruiting college players, such as those from Western University in Kansas.<sup>112</sup> They liked college players because they tended to behave better than those who had never played in college. It worked as a mutually beneficial relationship. Players like future Hall of Fame member Willie Wells saw it as a preferable job alternative than earning money for school by washing dishes or working in a hotel. This new source of players encouraged professional teams to play against black college teams. It also helped clean up the images of these black baseball teams. Teams were booked to play more often in a town if their teams did not have the reputation of troublemakers, which was usually the result of racism rather than past actions. Black teams had to work actively against any real or perceived negative reputation. Any instance of acting out or fighting back against the crowd could result in a town never asking them back or possibly arrests, all of which resulted in lost income.<sup>113</sup>

If the local white team refused to play a traveling black team, the black manager at least hoped to play other black teams. Some of the better-known semi-professional teams were the Hutchison Monarchs, the Cudahy Rex team out of Wichita, and the Black Oilers. The Black Oilers were good enough that the Kansas City Monarchs would use them as a type of minor league team. The Monarchs lent them players that were not good

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<sup>111</sup> “Interview with Webster McDonald”, *Voices*, 75; “Interview with Newt Allen”, *Voices*, 92; “Interview with Willie Wells”, *Voices*, 221.

<sup>112</sup> Western University is a historically black college that operated in Northeast Kansas before moving to Dodge City.

<sup>113</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 34-35.

enough to stay at the professional level. If a player got cut from the Monarchs, they could still play for the Oilers. The Hutchison Monarchs, named after the Kansas City team, had players who were scouted by the Kansas City club. Other black teams formed based on where they worked , or were company teams like the McPherson Globe Refiners or Cudahy Rex.<sup>114</sup>

The Great Depression led to more white teams willing play black teams during the 1930s. The National Baseball Congress in Wichita started to invite black teams to its tournament. Since white players were willing to play black teams, it led to bigger draws for games. In 1934, the Monarchs played a barnstorming series in eastern Kansas against a white all-star team formed by future Hall of Fame member Dizzy Dean. The barnstorming series had games with attendance numbers anywhere from fourteen to twenty thousand. The Monarchs and Dean's All-Stars charged fans anywhere from seventy-five cents to one dollar. For a black team, which typically struggled to get income during the middle of the 1930s, this meant thousands of dollars for the Monarchs. Dizzy Dean remarked that he made more money barnstorming against the Monarchs than he did playing for the St. Louis Cardinals.<sup>115</sup>

During the Great Depression, whites and blacks both endured hard times. Therefore, to increase the chances to make more money, it was not unheard of for white barnstorming teams to sign a black player or two to play for them. This practice led to conflicts in some parts of Kansas. In 1934, Satchel Paige and Ted Radcliffe were playing for a white team traveling through the state. They stopped in Wichita to play in a tournament the city was hosting. The white manager reserved a hotel for the members of

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<sup>114</sup> "Fast Negro Teams to Mix Today", *The Hutchinson News*, June 25, 1939;"Diamond Hot Spots", *The Hutchinson News*, June 12, 1938.

<sup>115</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 76-77.

the team. When they arrived at the hotel, the manager claimed they had no room for the two black players. It was a common black experience. However, Ted Radcliffe recalled that his white manager threatened to sue and made a scene before Radcliffe and Paige decided to remove themselves. Radcliffe and Paige put up with the racism for the payoff, both of them made seven thousand dollars for participating in the tournament. White players on opposing teams remarked to Radcliffe and Paige, who dominated opposing teams on the mound and in the batter's box, that they would never come back as long as those two played since they were "big-league players."<sup>116</sup>

One benefit teams encountered while barnstorming was the chance to increase their pitching skills. The towns they visited would provide the umpire, who usually was white and from the town. The local umpire almost always created biased situations, often unfairly calling the games in favor of the home team. However, the more talented black teams found ways around biased umpires. For tighter strike zones, pitchers learned how to locate their pitches better. Batters learned how to hit balls that would often be far outside the strike zone. Better pitching and batting skills led to seasons in the Negro League where teams like the Monarchs could dominate their opponents because they could hit the ball anywhere the pitcher threw it. As Newt Allen put it, "All they had to do was throw the ball down the middle to get seven out of nine of us out."<sup>117</sup> Allen felt that black players got so used to hitting the ball everywhere, that if a ball went down the middle of the plate, they would not know what to do.

One Monday night in 1929 in Hutchinson, Kansas, the Monarchs took on the top players the town had to offer. The Monarchs sent one of their most inexperienced

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<sup>116</sup> "Interview with Ted Radcliffe", *Voices*, 178-179.

<sup>117</sup> "Interview with Newt Allen", *Voices*, 93.

pitchers to play against the Hutchinson team. They proceeded to hold Hutchinson to two hits over the course of a nine-inning game. The Hutchinson pitchers had no chance against the Monarchs hitters, while the Monarchs decided to embellish routine plays and play with Harlem Globetrotters like style. Often, instead of throwing the ball directly to the proper fielder, they would toss it around first. Since the Monarchs were so much more talented, they attempted plays that would not normally work in a competitive game. Though the game drew 500 people, the hometown team lost eleven to zero. This became a common occurrence for the Monarchs, as well as other black traveling teams. Most town teams could not hope to play on the same level. <sup>118</sup>

In September 1945, Atchison hosted the traveling team from Kansas City, the Kansas City Colored Clowns. The Clowns team had not lost in 167 games, most against white opponents. The team even featured two players older than sixty. The advertisements emphasized the players ages, prompting the two players to come onto the field with walkers and canes. The Clowns' record shows the dominance they and other traveling teams had against white town ball teams. <sup>119</sup>

When a baseball team came to town barnstorming it was not just a game. The whole city came out to the event. In the early 1930s, before lights allowing night games, weekend games would draw numbers in the thousands, while weekday games drew numbers only in the hundreds. Black teams also played on Sundays during the summer, which brought out large crowds after the local churches let out. The possibility of large crowds provided even more reasons for the teams to travel. Most teams struck deals with the towns to collect half of the ticket money at each game. Teams got revenue based on

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<sup>118</sup> "Sealeys Easy for the Monarchs" *The Hutchinson News*, August 27, 1929.

