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## Foreword

*Mark Langill*

During the last few years of his life, former catcher and longtime baseball executive Bobby Bragan called the offices of Dodger Stadium on the opening of the baseball season with the same question, his voice mixed with pride and apprehension. “How many guys are left from the 1947 team?”

Bragan was referring to his teammates on the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers. Most sports teams become famous if they perform well in the playoffs at the end of the season, always invited to reunions if the group wins a championship. Although they were crowned National League champions in September, the 1947 squad became forever linked to our national history on April 15, Opening Day, when Jackie Robinson made his debut at Ebbets Field as the first African American player of the twentieth century to appear in the Major Leagues.

In previous years the Dodgers usually found their biggest challenges in the opposing dugout, whether battling their crosstown rival the New York Giants or a St. Louis Cardinals franchise dominating the 1940s with pennants in 1942, 1943, 1944, and 1946. A decade earlier, the biggest hurdle was the team’s balance sheet, with the Brooklyn Trust Company serving as the club’s chief creditor and fearing bankruptcy during the Great Depression.

But the presence of Robinson in 1947 forced players and coaches to look within themselves and their respective communities back home as their sport became integrated. It also meant learning about Robinson as a teammate and ballplayer through his play on the field.

At age twenty-eight Robinson wasn’t a typical rookie, because of life experiences such as being a student-athlete at UCLA, playing professional foot-

ball, facing racism in the military, and resuming his baseball career in the Negro Leagues. As a second lieutenant in World War II, he was acquitted during a court-martial trial that stemmed from his refusal to move to the back of a military bus when so ordered by the driver, even though the army had commissioned its own unsegregated bus line. And his marriage to UCLA nursing student Rachel Isum before leaving for Triple-A Montreal in 1946 gave Robinson a partner and a solid foundation for the historic rookie season and the final twenty-seven years of his life.

With Brooklyn in 1947, Robinson wasn’t there to make friends as a first-year player. His only desire was for the other Dodgers players to respect him as a man while proving blacks and whites could play together on a ball field.

Broadcaster Red Barber admitted his initial uncertainty when tipped off the previous winter to the Robinson plans by Dodgers team president Branch Rickey. The 154 games of the regular season meant Robinson’s drama could slowly play out on a national stage and soak into the nation’s consciousness as the Dodgers visited the various National League cities.

And one season wouldn’t end the problems. Robinson received death threats prior to a 1949 exhibition game in Atlanta, and Robinson’s teammates were advised of a possible sniper. Gene Hermanski, an early supporter of Robinson in 1947, suggested that every Dodger wear uniform No. 42 “so they won’t know which one to shoot at.” The irony, of course, is every Major League player now wears Robinson’s number on the April 15 anniversary date.

Stepping back into a time machine, one can only imagine what would have happened with slight changes to the main characters and circumstances.

What if Dodgers team president Larry MacPhail had stayed with Brooklyn after the 1943 season and not accepted a commission with the U.S. Army at age fifty-two, prompting the team to lure Rickey from the St. Louis Cardinals? Both MacPhail and Rickey were Hall of Fame executives and powerful advocates of changing the status quo. Would Rickey have tried to integrate baseball with the Cardinals? MacPhail in Brooklyn?

Although Rickey was a visionary, he couldn't see everything in his crystal ball. For example, Dodgers manager Leo Durocher was suspended for the entire 1947 season by Commissioner Happy Chandler for Durocher's "accumulation of unpleasant incidents . . . detrimental to baseball." But Chandler's decision wasn't announced until a week before the season opener, which gave Durocher enough time to set the tone in spring training by defending Robinson in a clubhouse meeting with his players.

If Durocher had stayed with the Dodgers in 1947, how would he compare to his replacement, Burt Shotton, who at age sixty-two didn't want to wear a uniform and therefore was confined to the dugout during games? How would Durocher have reacted to the Ben Chapman episode in Philadelphia when the Phillies manager unleashed a torrent of verbal abuse and bench jockeying, to the point that Dodgers teammates rallied around Robinson because he couldn't fight back?

How does history change if the peaceful scene of Robinson and Chapman shaking hands and smiling in a pregame photo-op, arranged as a favor to Chapman because of public backlash against his behavior, is replaced by the image of "Leo the Lip" punching Chapman in the mouth?

One Robinson story never publicly chronicled centered on eleven-year-old Eddie Hamlin of Mid-

dletown, Connecticut, who had been horribly burned in a gasoline fire on January 1, 1947.

"[Hamlin] had been in the hospital for more than six months," wrote Arthur Mann, Rickey's assistant, in a report to his boss after the 1947 season. "His one fear was of dying before he could see Jackie Robinson. I learned about it from a newspaper man (Dan Parker) and, without Parker's knowledge, detoured Robinson on the way to Boston with the express understanding through my contact at Middletown that there would be no reporters and no photographers.

"Robinson visited Eddie, who suffered many skin grafts, most of them in vain, and dozens of transfusions. His mother was trying to work out a \$1,500 hospital bill in the kitchen. Robinson spent an hour with the boy, gave him pictures and an autographed baseball and departed. The Hamlin boy was so overcome that he could not speak. Four weeks later, we received a note from Eddie and a picture of him leaving the hospital on crutches with a wide grin."

One man, of course, does not win a pennant. So this book also pays tribute to Robinson's teammates and coaching staff, along with an analysis of the franchise and the various postseason awards.

Although the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers fell short of becoming the first World Series champion in franchise history, losing a seven-game classic to the New York Yankees, the consolation prize was priceless.

Looking back at the twentieth century, only one Major League team changed a nation.

## Introduction

*Lyle Spatz*

Of the several thousand team-seasons in baseball history, only a select few stand out, and only a handful might be said to have national appeal. Foremost among those with such national appeal is the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers, the first racially integrated Major League team of the twentieth century.

The addition of Jackie Robinson to the 1947 Dodgers changed not only baseball but also the nation. Robinson, however, was just one member of that memorable and iconic club. This was a team that had many great players on its roster, some at the beginning of their careers and some at the end. Along with Robinson, they include Carl Furillo, Gil Hodges, Pee Wee Reese, Pete Reiser, Duke Snider, Eddie Stanky, Arky Vaughan, and Dixie Walker. Also associated with the team was a quartet of baseball's most unforgettable characters: Branch Rickey, Walter O'Malley, Leo Durocher, and Red Barber.

