STORES BY LYDIA R. DIAMOND

A DRAMATURGICAL CASEBOOK

DIRECTOR: JAMIL A.G. MANGAN
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MAY 29TH-JUNE 18TH PLAYHOUSE

TONI STONE (1921-1996)

BY MICHELLA MARINO, INDIANA, HISTORICAL BUREAU

In 1953, Toni Stone became the first woman to play professional men's baseball when she joined the Negro League's Indianapolis Clowns. Born Marcenia Lyle Stone in 1921, "Toni" grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dubbed "Tomboy," Stone lived for baseball, but her parents felt her interest was unfeminine. They relented when their priest suggested that Stone play for the Catholic boys' team under his guidance. Stone's talent and persistence paid off when she was invited to tour with a black men's barnstorming team.

From her teens through her twenties, Stone played on several men's local, barnstorming, Legion, and semi-pro baseball teams. She wanted to play for the All American Girls Professional Baseball League in the late forties, but was denied the opportunity as the league was segregated. In 1950, she married Aurelious Alberga, a man forty years her senior. Although previously supportive of her her baseball career, upon his request, Toni sat out for the 1951 season. This furthered her drive to play professional baseball.



Her big break came in 1952. Syd Pollack, owner of the Negro League's Indianapolis Clowns, needed a scrappy, solid player that could also draw big at the gate. Pollack offered Stone the chance to play second base for the Clowns for the 1953 season. Stone endured a grueling schedule as well as pervasive sexism and racism but she never backed down, telling reporters, "Don't worry. I can take care of myself." Her talents, as well as the novelty of seeing a professional woman baseball player, drew in crowds for the Clowns and attracted extensive press coverage, both positive and negative. Stone joined the Kansas City Monarchs for the 1954 season, but the Negro League was struggling after the integration of Major League Baseball. Now in her thirties, Stone began questioning her career and love of the game. She walked away after the 1954 season.

Stone was lost without baseball but slowly found her way back. In the 1960s, she coached a local boys' team and played men's recreational baseball. However, it wasn't until decades later that Stone received the recognition she deserved for playing professional baseball.

A 20TH CENTURY BASEBALL INSTITUTION BY MATT KELLY

Telling the story of baseball in America in the first decades of the 20th Century while only using the names of stars like Babe Ruth, Rogers Hornsby and Joe DiMaggio is indeed only telling half the story. For while Major League Baseball powered on as America's favorite sport through the turn-of-the-century, the Roaring 20s, the Great Depression and World War II, an equally talented and equally entertaining league – if not more so, in the eyes of some – was also thrilling fans in many of the same ballparks.

Black Americans have played the National Pastime since it first spread across the country like wildfire during the Civil War, but they were barred from the highest levels of organized baseball by unwritten rules and "gentleman's agreements" as the 1800s came to a close. Black players still organized teams and barnstormed across the country, but it wasn't in the organized forum fans have come to know today until one of those barnstorming players, a dominant pitcher named Rube Foster, envisioned a league where those Black stars could properly showcase their talents.

Foster formed the Chicago American Giants club in 1911 and negotiated for the team to play at the White Sox stadium, South Side Park, but he soon desired a way for his club to control its own destiny – including its gate receipts and its scheduling.

"The wild, reckless scramble under the guise of baseball is keeping us down," Foster said, "and we will always be the underdog until we can successfully employ the methods that have brought success to the great powers that be in baseball of the present era: organization."

Foster spent years convincing his fellow Black club owners that organization was necessary, but on February 13, 1920, those owners came together at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City to form the Negro National League. Operating under the slogan, "We Are the Ship, All Else the Sea" in a nod to its independence, the NNL took off; Foster's American Giants club, for example, drew nearly 200,000 spectators during the '21 season.

Legends were quickly born and grown within Negro League competition. Stars like Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell, Martín Dihigo, Turkey Stearns, Judy Johnson, Oscar Charleston and many, many more would soon become household names for both Black and white baseball fans across America. The NNL remained strong until the eve of the Great Depression, which destroyed all but a few strong independent clubs by the early 1930s. However, organized Black baseball rose again in 1933 with the founding of the new Negro National League, soon followed by the Negro American League. Nineteen thirty-three also saw the introduction of the East-West All-Star Game in Chicago, which rivaled the Major Leagues' All-Star Game (also introduced that year) in popularity and attendance.