<sup>119</sup> "Clowns Have No Defeats in 167 Games" *The Atchison Daily Globe*, September 1, 1945.

ticket sales, so rainouts or missing a game could be detrimental. If team owners did not get paid, players were also not paid. If teams could not pay players regularly, they risked their better players leaving for another team. If a team lost its best players, they risked not drawing the crowds they could with big names like Paige or Gibson. Therefore, the top priority of any team was to bring in crowds, money, and keep its star players.<sup>120</sup>

Since each team individually negotiated their percentage of sales, the more well known the team, the higher ticket percentage they collected. The Monarchs could expect to receive anywhere from fifty-three to occasionally ninety percent of the ticket sales. They could demand this because the town leaders knew they would bring in a certain number of fans. The Monarchs could often get a guaranteed amount of money regardless of how many fans showed up, which potentially meant towns could lose money by scheduling the Monarchs. However, towns could bully less famous teams into taking smaller percentages, since the smaller teams needed the money. This meant smaller teams could lose players or scheduled games if they did not have fans come to watch. This led to smaller teams doing whatever they could to become a draw, such as doing minstrel shows and shadow-ball games before hand.<sup>121</sup>

At modern baseball games it is standard practice that if a ball goes in the stands, whatever fan catches that ball keeps it. For barnstorming black teams this was not the case. Teams cut costs wherever they could. The players usually brought their own bats and gloves, but teams provided balls. While teams provided the balls, they could not afford to buy large numbers. Smaller barnstorming teams used the same ball game after game. According to Crush Holloway, his team used one ball per one game at a quarter

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<sup>120</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 44

<sup>121</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 61-62.



per ball in 1930. When a team bought a ball for fifty or seventy-five cents, the ball lasted at least a weeks' worth of games. According to Holloway, his team once purchased a ball for \$1.25, which they used for the entirety of a barnstorming season. Meanwhile major white teams at the time could afford multiple balls a game allowing fans to keep what went into the stands.<sup>122</sup>

Salaries varied from team to team and player to player. According to former player Sug Cornelius, the average player got around \$250 a month while top players could get upwards of \$500 a month in 1931. Top players often had the opportunity for guaranteed money regardless of ticket sales. However, only players of Josh Gibson or Satchel Paige's fame got guaranteed salary contracts. Sug Cornelius claimed to be making around \$350 a month in 1933 if he played enough games. However, Cornelius played for a well-known traveling team. Ted Radcliffe claimed to make around \$50 for every fifteen games he played. Ted Page got an average monthly salary of around \$200 to \$250 during the early 1930s. Before he played, Page made \$15 a week. To compare this to the major leagues, in 1926 Ty Cobb offered a light-skinned black man named Larry Brown \$750 to play for the Tigers as a Cuban. Baseball provided players an opportunity to gain a monthly salary anywhere from four to ten times the amount they could at a regular job. However, players sometimes found out owners were not always trustworthy when dealing with money.<sup>123</sup>

Ted Radcliffe was playing for one team when another team's owner offered to pay him \$500 plus twenty percent of all ticket sales. He took the offer and began to both play and manage the team in 1936. In the first two weeks, Radcliff helped the owner

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<sup>122</sup> "Interview with Crush Holloway", *Voices*, 63.

<sup>123</sup> "Interview with Ted Page", *Voices*, 163; "Interview with Larry Brown", *Voices*, 209; "Interview with William Sug Cornelius", *Voices*, 235.

draw in over 30,000 fans and made him over \$2,000. The owner then brought him into his office to have a conversation, attempting to get out of paying the percentage of ticket sales that Radcliff was owed. He had torn up the contract Radcliffe signed and claimed it was invalid. He then offered Radcliffe half of the agreed upon salary. The owner also paid his players seventy-five dollars a month. According to Radcliffe, this was well below average for a semi-professional player's salary. The team owner was not unusual in the world of black baseball. Players took the risk of the owners not paying money promised to players. Therefore, players could play for multiple teams each barnstorming season.<sup>124</sup>

The living expenses also varied for each player. Most teams did not provide the player with food or pay for hotels if they stayed at one. Since many times they camped, stayed on the bus, or in people's homes, the living expenses tended to be lower for black players. Food costs ranged based on a player's taste. For most players, though, they could eat on .75 cents to a dollar a day. According to Bill Drake, he could eat a steak dinner every night for .35 cents in 1926. When they stayed at people's homes, normally that family provided food for the players. Players could make several hundred dollars a year after living expenses, which could provide their families with a couple years' worth of salaries from a regular job from this time. Since the salaries were high and costs low, barnstorming provided even more extra income for the players. It increased the quality of life for the player and their family. They would never be on equal footing with white

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<sup>124</sup> "Interview with Ted Radcliffe", *Voices*, 179-180.

America but it allowed them to get closer. The owners incurred most of the traveling costs.<sup>125</sup>

A player was also responsible for taking care of his equipment. Most teams gave a player one uniform. Unless they played for a top team, players had to provide their own shoes, socks, bat, and glove. If they lost their uniform, they would be responsible for covering the cost for the team to provide them with a new one. Since teams could not afford to have equipment managers, each player transported his own equipment, which meant carrying it with them in what Newt Allen called a “suit-roll.” They wrapped up everything they needed for a game outside their suitcase so it was ready to go. As soon as they got to the game, they had to be ready to play, which meant that a player treated their uniform and equipment like their most prized possession. For most players, this was true, as many did not want to lose most of their paycheck to replacing equipment.<sup>126</sup>

When a black man joined a baseball team, he left a life where he was a second-class citizen every day. Society told him every day that he could not do what a white man could do. When people like Newt Allen, Satchel Paige, and Josh Gibson put on a uniform and took the field, they knew that this was a lie. Their athletic abilities allowed them to play America’s pastime on a more equal footing with white players. Since they could not make enough money playing strictly in-league, they took the road to take on all challengers. Barnstorming provided these black players a chance for a better life, the opportunity to increase their skills, and show white players they could play just as well, if not better, than them. Top-level players like Paige and Gibson, as well teams like the

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<sup>125</sup> “Interview with Bill Drake”, *Voices*, 30; “Interview with Newt Allen”, *Voices*, 98-99; “Interview with Ted Page”, *Voices*, 148.

<sup>126</sup> “Interview with Newt Allen”, *Voices*, 98-99.

Monarchs, allowed owners to increase profits and promote the ability of black baseball players.