Several memorable subplots marked the Dodgers' 1947 season. Just before Opening Day, Commissioner Happy Chandler suspended manager Durocher for the entire season, whereupon Rickey lured his old friend Burt Shotton out of retirement to replace him. Meanwhile, co-owner Walter O'Malley had already begun his maneuverings to take control of the club from Rickey.

Gifted outfielder Pete Reiser was again sidelined after running into an outfield fence; nevertheless, the Dodgers won the National League pennant over their old rivals, the heavily favored St. Louis Cardinals. Despite the one-game heroics of Cookie Lavagetto and Al Gionfriddo, whose feats have become part of baseball lore, they lost in a dramatic seven-game World Series to the New York Yankees.

But the biggest story of the season was Jackie Robinson. Historians have said that by joining the Dodgers in 1947, Robinson not only integrated baseball, he also set the stage for the Supreme Court's groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 and all the civil rights legislation that followed.

During spring training, a mini-revolt by some Dodgers players opposed to Robinson's joining the team was quashed by Durocher and Rickey. Robinson slowly overcame the enmity of some of his teammates, and he withstood the vicious assaults on his dignity from other players, managers, and fans to win the Rookie of the Year Award. Along the way, he helped the Dodgers set single-game attendance records in cities around the National League, while also changing the face (literally) of product advertisements.

For all these reasons, the 1947 Brooklyn Dodgers remain one of baseball's most treasured teams.

## Chapter 1. How the 1947 Team Was Built

*Lyle Spatz*



The 1947 National League champions.

### Pitchers

**HUGH CASEY:** Taken in the Rule 5 draft from the Memphis Chicks of the Southern Association on October 4, 1938.

**JOE HATTEN:** Acquired before the 1940 season from the Crookston Pirates of the Northern League.

**KIRBY HIGBE:** Acquired from the Philadelphia Phillies on November 11, 1940, in a trade for pitcher Bill Crouch, pitcher Vito Tamulis, Minor League catcher Mickey Livingston, and \$100,000.

**WILLIE RAMSDELL:** Acquired before the 1941 season from the Big Spring Barons of the West Texas–New Mexico League as part of a Minor League working agreement.

**HANK BEHRMAN:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**HAL GREGG:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**VIC LOMBARDI:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**RUBE MELTON:** Acquired from the Philadelphia Phillies on December 12, 1942, in a trade for pitcher Johnny Allen and \$30,000.

**REX BARNEY:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1943.

**RALPH BRANCA:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1943.

**HARRY TAYLOR:** Acquired from the St. Paul Saints of the American Association before the 1944 season as part of a Minor League working agreement.

**JACK BANTA:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1944.

**CLYDE KING:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1944.

**ED CHANDLER:** Signed as a free agent in 1945.

**ERV PALICA:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1945.

**JOHNNY VAN CUYK:** Signed as a free agent in 1945.

**PHIL HAUGSTAD:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1946.

**GEORGE DOCKINS:** Purchased on waivers from the St. Louis Cardinals on April 19, 1946.

**DAN BANKHEAD:** Purchased on August 24, 1947, from the Memphis Red Sox of the Negro American League.

### Catchers

**BRUCE EDWARDS:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**GIL HODGES:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1943.

**BOBBY BRAGAN:** Acquired from the Philadelphia Blue Jays on March 24, 1943, in a trade for pitcher Jack Kraus and cash.

### Infielders

**COOKIE LAVAGETTO:** Acquired, along with pitcher Ralph Birkhofer, from the Pittsburgh Pirates on December 4, 1936, in a trade for pitcher Ed Brandt.

**STAN ROJEK:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1939.

**PEE WEE REESE:** Acquired from the Boston Red Sox on July 18, 1939, in a trade for four players to be named and \$35,000.

**SPIDER JORGENSEN:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**ED STEVENS:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**HOWIE SCHULTZ:** Acquired from the St. Paul Saints of the American Association in August 1943 in a trade for pitcher Rube Melton, infielder Joe Oren-

go, Minor League pitcher Ed Spaulding, Minor League infielder Jack Bolling, and \$40,000.

**TOMMY BROWN:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1944.

**EDDIE MIKSIS:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1944.

**EDDIE STANKY:** Acquired from the Chicago Cubs on June 6, 1944, in a trade for pitcher Bob Chipman.

**JACKIE ROBINSON:** Signed as a free agent in 1945.

### Outfielders

**PETE REISER:** Signed as a free agent in 1938.

**DIXIE WALKER:** Purchased on waivers from the Detroit Tigers on July 24, 1939.

**CARL FURILLO:** Was a member of the Interstate League's Reading Chicks team, which Brooklyn purchased following the 1940 season.

**TOMMY TATUM:** Signed as a free agent in 1940.

**GENE HERMANSKI:** Signed as a free agent in 1941.

**MARV RACKLEY:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1941.

**ARKY VAUGHAN:** Acquired from the Pittsburgh Pirates on December 12, 1941, in a trade for pitcher Luke Hamlin, catcher Babe Phelps, infielder Pete Coscarart, and outfielder Jimmy Wasdell.

**DICK WHITMAN:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1942.

**DUKE SNIDER:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1943.

**DON LUND:** Signed as an amateur free agent in 1945.

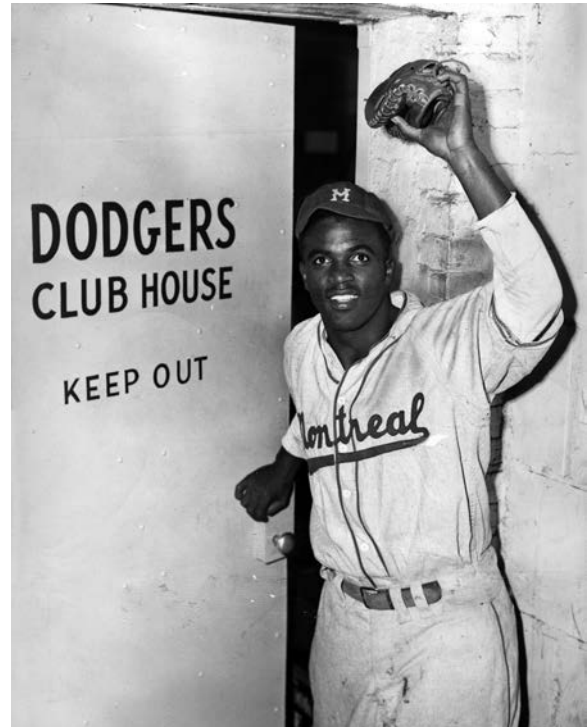
**AL GIONFRIDDO:** Acquired, along with \$100,000, from the Pittsburgh Pirates on May 3, 1947, in a trade for pitcher Kirby Higbe, pitcher Hank Behrman, pitcher Cal McLish, catcher Dixie Howell, and infielder Gene Mauch.