Negro League Baseball remained wildly popular through the 1930s and early 1940s, with an estimated 3 million fans coming to ballparks during the '42 season. The only event that halted the Negro Leagues' run of success was something many Black players had desired all along: an invitation to prove themselves in the Majors. The death of Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis – one of the major figures who kept Black players out of MLB for decades – in 1944 opened a new chapter, with Negro Leagues star Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier and making his historic debut for the Brooklyn Dodgers three years later. Fellow Black stars Larry Doby and Satchel Paige quickly followed Robinson into the Majors, and the Negro Leagues dissolved soon after once more and more of its most talented stars were finally admitted into MLB.

Though the Negro Leagues were finished, their creation had done its job: Black ballplayers had proven that they could play on even terms with their white counterparts – and challenge Major League Baseball at the box office, too.

BASEBALL'S DISPUTED ORIGIN IS TRACED BACK, BACK, BACK BY EDWARD WONG

It is as elusive as the search for Atlantis, as tangled in legend as the quest for the Holy Grail. For nearly a century, historians have trolled stacks of dusty tomes in hopes of unearthing the origins of baseball.

Its primordial myth held that Abner Doubleday, a West Point cadet, invented the game in 1839 on a dirt field in Cooperstown, N.Y., where the Baseball Hall of Fame is now situated.

In recent years, historians have credited Alexander J. Cartwright, a New York bank clerk, and the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club for codifying many of the modern rules and using them for the first time in an 1846 game at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, N.J.

Now, two newspaper references to baseball have turned up that show that an organized version of the game was being played even earlier in New York City. The articles appeared April 25, 1823; they indicate that some form of the game was even then being called "base ball" and was played in Manhattan.

The articles, discovered by a librarian at New York University, George A. Thompson Jr., bolster a growing consensus that baseball emerged gradually, by evolution and not by invention.

The longer of the two articles appeared in The National Advocate, one of about eight daily newspapers published in New York at the time. It is signed by a person wishing to be known only as a spectator. A mere four sentences, the article begins:

"I was last Saturday much pleased in witnessing a company of active young men playing the manly and athletic game of 'base ball' at the Retreat in Broadway (Jones'). I am informed they are an organized association, and that a very interesting game will be played on Saturday next at the above place, to commence at half past 3 o'clock, P.M. Any person fond of witnessing this game may avail himself of seeing it played with consummate skill and wonderful dexterity."

The game was played on the west side of Broadway between what is today Eighth Street and Washington Place in Greenwich Village, long before anyone dreamed of putting on a pinstripe uniform.

The booming port city of New York had more than 120,000 residents in 1823, according to the census, and its warren of cobblestone lanes had pushed as far north as present-day Canal Street. The Retreat mentioned in the article was a two-acre rural estate that in 1822 became the site of a tavern run by a man named William Jones.

John Thorn, a baseball historian, said the article supported the theory that baseball gradually evolved from prototypes. "It really is an uninterrupted lineage," said Mr. Thorn, who edits "Total Baseball" (Total Sports Publishing, 2001), a 2,600-page encyclopedia of the sport. "Amateur scholars will attempt to put stakes in a moving stream. But the water is the water."

Newspaper articles discovered over the last decade or so bolster that theory. In 1990 a Harvard student unearthed an account, complete with a box score, of a baseball game between teams from New York and Brooklyn in 1845.

Then an article surfaced the following year that had been published in 1825 in a newspaper in Delhi, N.Y. Signed by nine men from the town of Hamden, it challenged an "equal number of persons in any town in the County of Delaware" to "play the game of BASS-BALL, for the sum of one dollar each per game." (Stagecoach Series, anyone?)

In the early 19th century, Americans were just starting to adopt leisure activities, historians say, and ball games were still considered child's play. Boxing, horse racing, rowboat racing and bowling in saloons were more popular as entertainment for adults. But many sports, and the gambling that inevitably accompanied them, drew denouncements from newspapers.

Scholars say that probably explains why the author of the 1823 article in The National Advocate ended it with this line: "It is surprising, and to be regretted that the young men of our city do not engage more in this manual sport; it is innocent amusement, and healthy exercise, attended with but little expense, and has no demoralizing tendency."

The second article discovered by Mr. Thompson, the soft-spoken N.Y.U. librarian, was published the same day in The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser. That paper apparently received the same letter printed in The Advocate and summed it up in one paragraph, starting with "We have received a communication in favor of the manly exercise of base ball." The writer of the letter seemed to assume readers knew what he was talking about, indicating the game was "not a revolutionary new product" in 1823, Mr. Thorn, the editor of "Total Baseball," said.

Another baseball historian, Mark Alvarez, said, "The exciting thing about this discovery is that it implies this game was a regular meeting, that you could go somewhere and expect people to play ball and you could watch." Mr. Alvarez is the editor of The National Pastime, an annual journal of baseball history that recently published an article by Mr. Thompson on his finding.