## CHAPTER THREE: PROVING THEM WRONG

“I’d crack another little clink in Jim Crow” –Satchel Paige<sup>127</sup>

Black teams were not the only people to benefit from the relationship of barnstorming. As with most things, both sides in a business relationship got something out of it. When black teams came to a town to play a white team, this brought an influx of cash to local businesses. Hundreds or possibly thousands of people would come from outside of town and the surrounding area to watch the games. The massive amounts of people meant that local restaurants, merchants, and other businesses saw a rise in their profits. For larger teams, like the Kansas City Monarchs, this meant hotels too. Teams made more money as interracial barnstorming games tended to draw bigger crowds. Barnstorming games also started to break down some of the animosity that existed between the white and black communities.

Kansas was a unique situation in the United States. Along with other Southern Great Plains states, Kansans experienced more interracial interaction than the rest of the country. In Kansas, black teams commonly played white teams every summer. While interracial teams were still extremely rare, most people in Kansas had no issues with games between blacks and whites. More accepting attitudes led to prominent black teams coming to Kansas during the season. The famed Cuban All-Stars even toured the state, barnstorming several years during the Depression. In Kansas, on the baseball field, all things were equal. For the people who saw these games, this might be the only time in their lives they saw similar interaction between races.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Jason Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997, 88.

<sup>128</sup> Pendleton, James, “Baseball, Interracial” *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, ed. David Wishart. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 10.

For the general black population, barnstorming or traveling games provided an escape from their everyday lives. In Wichita, white citizens subjected black citizens to the jobs they did not want to do. Those blacks who had decent employment still faced discrimination when they attempted to find housing. They had to live in shantytowns on the outskirts of the city. The interracial games and an interracial team in the 1930s gave a chance for the black citizens to live vicariously through the players. For a few hours on a day they went to a game, they saw that blacks were equal to whites in athletic ability if nothing else. Blacks could even wear the same uniforms as white people. It provided hope for those black men, women, and children who watched those games in the 1930s. They saw a chance for a future where society did not subjugate them to second-class status. Within the next fifteen years, they would see a National League baseball team have a black player. Within the next thirty, they saw the start of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. These interracial games provided some of the roots for these movements to grow.<sup>129</sup>

For local white teams, Negro League barnstorming provided an opportunity to practice and improve their abilities. High schools, local teams, and leagues usually played competition around the same skill level as themselves. However, when a black team came to town, they had a chance to play a team with more talent and ability. Some teams played the same black teams almost every year. For example, Belleville, KS had a standing agreement with Piney Woods, a black high school, that the black team would fit Belleville into their barnstorming schedule at least once a summer. Piney Woods often won, but it allowed Belleville's players to face better competition.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Pendleton, "Baseball", 89-90.

<sup>130</sup> "Negroes Here Tuesday" *The Belleville Telescope*, August 10, 1933.

Since Piney Woods and Belleville played every year, they developed a rivalry. It provided extra incentive for the Belleville team to beat the better skilled black team. If Belleville won, the town celebrated. In 1931, they scored fifteen runs off Piney Woods. Even the newspapers admitted that Piney Woods was normally a better team than Belleville. However, since Belleville played superior Piney Woods while barnstorming, it gave them the opportunity to improve. The annual event allowed Belleville to steal victories from superior competition later in the season and dominate their own league.<sup>131</sup>

Piney Woods was not the only black team Belleville's baseball club played. The Omaha Rockets regularly came through Belleville. The Rockets, a semi-professional black team, traveled across the country playing. They frequented Kansas most summers in the 1930s. When Belleville played semi-professional teams, this provided a step up even from the black high school teams. Belleville coaches could show their young players how professionals played. Players worked on hitting pitchers that were more difficult and striking out talented batters. When Piney Woods then played their regular competition, they demonstrated higher levels of skill as a result. If a high school team did not barnstorm against some of these semi-professional black teams, they risked falling behind their competition during their regular season. It also provide another source of income for small town teams like Belleville, and allowed them to take in income to furnish the baseball team with equipment.<sup>132</sup>

For example, in 1937, Chanute City, Kansas hosted the Texas Black Spiders. They hosted them on a Monday in August and sent their town's best players to the field. They charged twenty-five cents for men, fifteen cents for women, and ten cents for

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<sup>131</sup> "Junior Ball Team Wins Batfest From Darkies" *The Belleville Telescope*, October 1, 1931.

<sup>132</sup> "Baseball" *The Belleville Telescope*, June 30, 1949.

children. This was an average price for a Monday night game featuring a semi-professional black team of that level in the 1930s.<sup>133</sup> Expecting several hundred people to show up, the teams could earn upwards of a two hundred dollars for the game, putting extra money in the pockets of the local players. This was also a profitable reason for black players to suit up and play a traveling team. Through the 1930s barnstorming teams usually drew larger crowds than two white teams playing.<sup>134</sup>

While social and cultural racism meant major league teams had no interest in black players, they did have an interest in the white players at barnstorming games. When a local white team played a traveling black team, they usually faced the best competition they would see all year. These top match-ups created opportunities for the white players. National and American League teams would scout these games, as they knew these black teams often had some of the best talents in the region. On April 30, 1935, the St. Louis Cardinals sent a scout to check out the Hutchinson Larks when they took on the Kansas City Monarchs. The Cardinals had previously scouted four of the white players, but the scout in attendance that day noted that they wanted to see the players against better competition.<sup>135</sup>

A game against the Monarchs could make the difference for a young Kansan player. It meant a possibility for a future in the major leagues if they played well, or a bad game could mean the scouts would pass over them. Knowing scouts were in the stands when white teams played black teams, the players tried their hardest to win.

During the Great Depression, Kansas baseball players did anything they could to stand out from the crowds. They had to compete with hundreds or thousands of baseball

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<sup>133</sup> Dixon, "Negro Leagues".

<sup>134</sup> "Baseball" *The Iola Register*, August 23, 1937.

<sup>135</sup> "Cardinal Scout to Watch Game" *The Hutchinson News*, April 30, 1935.



players across the state to grab the attention of professional scouts. In 1938, the Hutchinson Larks had fifty players show up to try to make their top white team. Other white semi-professional teams in Kansas had similar numbers of players compete for a roster spot. Barnstorming could make the difference for some of the players being the last man on the roster or one of the first ones cuts. Even for players who did not have the talent to catch the attention of major league clubs, they wanted to compete and prove themselves against black players. For those players being scouted, it could make or break their ability to play semi-professional or professional baseball.<sup>136</sup>

Most of the objectively better black teams that played white teams in Kansas had more experience and some players had superior talent. Since black players had more plate appearances, they could hit the ball better than white teams could. This meant white teams had to play up to the competition, which forced them to come up with new ways to gain an advantage over a superior team. The better competition led some teams to find pitchers who could throw more than just a fastball. When the Monarchs came to Hutchinson in 1929, the home team decided to rely on a pitcher who threw mainly off-speed pitches to fool the Monarchs' hitters. These match-ups meant white teams had to learn to play the game as well as many black teams would, using any advantage they could find.<sup>137</sup>

Teams often used barnstorming games against black teams to tune up for their regular summer seasons. Bob Morrow, of the Hutchinson Larks, regularly scheduled barnstorming black teams to improve his players. The games provided both an opportunity to gauge which players could make the team and which players had the

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<sup>136</sup> "First Squad Cuts" *The Hutchinson News*, April 6, 1938.