## Chapter 2. Spring Training in Havana

*Irv Goldfarb*

“You could not possibly train a baseball squad in Havana. The distractions are too great. . . . The after-dark program down there would kill a team before it ever had a chance to appear in National League competition.” So opined baseball legend John McGraw when asked why he never took his New York Giants to Cuba, though he often vacationed there himself. “There are too many women, there is too much drinking, there is too much gambling, and the climate is much too hot.”<sup>1</sup> Despite McGraw’s warnings, another brilliant baseball mind was to test that theory, and for a very specific reason.

Mention the Brooklyn Dodgers and the year 1947, and any baseball fan will immediately acknowledge it as a landmark season for both the franchise and Major League Baseball. But besides the obvious reason for the familiarity of the year—the signing of Jackie Robinson and the official integration of the Major Leagues—the ’47 season was unique for team president Branch Rickey and his club in other areas as well. The Dodgers became the first team in baseball history to have their manager suspended before the season had even begun. Leo Durocher, a character not unfamiliar with controversy, had become fodder for the New York tabloids during the previous year by indulging in violent altercations with umpires, hitting a fan, and allowing actor George Raft to borrow his apartment and conduct a dice game in his living room. Leo added to the chaos when he wed divorced actress Laraine Day, an event that caused the Brooklyn chapter of the Catholic Youth Organization to withdraw its support of the famed Dodgers Knothole Gang.



The Dodgers promoted Jackie Robinson from Montreal just before the season began.

Durocher then capped it off when he accused New York Yankees president and co-owner Larry MacPhail of entertaining two alleged gamblers at an exhibition game between the clubs. Pointing to MacPhail’s private box, Durocher chided, “If that was my box I’d be barred from baseball.”<sup>2</sup> The two gamblers, Connie Immerman and Memphis Engelberg, were actually in the box *behind* the Yankees executive’s, but the incident was the proverbial straw, forcing Commissioner Albert “Happy” Chandler to call for two hearings between the parties. On April 9, just before the

season began, Chandler suspended Durocher for the season for “conduct detrimental to baseball.” Leo and his team were stunned.

The incident that touched off this baseball war was historically important for more than just the fact that it led to the suspension of the Dodgers’ manager: the private box in question was located at Gran Stadium in Havana, Cuba, the site chosen by Rickey for his team to train that spring.

The Dodgers were not totally unfamiliar with Cuba, having previously used Havana’s La Tropical Stadium as their spring training site for the 1941 and 1942 seasons, before Rickey arrived from St. Louis. Wartime travel restrictions, however, ended that experiment. And as early as 1943, Rickey had shown interest in having heralded Cuban Leaguer Silvio Garcia become the first player to test Major League Baseball’s color barrier. According to Cuban baseball authority Edel Casas, Rickey traveled to Cuba and, thinking ahead to possible racial abuse, asked Garcia during the interview, “What would you do if a white American slapped your face?” When Garcia declared, “I kill him,” Rickey moved on.<sup>3</sup> (However, a less popular version of the tale claims Rickey sent Walter O’Malley to Havana with a \$25,000 letter of credit to sign the shortstop. When O’Malley got there, Garcia was gone, probably having enlisted in the Cuban army.)

When Jackie Robinson trained with the Montreal Royals in Daytona Beach in the spring of 1946, Rickey began to witness some of the racial confrontations he had feared. Trying to avoid as much of this as possible while preparing Robinson for his Major League debut, Rickey cited Cuba’s passion for baseball and its easy access from the mainland as two good reasons to hold training camp there in 1947. Another valid reason, no doubt, was the fact that blacks had been playing baseball in Cuba since the turn of the century. A city that had seen the likes of Oscar Charleston, Josh Gibson, and Satchel Paige appeared safe from

any social upheaval at the sight of the Dodgers’ rookie.

If an under-the-radar arrival in Cuba is what Rickey wanted, that’s exactly what he got. The week the team landed, the new Gran Stadium (Gran Estadio de La Habana, to be exact) hosted the climactic three-game series between perpetual rivals Havana and Almendares in what was probably the greatest pennant race in the history of the Cuban League. Almendares needed to sweep the series to take the flag, and they sent former Cardinal Max Lanier (in exile from the Major Leagues as a jumper to the Mexican League) to the mound. Lanier won the first game, 4–2. Almendares won again the next day, 2–1. An overflow crowd of almost 40,000 attended the third game, and watched in a frenzy as Lanier went out on one day’s rest and defeated Havana 9–2 to sweep the series and capture the title.

With the local baseball season at an end, it was the Dodgers’ turn to take over Gran Stadium. Built only the year before as part of Havana’s burgeoning modernization, the ballpark reportedly included a playing field and lighting system of Major League quality. Along with these fine facilities, the players were housed at the best resort in the city, the Hotel Nacional. These opulent quarters boasted beautiful swimming pools and fine restaurants, and the players were quartered with visiting diplomats and international businessmen. The Class Triple-A Royals were housed at the Havana Military Academy, a prep school attended by the wealthy offspring of government employees. The black members of both squads, however, stayed at neither of these locations.

Robinson and the Royals’ other black players—Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe, and Roy Partlow—were taken instead to the Hotel Boston in “old” Havana. Jackie was irate. “I thought we left Florida . . . so we could get away from Jim Crow,” he complained to the Dodgers’ traveling secretary, Harold Parrott. “So what the devil is this busi-

ness of segregating the Negro players in a colored nation?"<sup>4</sup> Parrott explained to Robinson that the whole thing was Rickey's idea. Though the Hotel Nacional was fully integrated, the Dodgers' head man didn't want to take the chance of any incidents while his team was staying there. "I'll go along with Mr. Rickey's judgment," Jackie finally said. "He's been right so far."

