

# Hilton Smith

Baseball Player

1912-1983

by David Conrads

Hilton Smith was a mainstay of the Kansas City Monarchs' pitching staff from 1936 until 1948, a time when the Monarchs were one of the dominant teams in the Negro Baseball Leagues. Although he was well known in the baseball world, the quiet, workmanlike Smith was greatly overshadowed by Satchel Paige, his flamboyant teammate, and Smith never got the public acclaim he deserved.

During his years with the Monarchs, Smith established himself as one of the premier pitchers in the Negro American League. Armed with the best curveball in all of black baseball, Smith won more than 20 games in each of his seasons with the Monarchs and went undefeated in league games in 1938 and 1941. He pitched a no-hitter in 1937 and made six consecutive appearances in the East-West Game, the Negro Leagues' annual all-star game, between 1937 and 1942. Smith was also a good hitter and frequently played in the outfield or at first base when he wasn't on the mound. He was later approached by the Brooklyn Dodgers, but turned down their offer, believing that he was too far past his prime.

"Hilton never got the credit he deserved," teammate Allen "Lefty" Bryant once remarked. "We never told him, but Hilton was the best pitcher we had, including Satchel." Buck O'Neil, his teammate and close friend, summed up Smith's career this way: "From 1940 to 1946, Hilton Smith might have been the greatest pitcher in the world."

A native of Texas, Smith played baseball as a student at Prairie View A&M College. He played on a semipro team in Austin before joining the Monroe [Louisiana] Monarchs, of the Negro Southern League, in 1932. He joined the Kansas City Monarchs, of the newly formed Negro American League, in 1937. Smith became a schoolteacher and coach in Kansas City after 1948, and later worked for Armco Steel. He was an associate scout for the Chicago Cubs at the time of his death in 1983.

Smith was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001.



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