<sup>137</sup> "Snell To Feed Them Slowballs" *The Hutchinson News*, April 24, 1929.

ability to make an immediate impact. Before the 1935 season, Morrow used the barnstorming game to make final decisions on his roster. Following the game, he cut Sam Stubba and D.R. Johnson, two of the veteran leaders on the team, after they failed to perform at his expected standard. Since the Larks beat the black team sixteen to four, an unusual occurrence for most white teams, Morrow voiced his confidence in the Larks for their upcoming season. The dominant performance by his pitchers over a talented black team proved to him that the Larks had come to play that year. David Cheeves, one of the black barnstormers, also performed well in that game and ended up with one of the best seasons on the record for the team in the 1930s.<sup>138</sup>

White teams in places such as Hays and Hutchinson vied for the chance to play the Kansas City Monarchs during the barnstorming season. When the Monarchs came to town, it provided benefits, to both the team and the town. When they played the Monarchs, managers scouted their own players, since the Monarchs had major league skill level.<sup>139</sup> The high level opponent meant that players who wanted to have a career in baseball could judge their ability against major league talent, even if the black players could not play in the major leagues. High school-aged players got an opportunity for professional teams to scout them. Semi-professional players got one last chance to catch on with a professional team.<sup>140</sup>

When the Monarchs came to town, the white teams had to bring their best game to the field. For example, on a Monday night in late August in 1935, the Monarchs came to play the local Hutchinson semi-professional team, Sealey. The Monarchs dominated

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<sup>138</sup> "Larks Takes Abbreviated Exhibition With Dust Clouding Bright Lights" *The Hutchinson News*, April 27, 1935; David Davis. "1935 Hutchinson Larks" *Baseball Reference*.  
<http://www.baseballreference.com/register/team.cgi?id=b9b724cd>

<sup>139</sup> Dixon, "Negro Leagues"

<sup>140</sup> "KC Monarchs to Play Larks" *The Hutchinson News*, April 29, 1935.

Sealy, beating them eleven to nothing, with fourteen hits. Sealey knew that they would probably would not win that game, but that did not mean they did not try, holding the Monarchs scoreless in all but two innings. They played to their best ability and still lost badly. The crowd felt the same, as they knew their hometown team would most likely would not win. However, expectations did not hurt the crowd size, as five hundred people showed up to watch the game. That was a large size for a weekday night. When a team like the Monarchs played, no matter what day the city and local white team could expect to turn a profit off the matchup. In fact, when the Monarchs came to town, games often drew in the thousands of spectators regardless of the day of the week compared to the semi-professional black teams that could only bring thousands on a good weekend day.<sup>141</sup>

The most famous team towns could bring in, besides the Monarchs, was the Negro House of David. This team formed as an offshoot of the more famous white House of David team out of Michigan. Similar to the Michigan team, the Negro House of David had a rule that while a player played for the team, the player had to abstain from shaving their face. The Negro House of David team also had a catcher during the late 1930s who became famous in Kansas for catching games from a rocking chair.<sup>142</sup> Since the team was famous, more people attended games, and towns could charge more for tickets. A match against the Negro House of David could see ticket prices for reserved seats as high as sixty-five cents during the Depression. For general admission, tickets were forty cents. This made the team two to three hundred dollars a game. However, this also meant dealing with the theatrics of the House of David.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> "Sealeys Easy For Monarchs" *The Hutchinson News*, August 27, 1929.

<sup>142</sup> "Start Faser on the Hill" *The Hutchinson News*, April 25, 1938.

<sup>143</sup> "Start Faser on the Hill" *The Hutchinson News*, April 25, 1938.

They tended to be superior in talent, so in addition to the rocking chair they had players attempting to catch balls with their beards. The Negro House of David, like other black teams, provided multiple forms of entertainment for the white crowds. Their theatrics were similar to the Harlem Globetrotters, of 1970s and 1980s basketball fame, providing comic relief during the game. They showed up opponents by making plays look more impressive, such as waiting until the last minute to make a throw to another player, or attempting to catch fly balls with their beards. Their superior abilities, despite the antics, led them to have two hundred wins and only fourteen defeats in 1937.<sup>144</sup>

Two hundred and fourteen games in a single season for one team barnstorming meant they visited large number of towns each year. They were just one of many teams that spent their time from April to September playing in random towns across Kansas and the rest of the country. Barnstorming games often became the primary form of entertainment in Kansas communities from early April to late September in the 1930s. White fans flocked to game after game to watch interracial matchups. It became a desegregated event for teams and towns in Jim Crow America, with laws preventing other interactions between races.<sup>145</sup>

White teams expected to lose to other black teams besides the Monarchs. Other barnstorming black teams such as the Kansas City Colored Clowns and the Colored All-Stars also dominated their white opponents. The Clowns rarely lost to white opponents, at one point having a one hundred and sixty-seven game winning streak in the 1930s. Most of those wins were not even close games.. White crowds would still come out to watch, as they wanted their team to be the first to break up the Clowns winning streak. The

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<sup>144</sup> "Negro Team Here Tonight" *The Hutchinson News*, April 26, 1938.

<sup>145</sup> "Negro Team Here Tonight" *The Hutchinson News*, April 26, 1938.