Some have questioned whether Rickey was right in segregating the black players from the rest of the team, believing it was an overreaction. Where the team stayed, however, made no difference to a number of white Dodgers who were nonetheless offended by Robinson's presence. Led by Dixie Walker, the de facto leader of the team, the group attempted to keep Jackie off the club. During a trip to Panama for a three-game series against the Royals, Durocher, still the Dodgers' manager, caught wind of the uprising and exploded.

"I told them what they could do with their petition, and I don't think I got much back talk on it," he said years later. "I told the players that Robinson was going to open the season with us come hell or high water, and if they didn't like it they could leave now and we'd trade them or get rid of them some other way. Nobody moved."<sup>5</sup> (This quotation is likely also in Maury Allen's biography of Robinson.) Rickey confronted his mutinous players in his hotel room and reiterated that anybody who wanted to leave the team would be accommodated. The petition got no further. Though some tension undoubtedly remained into the regular season, there were no more internal flare-ups in Cuba.

While in Havana, the team played "home" series against the Yankees and Boston Braves, along with games against the Royals and a team of Cuban all-stars. In addition to the trip to Panama, they took quick jaunts to play in Caracas, Venezuela, and the Panama Canal Zone, before finally breaking camp during the first week of April and heading home to Brooklyn.

The Havana experiment lasted only a single

spring. The club's training camp costs that year were reported as being the highest in the Majors. Surprisingly, the fans in the baseball-hungry country didn't show up in the numbers the Dodgers had expected. Attendance for their series against the Braves was so low that the visiting Boston club lost money on the deal, causing even the St. Louis Browns to cancel their upcoming trip. The prevailing thought may have been that the city, having just experienced the most pressurized pennant race in Cuban League history, had seen enough baseball for a while. But this was disproved later that spring when the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, featuring the champion Racine Belles, arrived. Fifteen thousand fans showed up for that league's first *practice* game in Havana. In the end, the Dodgers opted not to return in 1948, choosing the less expensive Dominican Republic as their spring training site.

The Dodgers, by then located in Los Angeles, did return to Cuba one more time. When heavy Florida rains threatened a weekend set in 1959 against the Cincinnati Reds, the teams opted to move the series to Gran Stadium. It was the last time the team played there; that same year, Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, and baseball's official dealings with the nation ended. Still, despite John McGraw's warnings, that spring in Havana became a milestone in Dodgers history. The team may have lost a manager but gained a leader, Jackie Robinson, who subsequently changed the fate of their franchise, and baseball, forever.

## Chapter 3. Jackie Robinson

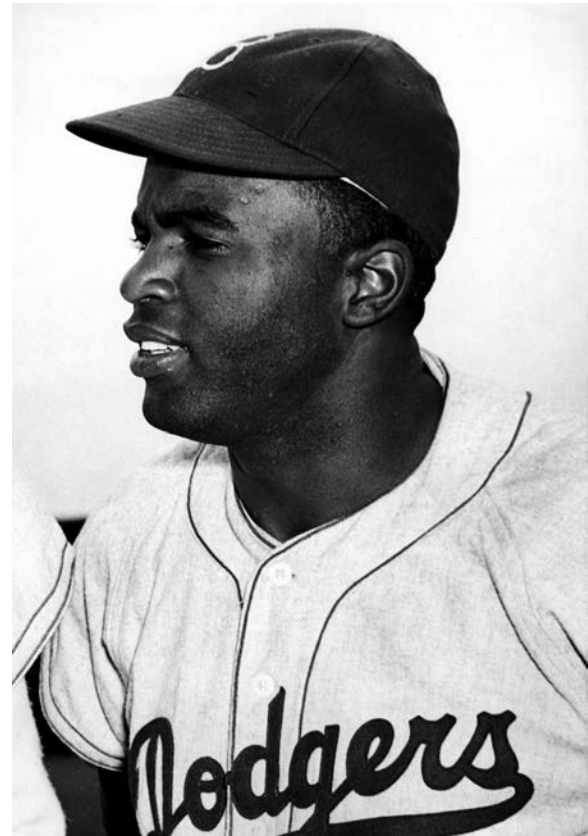
*Rick Swaine*

| AGE | G   | AB  | R   | H   | 2B | 3B | HR | TB  | RBI | BB | SO | BAV  | OBP  | SLG  | SB | GDP | HBP |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|------|------|------|----|-----|-----|
| 28  | 151 | 590 | 125 | 175 | 31 | 5  | 12 | 252 | 48  | 74 | 36 | .297 | .383 | .427 | 29 | 5   | 9   |

Jackie Robinson is perhaps the most historically significant baseball player ever, ranking with Babe Ruth in terms of his impact on the national pastime. Ruth changed the way baseball was played; Jackie Robinson changed the way Americans thought. When Robinson took the field for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947, more than sixty years of racial segregation in Major League Baseball came to an end. He was the first acknowledged black player to perform in the Major Leagues in the twentieth century and went on to be the first to win a batting title, the first to win the Most Valuable Player Award, and the first to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He won Major League Baseball's first official Rookie of the Year Award and was the first baseball player, black or white, to be featured on a U.S. postage stamp.

The raw statistics only scratch the surface in evaluating Jackie Robinson as a ballplayer. Because of institutionalized racism and World War II, he did not play his first big league game until he was twenty-eight years old, and therefore his Major League career spanned only ten seasons. His lifetime batting average was a solid .311, but because of the brevity of his career, his cumulative statistics are relatively unimpressive by Hall of Fame standards.

But in what would be considered his prime years, ages twenty-eight to thirty-four, Robinson hit .319 and averaged more than 110 runs scored per season. He drove in an average of 85 runs, and his average of nearly 15 home runs per season was outstanding for a middle infielder of that era. And he averaged 24 stolen bases a season for a power-laden team that didn't need him to run very often.



Jackie Robinson overcame a most difficult entrance to the Major Leagues to win Rookie of the Year honors.

Colorfully described as a tiger in the field and a lion at bat, the right-handed-hitting Robinson crowded the plate and dared opposing hurlers to dust him off—a challenge they frequently accepted. He was an excellent bunter, good at the sacrifice and always a threat to lay one down for a hit. Not known as a home-run hitter, he displayed line-drive power to all fields, had a good eye for the strike zone, and rarely struck out. For his en-

tire big league career, he drew 740 walks and struck out only 291 times—an extremely impressive ratio.

