

# Jackie Robinson

Baseball Player  
1919-1972

by David Conrads

Jackie Robinson, the most significant baseball player in the history of the game, got his professional start in Kansas City. While playing short stop for the war-depleted Monarchs in 1945, he was spotted by Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Two years later he became the first black man to play in the modern major leagues.

Robinson was born in Georgia and raised in Pasadena, California. A superb athlete, he excelled at every sport he attempted. He achieved stardom at UCLA, where he became the first four-letter athlete in that university's history. Following his discharge from the Army in 1944, he accepted a position teaching physical education at Samuel Huston College in Austin, Texas. The following year, Monarchs founder and owner J. L. Wilkinson, acting on a tip from pitcher Hilton Smith, invited him to try out for the team during their spring training in Houston.

During his one season in the Negro Leagues, Robinson proved himself to be an outstanding hitter, a skilled and aggressive base runner, and was one of the best infielders in the league. His spot on the Monarchs' roster proved to be instrumental in securing his part in "baseball's great experiment." During that season Branch Rickey scoured the Negro leagues under the pretext of finding players for a new all-black league he was starting. Only his closest associates knew that Rickey was actually looking for just the right player to lead an assault on baseball's 60-year-old color barrier.

Robinson signed with the Dodgers after the 1945 season. He played on their top farm team in 1946, entered the major leagues the following year, and put together a spectacularly successful ten-year career in the majors. Among his long list of achievements, in 1962 Robinson became the first black player inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

## Sources

Bruce, Janet. *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black*



*Baseball*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985.

Peterson, Robert. *Only the Ball Was White*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970.

Rampersad, Arnold. *Jackie Robinson: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

Riley, James A.. *Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1994.

Shatzkin, Mike, ed. *The Ballplayers: Baseball's Ultimate Biographical Reference*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1990.

Tygiel, Jules. *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

© 1999

Photo: Courtesy of *The Kansas City Star*