Colored All-Stars often barnstormed near Atchison, KS and developed a bit of a rivalry against the local white team. The local white team could often win a game or two against the Clowns if they played them enough times. Therefore, this drew large crowds, as the town always wanted to see their town win.<sup>146</sup>

When the local team did win, town celebrations occurred. When the Hutchinson Larks beat a black team fourteen to seven, the town celebrated. The newspaper the next day had a story on it that covered every aspect of the game. The press made sure to note that the black team only scored after the Larks put in a rookie pitcher. The reporters noted the fact the black team took advantage of an inexperienced youth. Following the game, a loud group of players and fans prevented the opposing team from going back into the locker room to change. Sometimes when white teams won, things got out of hand since victory was a rare occasion for most of the white teams in Kansas.<sup>147</sup>

White semi-professional teams often scheduled barnstorming games against black teams to open up their playing season. Barnstorming served three purposes for the white teams. The first was that it gave a chance for the team to work out any mistakes or problems they had before the season. The black teams provided high quality competition for white players. They could work on their fielding and pitching knowing that the black hitters put the ball into play on a regular basis. They hardly ever struck out against the white teams. Second, managers had a better idea of players' skills before the regular season. Finally, it gave the town a chance to get excited for the upcoming season's worth of games. The Hutchinson semi-professional team scheduled the Monarchs for the first game in 1938, which brought some of the biggest names in baseball regardless color. It

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<sup>146</sup> "Clowns Have No Defeats in 167 Games" *The Atchison Daily Globe*, September 1, 1945.

<sup>147</sup> "Larks Beat KSIR 14 to 7" *The Hutchinson News*, April 23, 1938.

allowed the Hutchinson Larks players to start their season playing in front of one of the largest crowds of the year.<sup>148</sup>

Of course, white managers always talked big before playing semi-professional and professional black teams. The manager of the Sealey baseball club spoke in high regards of his team before they played against a black team from Wichita. He loudly proclaimed that his team would beat them. The Wichita team had traveled across Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri with few loses. Boosts of beating a statistically better black team created entertaining and attractive matchups for locals to watch.<sup>149</sup>

In August 1926, the Kansas City Monarchs played the Hutchinson Boosters, a team made up of all ages of men. The newspaper reported a hot forecast for the day, with only uncovered stands available. Regardless of the hot summer Kansas weather, there was a high demand for tickets. Stadium officials reported an expectation of standing room only, demonstrating the popularity of barnstorming teams and players. The crowd size showed how popular a draw these barnstorming games could be. Though the Boosters' roster was made up of non-professionals who simply played for the fun of it, the towns people enjoyed watching the top black teams.<sup>150</sup>

When teams, like the Monarchs, arrived to play local white teams, excitement followed. When they went to Pittsburg, KS, in late September 1929, the city greeted the team with a circus like atmosphere. The local sportswriter remarked how different the town was from a normal September day. Instead of a quite small town in Kansas, cars filled the streets. People walked around downtown, most headed to the baseball field.

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<sup>148</sup> "New Players with the Monarchs" *The Hutchinson News*, April 28, 1938; "Millers Beat Carthage Crew", *The Hutchinson News*, April 28, 1938.

<sup>149</sup> "Tip Sealey Ball Team to Meet Wichita Negro Nine" *The Hutchinson News*. June 8, 1929.

<sup>150</sup> "Look for A Big Crowd" *The Hutchinson News*, August 9, 1926.

Paul Fisher, the local sports reporter, remarked that he saw license plates from Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Trains brought passengers from near and far. Whole families headed to watch the Monarchs play their local white team. When the Monarchs' bus came into town, children of all colors went to greet the Monarchs. The Monarchs ended up winning that game, but it did not matter much for the people of the town.<sup>151</sup>

One of the effects traveling black teams had on the towns they came to was they provided an opportunity for the local whites to interact with black people. Paul Fisher covered the scene, "Each of the 16 Monarchs picks his thralls. Each one goes marching off toward the field with this little girl carrying his sunglasses, this small Negro boy with his baseball shoes, these blond brothers with his two bats, this barefoot Italian lad with his glove."<sup>152</sup>

An excellent example of the great equalizer of the baseball field occurred in 1925 in Wichita. A black team called the Monroviens played a local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. The Monroviens beat the Klan ten to eight that day. Reporters recorded no instances of violence during the game. The fans on both sides managed to spend several hours one afternoon together without incident. Even when the Klan began to lose, things stayed calm. Both teams banned anything that was a weapon during the game. Though peaceful, racism was still evident with fans segregated in the stands.<sup>153</sup>

This instance of the Klan playing baseball against an all-black team shows the unwritten racial rules of Kansas during the late 1920s and into the 1930s. On the baseball field, everyone became equal. The fact that a black team could play against a team made

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<sup>151</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 59-60.

<sup>152</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 59.

<sup>153</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 10.

up of members of a group that hated black people showed that baseball started to become exempt from the normal rules of segregation.<sup>154</sup>

The Monrovia team eventually lost their title as the best black team in the city to other teams. The Cudahy Rex team dominated Wichita in the early 1930s. It was the black counterpart for the Cudahy Puritans, both teams sponsored by the Cudahy Company, a meat packing company. Since Cudahy Rex had only black players, the city forced the Cudahy Rex team to schedule barnstorming games to play while the Puritans played in the city league. The Wichita city league officials refused to allow any black teams in. However, despite the segregation of leagues, the willingness of numerous white teams to play the Cudahy Rex team, demonstrated cracks in formal segregation policies. Even without the ability to play in the city's league, the team had an impact. Like the Monrovia team, Cudahy Rex exposed the white people in Wichita to interracial games. This exposure started the city on the long path of racial tolerance.<sup>155</sup>

In 1935, Wichita Kansans saw something even more unusual for Great Depression-era United States than interracial games. A team from Bismarck, North Dakota came down to barnstorm, which in itself was not unusual. However, the team had both black and white players. Satchel Paige led the team to a championship game in a normally all white tournament. At the game, black and white fans cheered on both teams. Paige was pitching in the last inning when the opposing team had a chance to win with their best player up to bat. When the batter was down to his last strike, Paige went into his windup, threw a fastball, and struck out the opposing batter. The interracial Bismarck team had won a championship in a tournament that only allowed black teams to compete

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<sup>154</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 10.