Second base was Robinson's best position. In a 1987 "Player's Choice" survey, he was voted the greatest second baseman of his era despite having played there regularly for only five seasons. Though not a smooth glove man in the classic sense, he was sure-handed and possessed good range and instincts. He made up for an average arm by standing his ground on double plays and getting rid of the ball quickly. Robinson also displayed his versatility by playing regularly at first base, at third base, and in left field when the needs of the team dictated it.

It was running the bases, however, where Robinson's star shined brightest. He was a dynamo on the base paths—fast, clever, daring, and rough. He was the most dangerous base runner since Ty Cobb, embarrassing and intimidating the opposition into beating themselves with mental and physical errors. Former teammate and big league manager Bobby Bragan, who initially objected to Jackie's presence on the Dodgers, called him the best he ever saw at getting called safe after being caught in rundown situations. He created havoc by taking impossibly long leads, jockeying back and forth, and threatening to steal on every pitch. His mere presence on base was enough to upset the most steely nerved veteran hurlers.

Robinson revived the art of stealing home, successfully making it nineteen times in his career—tied with Frankie Frisch for the most since World War I. At the age of thirty-five in 1954, he became the first National Leaguer to steal his way around the bases in twenty-six years, and a year later he became one of only twelve men to steal home in the World Series.

Throughout his career, Jackie Robinson was a fearless competitor. As Leo Durocher, first his manager and later an archrival, so elegantly phrased it, "You want a guy that comes to play.

But [Robinson] didn't just come to play. He came to beat you. He came to stuff the damn bat right up your ass."<sup>1</sup>

Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, in Cairo, Georgia, a sleepy southern town near the Florida border. Jackie was the youngest of five children, four boys and a girl, born to impoverished sharecroppers Jerry and Mallie Robinson. Jerry Robinson deserted the family six months after Jackie was born. Mallie Robinson, a strong, devoutly religious woman, moved the struggling family across the country by rail to Pasadena, California, in 1920 when Jackie was fourteen months old. She worked as a domestic to support her family; leftovers from the kitchens of families she worked for often constituted their daily diet. With the help of a welfare agency, the Robinson family purchased a home in a predominantly white Pasadena neighborhood, where neighbors immediately petitioned to get rid of the newcomers and even offered to buy them out. When those ploys failed, the family was harassed for several years. The Robinson boys often had to fight to defend themselves, and young Jackie was involved in his share of scrapes with white youths and had some run-ins with authorities.

Jackie's athletic talent became evident at an early age. But he wasn't the only gifted athlete in the family. His older brother Mack became a world-class track star, finishing second in the 200-yard dash to Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics. But after Olympic stardom and college, the only job Mack Robinson could find was janitorial work for the City of Pasadena. It was a position he soon lost. As in most of the country at that time, Jim Crow rules prevailed in Pasadena. Black citizens were permitted to use the city's public swimming pool only one day a week. When a judge ordered full access to the pool for black citizens, the city fathers responded by firing black employees, including Mack Robinson.

After starring in baseball, football, basketball,

and track at Muir Technical High School and Pasadena Junior College, Jackie declined many other offers to enroll at the University of California at Los Angeles, near his Pasadena home.

Robinson gained national fame at UCLA in 1940 and 1941. He became the school's first four-letter man and was called the "Jim Thorpe of his race" for his multisport skills.<sup>2</sup> Sharing rushing duties with Kenny Washington, who later became one of the first black men to play in the National Football League, Jackie averaged eleven-plus yards per carry as a junior. *Sports Weekly* called him "the greatest ball carrier on the gridiron today."<sup>3</sup> On the basketball court, Jackie led the Pacific Coast Conference in scoring as a junior and as a senior.

Although he wasn't named to the first, second, or third all-conference teams, one coach called him "the best basketball player in the United States."<sup>4</sup> Already the holder of the national junior college long-jump record, he captured the NCAA long-jump title and probably would have gone to the 1940 Olympics had they not been canceled because of the war in Europe. In addition, he won swimming championships, reached the semifinals of the national Negro tennis tournament, and was the UCLA Bruins' regular shortstop. Baseball was probably Robinson's weakest sport at the university, although he'd been voted the most valuable player in Southern California junior college baseball.

Financial problems at home forced Robinson to drop out of college in his senior year a few credits short of graduation. He took a job as an athletic coach for the National Youth Administration and played semipro football for the Los Angeles Bulldogs. In the fall of 1941, he signed on to play professional football with the Honolulu Bears. Already a gate attraction and a hero in the black community, he got top billing as "the sensational all-American halfback."

Upon returning home from Hawaii shortly after Pearl Harbor, Robinson was drafted into the

army in 1942. Stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, he was originally denied entry into Officer Candidate School despite his college background. Intervention by a fellow soldier, boxing great Joe Louis, who was also stationed at the base, managed to get the decision reversed. Yet Jackie was not allowed to play on the segregated camp baseball team, which infuriated him so much that he refused to play on the football team even when superior officers pressured him to do so. After OCS, Robinson was appointed morale officer for the black troops at Fort Riley and won concessions for them that predictably angered a few higher-ups in command.

Reassigned to Ford Hood, Texas, Jackie continued to be controversial. On July 6, 1944, he defied a white bus driver's orders to move to the back of the bus "where the coloreds belonged." When the base provost marshal and military police supported the driver, Robinson objected vehemently and was subject to court-martial. Facing a dishonorable discharge, Jackie prevailed at the hearing. But the army had had enough of the controversial young black lieutenant and quickly mustered him out with an honorable discharge.

It's ironic that Jackie Robinson's difficulties with white authority in the military led directly to his rise to the top of Branch Rickey's list of candidates to break baseball's color barrier. Rickey, the orchestrator of Organized Baseball's desegregation, was the president, the general manager, and a part-owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey's scouts had been surreptitiously scouring the Negro Leagues for Major League talent for some time before tapping Robinson to break the unwritten, and diligently enforced, gentlemen's agreement that banned blacks from participating in Organized Baseball.