Dean A. Sullivan, another baseball scholar, said the finding was fascinating and had some significance as to the overall evolution of baseball.

But Mr. Sullivan, who edited "Early Innings" (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), a collection of early accounts of baseball, cautioned that although the article "mentions the magic word, you can't equate that exactly to what we know as baseball today."

The Advocate article has no description of the game it refers to. Many rules of the modern game, like foul territory and throwing to a base to get a player out, were not known to have been formally introduced until the 1846 match in Hoboken. Other elements, like nine innings in a game and nine players to a team, did not become the norm until the following decade, scholars say.

So, the 1823 game could have resembled any of the ancestors of baseball that were being played at the time. For example, a game called town ball (probably played before or after a town meeting) required a player to be hit with the ball to be called out. In cricket and rounders, all the players took a turn at bat. Variations of another game, known as ol' cat, used holes as bases and required players to stick their bats in them as they raced from one to the next.

"History is much more interesting, much more messy, and baseball has 1,000 fathers," Mr. Thorn said.

Ball games involving bases were mentioned in print as early as the 18th century, said David Q. Voigt, a retired professor of sociology and anthropology at Albright College in Reading, Pa., and the author of a three-volume history of baseball.

For instance, a doctor in George Washington's army in Valley Forge, Pa., wrote of a game where players ran from base to base, he said. Children's books of that century described a similar game. And Mr. Thorn points out that an Englishwoman named Lady Hervey wrote in a letter in 1748 that the family of the Prince of Wales was "diverting themselves with baseball, a play all who are or have been schoolboys are well acquainted with."

By the early 1830's, a version of baseball was starting to be played by clubs in New York, according to a book published several decades later. But after its mention in The Advocate in 1823, references to the game did not crop up again in New York newspapers until the 1840's, scholars say.

Mr. Thompson said he had looked through thousands of early 19th century newspapers on microfilm without finding any other reference to baseball. (As for why he spends hours each week poring over such papers, he said, "It's a cheap hobby, and it keeps me from falling into the company of frolicsome women.")

"Finding this paragraph on the 1823 ballgame was an accident," he said as he stood outside his cluttered office, a navy blue tie with white baseball diamonds dangling over his belly. "I certainly didn't go looking for it. Anyone who goes looking for something specific in newspapers of that era is in for a lot of frustration."

As baseball overtook cricket in popularity after the Civil War, it showed up in more and more writings. People would wax nostalgic over how it was played during their childhoods, Mr. Sullivan said. One politician, for instance, wrote in 1884 of seeing the game in Rochester in 1825, only two years after it was played at the Retreat in Manhattan.

But such recollections are unconfirmed and possibly apocryphal, Mr. Sullivan said. By the 1880's, baseball had already entered the mythos of the United States as a symbol of an "idyllic, rural American past, an expression of nostalgic desire for 'the good old days,' " Mr. Sullivan wrote in "Early Innings." In other words, it had become the national pastime.

AT HOME ON THE ROAD

FROM THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

From the time the first professional baseball teams called their cities home, team owners were ready to take them on the road.

These "barnstorming" tours played an important part in the development of the National Pastime – even though their history was not nearly as well documented as that of the major leagues. That history remains alive today at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

The first formal barnstorming tour took likely took place in 1860 when the Brooklyn Excelsior, a talented amateur team of the time, played games around the state of New York. As the years passed and leagues become more prevalent, only preseason and postseason barnstorming was allowed. And by the 1880s, postseason barnstorming became the norm.

Over the years, various barnstorming teams have included all-women (Bloomer Girls), bearded men (House of David), multi-ethnic (All Nations) and African-American (Indianapolis Clowns), but the inclusion of big leaguers into this mix has been not without some hardship the other groups didn't have to endure.

With the birth of the modern World Series in 1903 came a more proprietary view of players regarding barnstorming by team owners. The opening salvo in this tug of war came prior to the 1910 season when all new player contracts included the clause:

"The party of the second part (the player) will not be permitted at any time, either during the playing season or before the commencement or after the close thereof, to participate in any exhibition baseball games, indoor baseball, basketball, or football, except that the consent of the party of the first part (the club) has first been secured in writing."

Hall of Fame executive Ban Johnson, the American League president at the time, was quoted as saying, "It doesn't look good for a professional baseball player to be beaten by an amateur or a semi-professional. It discredits the league players, and if they are defeated causes remarks to be made about their inability to beat a town nine.

"Now an owner is not going to stop the player from earning a little extra money in a legitimate way after the season is over, but the owner has a right to protect the good name of his club. Barnstorming doesn't help baseball. Now, when the new clause is thoroughly understood, it will be a benefit to the game and the players as well."