<sup>155</sup> Jason Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 94-95.



that year. When someone asked Paige years later what he thought about that moment, he responded, “I’d cracked another little clink in Jim Crow.”<sup>156</sup>

The victory of Bismarck forced white society in Wichita to question the normalized practices of segregation. An interracial team had dominated the tournament without causing so much as one fight and society did not collapse. This victory showed that black society, or at least baseball, was beginning to gain inroads in some parts of life that only whites had access to. Black teams and spectators failed to follow the rules set by segregationist policies. The years of black teams dominating their white competition cumulated in the interracial Bismarck’s victory in 1935. It was a sign of things to come as cities and towns in Kansas began to question racial policies.<sup>157</sup>

Bismarck beat the best teams, black or white, that anyone could muster against them. The fans in Kansas saw that these five white men and six black men could take on the best teams of any color. They beat them because they took the best players they could get regardless of race, over a decade before Jackie Robinson took the field for the Dodgers in 1947, Bismarck had white and black fans rooting for them in Kansas. It exposed Kansans to the fact interracial interaction can go on without any major incident of violence.<sup>158</sup>

For non-player blacks, barnstorming black teams also provided a better life. The Monrovia team worked towards this goal in Wichita. They used their ballpark as a place for the black community in the city to escape everyday occurrences of racism. They played more games to provide a diversion from the mundane, segregated nature of their daily lives. The team actively encouraged whites to attend games alongside blacks. Often,

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<sup>156</sup> Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 87.

<sup>157</sup> Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 97.

<sup>158</sup> Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 88.

they scheduled white teams in order to draw in more white fans. While this had a benefit of more money for the team, it served a secondary purpose for the citizenry. It provided family friendly entertainment for blacks that they usually could not enjoy. Whites who attended these games became less likely to be outwardly racist towards blacks. This occurrence is just one example of what people experienced across the state. These teams provided a chance for black communities to enjoy similar entertainment as white communities. For towns with small black populations, this could make all the difference in everyday life.<sup>159</sup>

The extent to which the Monrovia's outreach to heal racial segregation is best summed up by their game against the Campbell Merit Bread Company team in August 1932. The *Wichita Beacon* reporter described the crowd as one of the largest to ever to attend a baseball game in the city. Fans of both races packed the stands to cheer on their teams, an example that baseball existed in Kansas as almost a silent protest against the laws that segregated society. The Campbell company team had won the city championship that year for the white league. The Monrovia team won the city championship for the black league. The Campbell Company approach the Monrovia's for a barnstorming match between the two. They wanted to prove to themselves and the city who the best team was that year. The fact that the white team openly looked to challenge the best black team in the city, for pride as well as the money from the tickets sales, showed that the sport had started to wear down some of the outwardly racist feelings that existed in America.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 91.

<sup>160</sup> Pendleton, *Kansas History*, 92.

While the interracial games started to heal some of the racial hatred, it did not solve the issue completely. As Paige had stated in his biography, interracial games only cracked part of the Jim Crow laws, it did not break them completely. White teams who played black teams were willingly defying normalized segregation of the 1920s and 1930s. However, many towns' people still held some racial hatred towards the black teams that came to play their home team. Often people showed up just to yell slurs and antagonize the opposing teams. In one game in the early 1930s, they pushed black player Pat Patterson too far. Patterson charged into the stands to punch the white fan. Since black players were still part of a subjugated society, nothing happened to the white fan. He insulted the player because he knew he could get away with it. When Patterson lost his cool, the team moved to repair their image and fined him. A paying white fan always gained priority over the black players.<sup>161</sup>

Despite long-standing segregation policies and laws, white and black teams openly played each other in barnstorming games in Wichita and other parts of Kansas. No rules existed preventing black teams from officially joining the city league. A variety of reasons supported this unofficial rule. One of the reasons white teams and black teams could play interracial games peacefully, that did not risk of upending the standard social order. The racial peace only lasted inside the baseball park. If a black team won the league championship, it might upend the preconceived ideas held by the ruling white elites. While it started to lessen the bigoted beliefs of some whites, the racial unity experienced at games largely only affected the lower classes. In fact, white newspapers in

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<sup>161</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 60-61.

Wichita regularly omitted stories of black victories over white teams but never missed a story when black teams lost.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the white views, the barnstorming interracial games did start a public debate whether Wichita should allow a black team in its white league. Newspapers in the city went back and forth with the pros and cons of allowing them to join. City leaders opposed it, as they feared it would upset the existing social order. Middle and lower class whites did not see any issue with letting blacks in the league. They wanted to see the best players compete regardless of race.<sup>163</sup>

T.J. Young, a black player, led the efforts to include a black team in the Wichita city league. He gathered some of the best players he could and had a large amount of support from the black community in the city. He met resistance from the upper class white community, but that did not mean Young failed entirely. The city allowed him to join one of the teams as an individual. Even a single black player allowed into a white league showed progress in 1936. The city could not yet accept a black team, but they began to accept to the idea that black players improved the game. Young's participation in the league also showed that the city officials began to question the segregation laws.<sup>164</sup>

The inclusion of Young and published debates did not end the racism in the town after the games. When black players wanted to eat at the white business in the city, they faced opposition. Roy Johnson, a member of the Monarchs, hated the hypocrisy of the white communities he played in so much he quit. He noted with disdain the white adults cheering him on while he was on the field, but not serving him meals off the field. Johnson and Newt Allen went into a restaurant after the game and ordered fifty

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<sup>162</sup> Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, 93.

<sup>163</sup> Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, 98.

<sup>164</sup> Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, 98.

hamburgers. The owner saw the black men and told them to wait outside for the food, causing the team to walk out of the restaurant without the food or paying. White communities often held these double standards towards black players. However, as the story of the children chasing the Monarchs bus in 1935 shows, feelings started to change. Younger generations of whites began to question the segregationist practices as they saw blacks compete on an equal footing on the baseball field. <sup>165</sup>

The Monarchs popularity was unrivaled in Kansas. For example in Pittsburg, KS the Monarchs drew fans from three different states besides Kansas to watch the game. The out of state fans meant a massive influx of cash for Pittsburg anytime they had the Monarchs barnstorm in the town. With thousands of fans coming into the town local hotels, restaurants, and other businesses all profited. Most of the out-of-town travelers had to find places to eat, stay, or even shop. Families treated games such as these as a miniature vacation, not just an isolated situation only in Pittsburg. Any Kansas town that hosted the Monarchs could expect similar results. <sup>166</sup>

While this may have been an extreme example, smaller black teams brought similar, albeit smaller benefits. The more famous the team that barnstormed in a town, the bigger of profits the town could make. On most occasions, the Monarchs took fifty-three percent of the ticket sales. This still left the white team making hundreds to thousands of dollars for a barnstorming game. Possibility of profits encouraged white teams and towns to bring the Monarchs, or other black traveling teams in, even if it, even if it most likely meant watching their home team lose. <sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 61.

<sup>166</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 58-61.

<sup>167</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 58-61.