Rickey was looking for a black pioneer who—in addition to possessing the requisite talent—was educated, sober, and accustomed to competing with and against white athletes. Robinson met those conditions. He grew up in a racially mixed

environment, attended school with white classmates, and matriculated at UCLA. He'd been an officer in the military. He was well-spoken, personable, and comfortable in front of crowds. He had experienced the glare of the spotlight and reveled in it. Also extremely important to the pious Rickey was the fact that Robinson was a nonsmoker and nondrinker. Nor was he a womanizer; he was planning to marry his college sweetheart, Rachel Annetta Isum. In addition, Jackie was a Methodist, as was Rickey, and he coincidentally shared a birthday with Branch Rickey Jr. Jackie and Rachel were married in Los Angeles on February 10, 1946.

Certainly there were other black ballplayers who possessed the qualifications Rickey sought. Monte Irvin and Larry Doby were two obvious candidates. But when Rickey sent his scouts to search the nation for the best black player, Irvin and Doby were overseas, still in the armed forces. Robinson, though he was far from being considered the best player in Negro baseball, was available due to the early termination of his own military obligation.

After his discharge, Robinson had joined the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League for the 1945 season. The Monarchs, one of the most successful franchises in the Negro Leagues, had been ravaged by the manpower demands of the war, but their roster still included veteran stars Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, Hilton Smith, and Satchel Paige. Flashy-fielding veteran Jesse Williams moved over to second base to make room for Jackie at shortstop. Though Robinson hit well over .300 and showed speed and power as a rookie, he disliked the nomadic and often boisterous barnstorming life and was incensed by the Jim Crow laws that the Monarchs often encountered on the road.

On October 23, 1945, it was announced to the world that Robinson had signed a contract to play baseball for the Montreal Royals of the Interna-

tional League, the top Minor League team in the Dodgers organization. Robinson had actually signed a few months earlier. In that now-legendary meeting, Rickey extracted a promise that Jackie would hold his sharp tongue and quick fists in exchange for the opportunity to break Organized Baseball's color barrier.

The integration movement in general had picked up steam during World War II as black American soldiers fought and died beside whites. In fact, the decade leading up to Robinson's signing had been marked by significant progress in efforts to gain equal rights for minorities in all facets of life. Yet the moguls running Major League Baseball stubbornly resisted efforts to integrate the sport, refusing to consider black players even as the talent pool was depleted by the war and a one-armed and a one-legged player could be found among the old-timers, teenagers, and 4-Fs gracing big league rosters. But in November 1944, longtime baseball commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who was generally thought to be against integration, died of a heart attack. Landis's passing was the break Branch Rickey needed to begin implementing his plan to integrate the Dodgers.

When Robinson's signing was announced, the news was heralded in black newspapers and generally received positive reviews in national publications despite objections and attacks from predictable quarters. But Rickey and the Dodgers faced near-unanimous disapproval from the Organized Baseball establishment. After the initial furor died down, a campaign to downplay Robinson's talent and the import of the event began. The *New York Daily News* rated Robinson's chances of making the grade as 1,000 to 1. An editorial in *The Sporting News* deemed Robinson a player of Class C ability and predicted, "The waters of competition in the International League will flood far over his head."<sup>5</sup> Star pitcher Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians said that Robinson had "football shoulders and couldn't hit an inside pitch to save his neck."<sup>6</sup>

Muscularly built with a thick neck and wide shoulders, Robinson did look more like a half-back than an infielder. He suffered from rickets as a child and walked with a pigeon-toed gait, but on the diamond he moved with amazing quickness. He stood five feet eleven and weighed 190 to 195 pounds in his prime, although he thickened noticeably in the latter stages of his career. In the decades prior to Robinson's entry into Organized Baseball, there were several Major Leaguers whose skin tone caused doubts about their racial background. There could be no doubt about ebony-skinned Jackie Robinson. Columnist John Crosby called him "the blackest black man, as well as one of the handsomest, I ever saw."<sup>7</sup>

Plagued by a sore arm during the Royals' 1946 spring training camp, Jackie performed poorly, generating numerous "I told you so" claims. But when Montreal opened the season on April 18, 1946, against the Jersey City Giants at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City, Robinson was playing second base and hitting second in the batting order.

The first twentieth-century appearance by an acknowledged black player in Organized Baseball was a preview of things to come. In front of a packed house, Jackie lashed out four hits and scored four times to lead Montreal to a 14-1 victory. After grounding out in his first at-bat, he blasted a three-run homer over the left-field wall in the third inning. In the fifth inning he bunted for a hit, stole second, and made a daring play to take third on a grounder to the third baseman. From third base he danced far off the bag, darting back and forth and bluffing a steal until the harried pitcher balked him home. Two innings later, he singled sharply to right field and stole second base again before scoring on a triple. In the eighth Jackie again bunted safely. He once again took an extra base, advancing from first to third on an infield single, and again scored by provoking a balk by the Jersey City hurler.

The next day, the headline in the *Pittsburgh*

*Courier* read "Jackie Stole the Show."<sup>8</sup> According to Joe Bostic of New York City's *Amsterdam News*, "He did everything but help the ushers seat the crowd."<sup>9</sup>

Baseball's defense for keeping the game segregated hinged primarily on two points. The first was the contention that there just weren't any black players good enough to merit a shot at the Majors at the time. The second centered on financial concerns—the fear that white fans wouldn't pay to watch Negro players and didn't want to sit in the stands beside black fans. There was also much feigned concern about the financial impact on the established Negro Leagues.

But Jackie Robinson's first year in Organized Baseball emphatically dispelled those tired excuses. He was a sensation on the field, the Royals dominated the International League, and the turnstiles hummed. Thanks to Jackie, the Royals established a new attendance record in Montreal, and his impact on the road was even greater, as attendance at Royals games in other International League cities almost tripled over the previous year. More than a million people came to watch Robinson and the Royals perform that year, an amazing figure for the Minor Leagues at the time.

For the season Robinson led the International League with a .349 batting average and scored 113 runs in 124 games to pace the circuit in that department as well. His forty stolen bases were the second-highest total in the league, and he led the league's second basemen in fielding. Jackie led the Royals to the International League pennant, by a 19½-game margin, and to victory in the Little World Series. After the Series, ecstatic fans wanted to hoist Jackie on their shoulders in celebration, but Jackie had a plane to catch. They chased him for three blocks, prompting a journalist to observe, "It was probably the only day in history that a black man ran from a white mob with love instead of hate on its mind."<sup>10</sup>

In preparation for the 1947 campaign, the Brook-

lyn Dodgers and their top farm clubs set up spring training camp in Havana, Cuba. Based on his performance at Montreal, it seemed a foregone conclusion that Robinson would get a chance with the parent team, but he was still listed on the Royals' roster when the workouts started. Rickey chose Havana to avoid the racial attitudes of the spring training sites in the South. His plan was to allow the Dodgers' veterans to gradually get used to having Jackie around and to see for themselves what an asset he would be to their pennant prospects. Three other black players, Roy Campanella, Don Newcombe, and Roy Partlow, were also on hand. Rickey scheduled a seven-game exhibition series between the Dodgers and the Royals to showcase Robinson's skills, and Jackie dominated the contests with a .625 batting average.

