

The Sportier

Negro Leagues in the Big Leagues

Robert Manfred, the MLB Commissioner who has been despised by some for his many questionable actions, such as dealing minimal punishment to the Houston Astros players, to referring to the World Series trophy as “a piece of metal,” made a massive advancement in reconfiguring the history of Major League Baseball. This past Wednesday, it was announced that the MLB would be recognizing the Negro Leagues and its history as a part of the MLB. The Negro Leagues was founded in 1920 after African Americans were initially prevented from playing baseball with white players due to the Jim Crow laws. In the 1860s, applications to join the Major Leagues from African Americans were rejected, though their efforts did not end there. In 1884, Moses Fleetwood Walker, an African American baseball player, was the first player of color to play in the equivalent of Major League Baseball on the Toledo Blue Stockings. Unfortunately, Walker was driven out of the league due to the severe racial hostility he faced from teammates and opponents. After several years of being forced to play unorganized baseball due to exclusion from the Major Leagues, Rube Foster founded the Negro National League in 1920 for African Americans to participate in. Throughout its history, though, the Negro Leagues proved to be unstable. Without strong regulations on contracts, players were free to jump to the highest bidder. Additionally, teams were allowed to essentially accept other exhibition offers, so there was, in addition, very limited structure regarding schedules. Off the field, there were other issues that overtook the league. During the Great Depression in the United States, only a handful of Negro League clubs were able to survive. In the following decade, the Negro Leagues were able to yet again rise in relevance after rich owners presided over the league, where it was able to showcase the true talent found within the league. Players such as home run machine catcher Josh Gibson, and legendary pitcher Satchel Paige, exemplified the excitement that was displayed in the league. The 1940s is really when the Negro Leagues saw its decline, but in reality, it was for the better. On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson, a former superstar in the Negro Leagues as a member of the Kansas City Monarchs, made his major league debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Throughout the year, more players from the Negro Leagues, including slugger Larry Doby, joined Major League Baseball, breaking the color barrier in the sport known as America’s Pastime. With the success of African Americans in the MLB, the Negro Leagues was not needed to continue African American baseball.

With even a slight understanding of the Negro Leagues, it is evident why this past Wednesday was crucial. The Negro Leagues, an established association that held some of the best athletes of their era, was created because these same athletes were unfairly not permitted to play in the true Major Leagues. Players like Satchel Paige, a fantastic pitcher in the Negro Leagues, was only able to join the Major Leagues at age 41, which obviously skipped past most of his prime. Just a handful of influential changes that could come out of this Major League recognition are the statistical additions to many great players, such as hits to many great players such as Willie Mays, pitching wins and other key numbers for players like the elite Satchel Paige. Home run slugger Josh Gibson will have countless home runs tallied to his records as well. Calculation of these statistics are to date a bit fuzzy, as shown in the case of Josh Gibson. Many have recounted Gibson as having hit nearly 800 home runs, but per MLB’s calculations, he will be given an additional 238 home runs to his record. With Negro League statistics being calculated in a very loose manner, it may be hard for the MLB to fully recognize the talent that these men possessed. Regardless, even though Josh Gibson may not break Barry Bonds’ 762 career home run record, it is a step in the right direction for the MLB by taking the initiative of recognizing these superstar athletes, providing them with the recognition they deserve had they been given the proper chance from the outset.

Sources

[History.com](#), [CBS Sports](#), [ESPN](#)