The crowds that came to watch these games would be some of the largest crowds the town's field saw all year and gave the towns some of the biggest influxes of money. In case of high school and traveling youth teams, it provided money for uniforms, travel, and other expenses. During the Great Depression in Kansas, this could mean the difference between continuing to play or the team folding due to lack of funds. For semi-professional teams that played barnstorming black teams, this provided a chance for the owners of the team to turn a bigger profit. In turn, the owners paid the players more after these games, which could mean the difference of ten to fifteen dollars for an average game to double that for playing better black teams.<sup>168</sup>

The Monarchs fan base also crossed racial boundaries. The talented black team attracted fans of all races. One event in 1927 in Wichita drew over six thousand fans through the gate. If the Monarchs had been a Major League team, they would have had higher average attendance than five of the white major league teams. For most of the Monarchs' games in Wichita, the crowds mixed in the stands. For some games in smaller towns, they did guarantee unsegregated stands. The broad appeal of the team started to chip away at the idea of segregation. For a majority of whites who saw those games, they began to see that blacks did not differ that much from themselves. In fact, the Monarchs dominated their white opponents and in between 1934-1935 had only three losses in five-hundred and eighty games.<sup>169</sup>

The Monarchs were so good they tried modifying the rules of the game. When they played Henry's Clothiers in Wichita in 1932, they gave them a handicap to make it more competitive. The team that scored the most runs in an inning got one run on the

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<sup>168</sup> "KC Monarchs to Play Larks" *The Hutchinson News*, April 29, 1935.

<sup>169</sup> Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, 95; David Davis, "1927 Major League Baseball Attendance" *Baseball Reference*. <http://www.baseball-reference.com/leagues/MLB/1927-misc.shtml>

scoreboard. So regardless of how many runs the Monarchs could score, the maximum amount they could beat the Clothiers was nine to nothing. Whoever won an inning would start the next inning batting. The teams created this rule to help with competitiveness and get more white fans in the stands. However, no newspaper reported the winner of this game. Most likely, the Monarchs won this game.<sup>170</sup>

Since the black teams always looked for ways to increase profits, they often brought other entertainment with them when they came to town. For example, when one black team played in Hutchinson in June of 1939, the entertainment included pre-game festivities of car races. The extra shows meant that people came to town earlier and stayed longer. That brought more of a profit to the town as people spent more time there. The extra shows also provided more sources of entertainment, which western Kansas lacked most days of the year. Those entertainment chances would have been significantly less without the traveling black teams, which led to the interracial games becoming huge draws. People took the opportunity to see something that they thought of as a bit of a novelty and sideshow, as reporters described it. Those games represented one of the few times in Great Depression era United States that people got to see people of both races interacting in a public setting.<sup>171</sup>

The experience people had when they bought their tickets showed the excitement these match-ups brought to each town. Newspapers described the rush ticket takers experienced as fans turned up in droves to get a good seat to a game in Hutchinson during one late April 1939. A reporter noted that Buzz Arlitt, the manager for Hutchinson, had his face light up upon seeing the massive amount of fans that showed up to watch. The

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<sup>170</sup> Pendleton, *The History of Kansas*, 96-97.

<sup>171</sup> "Double Bill Sports Sunday" *The Hutchinson News*, June 10, 1939.

Hutchinson Larks regularly scheduled a couple of black teams to open their playing season, creating some hype as the team entered the season. In 1938, they opened their season by playing the Negro House of David and the Kansas City Monarchs. These matchups allowed them to get fans in the gates and start out the season with some buzz around town. The Larks did not charge for the House of David game but did for the Monarchs game that occurred a week later. This free game meant that they allowed the fans to see one game free in hopes the matchup could convince them to pay for future events, such as the Monarchs game. Since the teams put on a good show, people got excited for higher billed teams that came and bought tickets for the future game.<sup>172</sup>

Even the National Baseball Congress in Wichita began to invite several barnstorming black teams to its tournament each year, as they knew they had a big following. In 1937, the Kansas Shepherders, Oswego Ramiers, and the Osawatomie All-Stars all got invites to the tournament. The black teams tended to have larger followings as they traveled around the state gathering fans. Organizers received no backlash from the city for hosting an interracial tournament, likely due to influx of cash to the white businesses and other white teams that competed. This relationship benefited the city, the tournament owners, and teams.<sup>173</sup>

Both fans and players benefited from barnstorming black teams playing interracial games and attending tournaments like that in Wichita. Social barriers that kept segregation laws in place began to break down beyond just the black and whites community. Cities in Kansas, such as Wichita, began to be more accepting of interracial games with minorities. In the 1930s, the state saw an all-Mexican team, the Aztecs, begin

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<sup>172</sup> "Sports Bits" *The Hutchinson News*, April 28, 1938; "Family Battle Next Sunday" *The Hutchinson News*, April 19, 1938.

<sup>173</sup> "Western Teams Picked For Semi-Pro Tourney" *The Hutchinson News*, July 3, 1938.



barnstorming across the state. After the Aztecs initial success more Mexican and Latino teams formed. Baseball began to provide a sort of forced racial integration that only occurred in the stadium and reached into communities.<sup>174</sup>

Out of necessity interracial games popped up all across the state of Kansas. Hundreds of black teams dotted the state and played every year. They took off on barnstorming tours since none of the white semi-professional leagues that existed, such as the Western League, allowed them to join. Since the nearest major league team was in St. Louis, Missouri, citizens of Kansas lacked any professional teams to call their own. This lack of a professional team led to white and black Kansans adopting these traveling black teams as their own. The Monarchs, most famously, had the support of both groups and they became the closest thing to a Major League team in the state. White and black fans would sit alongside each other cheering on the Monarchs. Racial hatred began to lessen as the two groups interacted more. The baseball stadium often became the only place in Kansas society black and whites could interact in an equal setting. The biggest long-term benefit, for society, of black barnstorming teams was starting the slow breakdown of segregation in white society. They did this by allowing white society in Kansas to experience integration through barnstorming baseball teams. Teams like the Monarchs, Moravians, and Colored Clowns began to change the fabric of Kansas society.

Children of all colors flocked to see a black team in Jim Crow America. White children would pretend to be Josh Gibson or Satchel Paige when they played. Baseball began to heal some of the feelings of hatred whites had towards the black community. While it did not completely heal racist feelings and attitudes, black barnstorming teams

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<sup>174</sup> Pendleton, *History of Kansas*, 97.

began to show whites that blacks at least deserved respect. They repeatedly taught these white towns they could compete in sports with whites.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 59-60.