One problem that Rickey and Robinson had to overcome was that the Dodgers already had Eddie Stanky playing second base. Robinson's Major League debut would come at first base, a strange position for a man who had always been involved in the action in the middle of the diamond.

During training camp, a crisis arose when several players on the team began to circulate a petition against Robinson. The dissenters were reportedly led by outfielder Dixie Walker, who initially dismissed the news of Robinson's signing with the comment, "As long as he isn't with the Dodgers, I'm not worried."<sup>11</sup> Rickey and manager Leo Durocher promptly quashed the mini-rebellion. Shortly thereafter, Durocher, an avid Robinson supporter, received a one-year suspension from the commissioner's office for associating with gamblers and other "unsavory" characters. Rickey deftly took advantage of the cover provided by the resulting clamor to quietly transfer Robinson to the Brooklyn roster.

Contrary to dire predictions, Robinson's first season in the Major Leagues went fairly smoothly as the rookie steadfastly stuck by his promise to Rickey to turn the other cheek. Tension sur-

rounding his first game was defused by a series of preseason exhibition contests against the Yankees in New York, and Jackie's Opening Day debut against the Braves was actually somewhat anticlimactic.

He received death threats when the club visited Cincinnati, but in an oft-told but undocumented story, Dodgers shortstop Pee Wee Reese, a native son of Kentucky, draped an arm over the shoulders of the nervous rookie infielder in a courageous public show of support. Later, a threatened strike by the St. Louis Cardinals was short-circuited by a show of force by league president Ford Frick.

Jackie's worst experience came at the hands of the Philadelphia Phillies. Led by manager Ben Chapman, the Phils baited Robinson so cruelly that he later admitted, "It brought me nearer to cracking up than I had ever been."<sup>12</sup> But the Chapman episode actually served to strengthen support for Robinson and even converted some of his detractors. Stanky, who originally had opposed playing with Robinson, challenged the Phillies to pick on someone who could fight back. Public reaction against Chapman was so severe that he had to ask Robinson to pose for a photo with him to save his job. Jackie graciously complied.

For his rookie campaign, Robinson hit .297, led the league with 29 stolen bases, and finished second in the National League with 125 runs scored. In 151 games he lashed out 175 hits, including 12 home runs. Usually hitting second in the batting order, he walked 74 times and led the league in sacrifice hits. On defense, his 16 errors at first base were the second-highest total in the league, but his fielding was generally considered adequate.

With Robinson the biggest addition to the lineup, the Dodgers captured the National League pennant. In the World Series, Jackie and his teammates lost to the powerful Yankees in a thrilling seven-game classic. The 1947 season was the first in which the full membership of the Baseball Writers' Association of America selected a Rookie

of the Year, and Robinson beat out twenty-one-game winner Larry Jansen of the New York Giants for the award. In the NL Most Valuable Player voting, he finished fifth. At season's end, Dixie Walker admitted that "[Robinson] is everything Branch Rickey said he was when he came up from Montreal."<sup>13</sup>

The integration of Major League Baseball proceeded without critical incident. Though Robinson was scorned by some of his teammates, was harassed by enemy bench jockeys, and received a steady diet of fastballs close to his head, he faithfully abided by his promise to Rickey to turn the other cheek. Even when veteran outfielder Enos "Country" Slaughter of the Cardinals appeared to deliberately try to maim him with his spikes in an August 20 game at Ebbets Field, Jackie didn't retaliate.

In fact, baseball's "Great Experiment" was a huge success. Despite the concerns of the owners, integration proved to be a financial windfall for Major League Baseball. Robinson and the Dodgers eclipsed the home attendance record they had set the previous year. They also broke single-game attendance records in every National League ballpark they played in during the 1947 season, with the exception of Cincinnati's Crosley Field, where the attendance record for the first Major League night game held up. Near the end of the season, Jackie was feted by fans with a day in his honor. At year's end, he finished runner-up to crooner Bing Crosby in a national popularity poll.

Before the 1948 season, Eddie Stanky was swapped to the Boston Braves to open up the Dodgers' second-base slot for Robinson. Jackie reported to camp out of shape and got off to a poor start. He was shifted back to first base for thirty games while utilityman Eddie Miksis manned second for the Dodgers. Eventually, Gil Hodges emerged as the club's regular first baseman, and Robinson returned to second. He finished strong at the plate, ending the year with a .296 batting

mark and leading the league's regular second basemen in fielding percentage. Spending more time in the power spots in the batting order, he drove in eighty-five runs, tops on the disappointing third-place squad.

In 1949 Robinson enjoyed the best season of his career, establishing career highs in games played, hits, batting average, slugging, runs batted in, and stolen bases as the Dodgers captured the National League pennant by a single game. He won the batting title with a .342 mark, and his Major League-leading 37 steals were the highest total in the NL in nineteen years. He finished second in the league in runs batted in (124), hits (203), and on-base percentage (.432), and third in slugging average (.528), runs scored (122), doubles (38), and triples (12). His efforts were rewarded with his selection as the National League's Most Valuable Player.

Robinson enjoyed two more superb seasons in 1950 and 1951, batting .328 and .338 and finishing second and third, respectively, in the batting race. Both years, the Dodgers lost the pennant on the last day of the season, although Jackie's heroics kept them in the hunt until the bitter end. In 1951 his spectacular play forced the playoff with the Giants that would be decided by Bobby Thomson's momentous home run. In the final regular-season contest against the Phillies, Robinson prevented the winning run from scoring in the ninth inning with a sensational diving catch, and he blasted a game-winning homer in the fourteenth inning.

