

Frank Duncan

Baseball Player, Team Manager of the Kansas City Monarchs
1901-1973

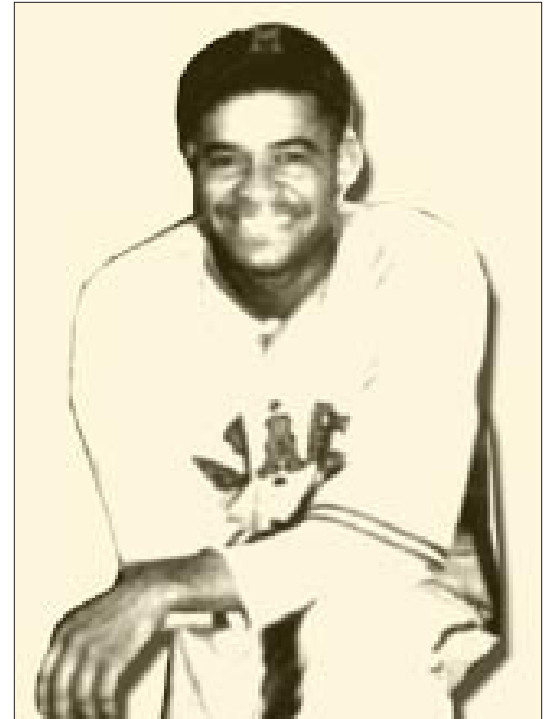
by David Conrads

One of the top catchers in the Negro baseball leagues, Frank Duncan spent most of his playing career with the Kansas City Monarchs. He was the first-string catcher during the Monarchs' glory years of the 1920s, when the team won three consecutive league championships and beat the Hilldale Club of Philadelphia in the first Negro World Series. He was their playing manager for most of the 1940s, when the Monarchs were, once again, one of the premier teams in black baseball.

Frank Duncan was born and raised in Kansas City. He played on semipro teams in St. Joseph, Missouri, and Chicago before he was traded to the Monarchs in 1921. Although his hitting was unexceptional, he was an outstanding defensive catcher, who excelled at throwing out base runners and handling pitchers. Satchel Paige, Hilton Smith, and Bullet Joe Rogan were just a few of the great pitchers he caught during his long, 28-year career. He also ran the bases with abandon and earned the reputation as a tough, hard-sliding competitor. He was also one of the finest managers in the Negro Leagues.

Duncan left the Monarchs four different times to play with teams in Chicago, New York, and Pittsburgh, but always returned to Kansas City. He became the team's manager in 1942, leading them to two Negro World Series appearances. He was Jackie Robinson's manager in 1945, the future star's first season of professional baseball. After he was replaced by Buck O'Neil as manager of the Monarchs in 1948, Duncan spent several years as an umpire in the Negro American League and also operated a tavern in Kansas City.

Duncan was married for a time to blues singer Julia Lee. His son, Frank Duncan, Jr., was also a baseball player. When Frank, Jr., joined the Monarchs in 1941, it marked the first time in sports history that a father and son appeared professionally as active players on the same team.



Sources

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