## CONCLUSION: A DOOR OPENED AND A DOOR CLOSED

As World War II ended in 1945, talk began to integrate professional baseball. Once Happy Chandler became commissioner in 1945, he publically declared, “If a black boy can make it on Okinawa and Guadalcanal, hell, he can make it in baseball.”<sup>176</sup> In 1945, Jackie Robinson, Marvin Williams, and Sam Jethroe worked out for the Boston Red Sox. This first attempt at integration failed when the baseball establishment pushed back. However, New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia formed a commission shortly after to study the effects integration in baseball might have. The New York group argued that black baseball affected rural communities across the country, largely as a result of barnstorming games. They concluded that allowing black players in the majors would destroy black teams and hurt communities like those in Kansas.<sup>177</sup>

The commission’s report came out in October 1945. That same week, Branch Rickey made history when he signed Jackie Robinson to a contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The owner of the New York Yankees, Larry MacPhail, said the deal “could conceivably threaten the value of the major league franchises.” It is worth noting that his organization made around \$100,000 from renting stadiums to black teams in New York and Kansas City.<sup>178</sup>

Jessie Williams replaced Robinson as the starting shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs, and stated. “I wouldn’t have took it [the major league deal]. If they had picked me, you possibly wouldn’t have heard of Mays and Campanella and all those other fellows.”<sup>179</sup> Pat Patterson put it best when he said, “I could have named five or six

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<sup>176</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 110.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

baseball players that were better ball players at the time.”<sup>180</sup> But more than ability played a role in Rickey’s decision. He picked Robinson because he could take the racial slurs, taunts, threats, and hatred that came with the job.

“It still was me that ought to have been first.”<sup>181</sup> That is how Satchel Paige responded after someone asked him what he thought about when Robinson signed with the Dodgers. For the most part, black players were happy for him. But older players, like Paige, felt jealousy since they never got the same chance during their prime years. Most of black baseball applauded the signing of Robinson to the major leagues. They saw it as a victory for civil rights, as well as baseball. As long time Kansas City Monarch, Buck O’Neil put it, “Great! Great! The door is open!”<sup>182</sup> O’Neil never got a chance to play in the majors, but he was happy anyway. Robinson’s inclusion to a major league team did open the doors to blacks as well as being a defining Civil Rights movement.

Shortly after Robinson made the Dodgers major league roster, more black players started signing with teams. In 1947, the Cleveland Indians signed Larry Doby. A month after that, the St. Louis Browns acquired former Kansas City Monarchs Hank Thompson and Willard Brown. In 1948, a forty-one year old Satchel Paige signed with the Indians. However, just as LaGuardia’s special commission had warned, the exodus of talent from black teams led directly to the demise of the negro leagues, and barnstorming teams in Kansas.<sup>183</sup>

Othello Renfroe played for the Monarchs before and after integration occurred. He noticed a distinct difference in style in the years after players left for the majors.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>182</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 113.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 115.

“Baseball lost something when Jackie Robinson went into organized ball.”<sup>184</sup> Before Robinson left in 1945, Renfroe remembered fans showing up to games early to watch the team practice. As talent began to leave, the unique flair of black baseball disappeared. Less talented players began to make up rosters and fewer fans attended games.<sup>185</sup>

Effa and Abe Manley, owners of the black Newark Eagles in 1947, noted that integration caused their attendance numbers to drop from 120,000 to 57,000 people a season. Abe started to have a harder time booking games for the Eagles. Before integration in 1945, the Eagles played a game almost every day from April to September. In 1948, they played, at most, three games a week. They had to sell off their best players to major league franchises to keep afloat. It became harder to field a competitive team. Abe and Effa had to pick from the players the majors did not want. They signed Jimmy Hill, a pitcher who stood at five feet five inches, after professional scouts turned him away due to his size. In 1950, the Manleys sold their team for a couple thousand dollars. That same year, several other black teams also folded.<sup>186</sup>

When fewer people started showing up to games, players received less money. Great Plains black teams were the only ones to make it past the late 1940s. Even the famous Homestead Grays and New York Black Yankees folded by 1948. The Kansas City Monarchs owner, JL Wilkinson, also sold the team in 1948. The Monarchs played for fifteen more years, but the era of black baseball dominance and barnstorming was over.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> “Interview with Othello Renfroe”, *Voices*, 339.

<sup>185</sup> “Interview with Othello Renfroe”, *Voices*, 342.

<sup>186</sup> “Interview with Mrs. Effa Manley”, *Voices*, 321-326.

<sup>187</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 116-118.

Soon, black teams began to integrate with the majors. The American Giants signed several white players to contracts. They became the first Negro League team to hire white players. Syd Pollock signed Marcenia Stone, the first woman player, to attract fans. White fans stopped coming to games too, as race became a nonissue for teams in the majors. Some teams reported losses up to \$15,000 a year.<sup>188</sup>

To survive, the Monarchs turned themselves into an unofficial farm team for major league teams. Their last great player, Ernie Banks, left the team in 1953. In 1955, they sold twenty-five players to professional teams. By the mid-fifties, the Monarchs were one of only four remaining Negro League teams. They offered a teenage Bob Gibson a contract in 1945 but he turned them down, stating, “The Kansas City Monarchs were no longer the be-all and end-all for a Negro ball player.”<sup>189</sup> In 1955, the Monarchs moved to Michigan, surviving until 1965. The Monarchs had been a symbol for black baseball since 1920, but their move from Kansas City signaled that barnstorming black teams had outlived their popularity. In fact, the very success of barnstormers helped lead to their downfall as a component of black and rural society.<sup>190</sup>

For almost thirty years, black teams traveled all over Kansas and the rest of the United States. Barred from the majors, some of the greatest players ever played in small Kansas towns like Hutchinson, Wichita, and Belleville. The Kansas City Monarchs, the Kansas City Clowns, and the Negro House of David became famous in small towns like Hays, Pittsburgh, and McPherson, where they took on amateurs, professionals, and anyone else willingly to play them. It gave hope to black communities and a better life

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<sup>188</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 120-121.

<sup>189</sup> Bob Gibson, *From Ghetto to Glory: The Story of Bob Gibson* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 22.

<sup>190</sup> Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs*, 120-121.

for black players and their families. Barnstorming baseball forced interaction between whites and blacks, starting the long process to overcome racist feelings in the state. A decade before Robinson, Kansas hosted interracial games and even an interracial team. Black barnstorming players helped Kansans experience integration and social equality decades before the rest of the country.

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