The Dodgers returned to the top of the National League standings in 1952 as Robinson hit .308, scored 104 runs, stole 24 bases, and belted 19 homers. During the 1953 season, Jackie Robinson may have had his finest moment. He had worked hard to develop into a fine defensive second baseman. In 1951 he led NL second sackers in fielding and double plays, and he repeated as the double play leader in 1952. But the Dodgers had a young black second baseman in their system, Jim Gilliam, who was ready for the big time.

Jackie graciously agreed to move to another position to make room for the rookie. The thirty-four-year-old veteran played seventy-six games in the outfield and appeared forty-four times at third base, nine times at second, and six times at first base during the 1953 campaign. He even filled in at shortstop in one game, the only time he played his original position as a Major Leaguer. He hit .329, drove in 95 runs, and scored 109 times. Gilliam expertly filled the Dodgers' lead-off spot and was selected the National League Rookie of the Year.

The 1954 campaign was Robinson's last good season. Again shuttling between left field and third base, he batted .311, but age and accumulated injuries were starting to catch up with him. He stole only seven bases and missed thirty games.

In 1955, the year the Brooklyn Dodgers captured their first world championship, Robinson had the worst season statistically of his outstanding career. Sharing third base with light-hitting Don Hoak, he appeared in the field in fewer than one hundred games and batted only .256. In the Dodgers' epic World Series victory, Robinson was at third base for six of the seven contests, and though he hit poorly, he scored five times, including his shocking Game One steal of home.

Jackie rallied to hit .275 in 1956, his final season, while sharing third base with newly acquired Randy Jackson and occasionally filling in at second. Though a mere shadow of his former self, the thirty-seven-year-old veteran was still a force at the plate and on the base paths. In the Dodgers' seven-game World Series loss to the Yankees, Jackie drew five walks, scored five times, and blasted a home run. He struck out in his last professional at-bat, but fittingly he went down fighting. Yankees catcher Yogi Berra had to throw him out at first base after dropping the third strike.

Jackie's last years with the Dodgers had not been harmonious. He disliked both manager Walt Alston and owner Walter O'Malley, whose power play forced Branch Rickey out of the Brooklyn

front office in 1950. Though the Dodgers had captured the 1956 pennant, the once dominating nucleus was growing old. Robinson himself was no longer a top performer on the field and had become increasingly outspoken on racial issues both inside and outside of baseball. The Dodgers' brass was hoping he'd step down gracefully, but Jackie refused to announce his retirement. Finally the club forced his hand by swapping him to the New York Giants on December 13, 1956, for journeyman hurler Dick Littlefield and \$30,000 in cash.

On January 22, 1957, Robinson's retirement from baseball was announced in an exclusive article in *Look* magazine, in which he took a few parting shots at the remaining segregated teams in the Majors. Jackie had actually decided to retire before he was dealt to the Giants, but couldn't say anything earlier because of his deal with *Look*. The Giants reportedly offered him \$60,000 to stay, and the prospect of playing alongside Willie Mays definitely had some appeal. But when Brooklyn general manager Buzzy Bavasi publicly implied that Robinson was just trying to use the magazine article to get a better contract, he decided to prove the Dodgers wrong and declined the Giants' offer.

Though Robinson's career as a Major League baseball player was over, he wasn't about to retire from the spotlight. He joined the Chock full o'Nuts coffee company as a vice president and served as the chairman of the board of Freedom National Bank, founded to provide loans and banking services for minority members, who were largely being ignored by establishment banks. He authored several autobiographical works, wrote a weekly newspaper column, and hosted a radio show. Earlier, he had even tried his hand at acting, starring in the 1950 movie *The Jackie Robinson Story*.

Robinson remained an unofficial spokesman for African Americans and a relentless crusader for civil rights. He became embroiled in politics. Though a strong supporter of Martin Luther King

and the NAACP, he endorsed Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy for president in 1960 because he felt Kennedy had not made it “his business to know colored people.” Reportedly, it was an action that he later came to regret.

In 1962 Robinson was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. He was inducted along with former Cleveland pitching great Bob Feller, who had once predicted that Jackie’s “football shoulders” would keep him from hitting big league pitching.

A few years after his retirement from baseball, Robinson acknowledged that he suffered from diabetes. His health declined under the ravages of the disease, and at the age of fifty-three he suffered a fatal heart attack at his home in Stamford, Connecticut. He died on October 24, 1972, only months after his No. 42 was officially retired by the Dodgers.

Although he always denied it, there’s evidence that Robinson may have been the first insulin-dependent diabetic to play Major League baseball, despite his claim that it hadn’t been diagnosed while he was an active player. But former tennis great Bill Talbert, a close friend of Robinson’s and the first famous athlete known to perform with diabetes, believed that Jackie became insulin-dependent in midcareer.

“I think Jackie felt it was a weakness. With all the publicity about blacks in baseball, he didn’t want another thing to talk about,” Talbert said after Robinson’s death.<sup>14</sup>

More than two thousand people packed Riverside Church on Manhattan’s Upper West Side to hear the young Rev. Jesse Jackson deliver Jackie Robinson’s eulogy. Tens of thousands lined the streets of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant to watch the passage of his mile-long funeral procession. Robinson is buried in Cyprus Hill Cemetery in Brooklyn, along with his mother-in-law, Zellee Isum, and his son Jack Roosevelt Jr. He was sur-

vived by his wife, Rachel, his son David, and his daughter, Sharon.

Shortly after his death, Robinson’s ordeals and accomplishments were the subject of a Broadway musical, *The First*. In 1987, on the fortieth anniversary of his breaking of the color barrier, the Rookie of the Year Award was redesignated the Jackie Robinson Award in honor of its first recipient. On the fiftieth anniversary of his debut, his No. 42 was permanently retired by all Major League teams, although current Major Leaguers already wearing the number were allowed to keep it for the remainder of their careers.

Among the adjectives often used to describe Robinson’s personal makeup are *fearless*, *courageous*, *dynamic*, *defiant*, and *proud*. But probably the most frequently used descriptor is *aggressive*. It’s a word that defines his public life as a tireless campaigner against discrimination as well as his history-making athletic career.

Jackie, who was not known for self-deprecation, made the greatest understatement of his life in 1945 at the announcement of his signing. “Maybe I’m doing something for my race,” he ventured.<sup>15</sup>

Former teammate Joe Black, speaking for generations of black ballplayers, later said, “When I look at my house, I say ‘Thank God for Jackie Robinson.’”<sup>16</sup>