

Satchel Paige

Baseball Player
Circa 1906-1982

by David Conrads

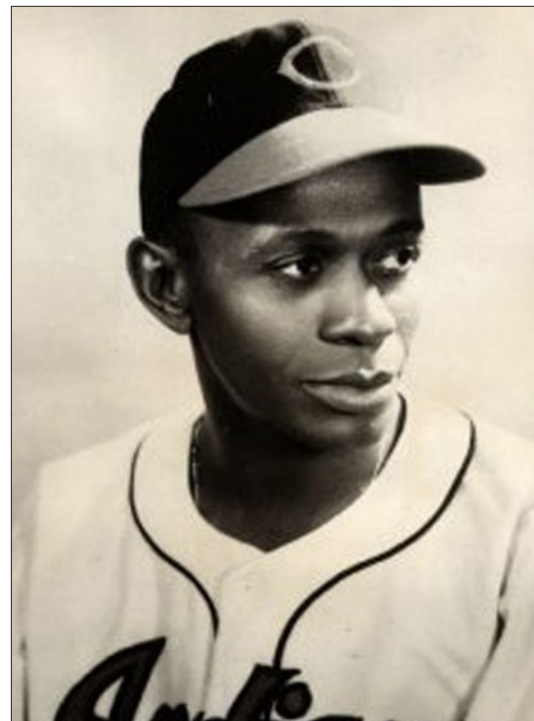
Satchel Paige is one of the most celebrated athletes in the history of American sports. Fusing extraordinary pitching skills with a nimble wit, colorful personality, and a flair for showmanship, Paige became a household name and one of the most famous African Americans of his day.

Leroy Robert Paige was born in Mobile, Alabama. Many facts of his life are shrouded in myths of his own making. His generally accepted birth date of 1906 was questioned for years because his family name was misspelled on the birth certificate. Paige incorporated his uncertain age into his persona. There are several versions of how he acquired his nickname, though most have to do with his carrying suitcases (or satchels) at the Mobile train station.

In 1918 Paige was sent to reform school, where he polished his pitching skills. After his release, he played for several semipro teams in Mobile before joining the Chattanooga (Tennessee) Black Lookouts, of the Negro Southern League, in 1926. He played for many different Negro leagues and black semipro teams over the next several decades, but earned his greatest fame with the Kansas City Monarchs. In his prime, he could throw with tremendous speed and pinpoint accuracy. He played year-round, barnstorming in the off-season, often against major league all-star teams, and played in parts of Latin America. Black baseball's premier gate attraction, Paige drew huge crowds wherever he played and for several years earned more money than most major leaguers.

In 1948, Paige became the oldest rookie in major league history when he signed with the Cleveland Indians. He continued to pitch until 1965, when he was around 60 years of age. He was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1971, the first player inducted from the Negro leagues.

Paige lived in Kansas City from the late 1930s until his death in 1982. Three days before he died, a refurbished stadium at 51st Street and Swope Parkway was renamed in his honor.



Sources

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