An editorial in the Chicago Tribune at the time understood the criticism from players who resent any attempt to curtail their earning power during the winter, but also sympathized with the owners' plight.

"President (Barney) Dreyfuss of the world's champions asked his men to give up the 'barnstorming' trip which a squad of them was planning after the (World Series). He was liable to wake up some morning and read about \$70,000 worth of players being beaten by some \$7 team. Of course it would be the "Pittsburg world's champions" who were trimmed, even if (Honus) Wagner, (George) Gibson, (Fred) Clarke, (Tommy) Leach, and a few other real world's champions were absent. If some of Dreyfuss' players had planned barnstorming under the name of "Invincibles" of "Carnegies," Barney probably would have had no objection. But that would not have been worth while. Only by jeopardizing the baseball reputation which Dreyfuss had spent many thousands of dollars to build up could his players fool the public into attending their mediocre exhibition game. Therein lies the objection."

In 1916, Baseball Players' Fraternity President David L. Fultz takes a stand for his brethren, stating, "The fraternity cannot recognize the right of organized baseball to fine players for taking part in games after the season is over and after their contracts have expired. The players have, of course, no right to represent any club with the consent of its owner, but as long as they trade upon their own personal reputations they are clearly within their rights.

"The relation of player to magnate is purely contractual and gives no basis for the principle of paternalism, which the magnates now attempt to inject into it."

In arguably the most infamous case of barnstormers being penalized, New York Yankees teammates Babe Ruth, Bob Meusel and Bill Piercy, coming off an American League pennant in 1921, were fined their World Series shares and suspended until May 20 of the 1922 season by Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Landis for participating in exhibition games following the '21 Fall Classic.

Ruth and the others had defied Section 8B of Article 4 of the Major League code, which took effect the previous February: "Both teams that contest in the world's series are required to disband immediately after its close and the members thereof are forbidden to participate as individuals or as a team in exhibition games during the year in which that world's championship was decided."

Landis, who was still dealing with the unsavory aspects of the Black Sox Scandal, made it crystal clear who baseball's boss was.

"I did not write the rule against barnstorming, but I am the enforcement officer of that rule and I am a stickler for obedience in such cases. To violate the rule is to challenge the authority of the Commissioner. Disregarding the personal side of entirely, this case resolves itself into the question of who is the biggest man in baseball, the Commissioner or the player who makes the most home runs. It may have to be decided whether one man is bigger than baseball."

After a barnstorming game in Elmira, N.Y. on Oct. 17, 1921, Ruth said, "I am not in any fight to see who is the greatest man in baseball. Meusel, Piercy and I think we are doing something in the interest of baseball. I do not see why we are singled out when other big players, members of second and third place clubs in the world's series money, are permitted to play post-season games. I am out to earn an honest dollar, and at the same time give baseball fans an opportunity to see the big players in action."

A column written by Grantland Rice, one of the sportswriting's all-time greats and the 1966 recipient of the J.G. Taylor Spink Award, in June 1922 made no doubt as to where he stood on the matter.

"There can be no reason worth offering for opposing barnstorming efforts after the baseball season has closed on the part of individual players. To say that the member of a championship team can't take part in any exhibition while the others can is one of the most brainless rules ever put forward by any organization.

"Putting a penalty upon successful endeavor is a new way to go about things. A star player, for example, is given to understand that by hustling to win a flag he is making money for his club owner, but is losing money for himself. A club owner willing to endorse this proposition should call in a surgeon to remove a mental kink."

The barnstorming rule in which Ruth was suspended was removed by July 1922, but forced players on a World Series team to obtain the consent of the club president and then gain the permission of the commissioner before joining a tour. Also, players were not allowed to participate in exhibition games past Oct. 31, and no more than three players from any one club were allowed to play on a single team in an exhibition game.

Eventually, this led to popular tours with Ruth and Yankees teammate Lou Gehrig – as the Bustin' Babes and Larrupin' Lous – in the mid-1920s.

"Baseball gives the player every possible protection during the regular season," Harridge said. "The players are provided with the best of everything – food, hotels, railroads and playing fields. And then, as soon as the season ends, many of them immediately rush off to play exhibition games on poor fields, with poor accommodations and without proper supervision.

"Injuries are apt to result and often do. In many cases, antics of 'wildcat' promoters, whose interest naturally is not in baseball, but in their personal pocketbooks, give the game a bad name. The magnate has an undeniable property right in the player's career, which the player, by barnstorming, places in jeopardy without any compensation for the magnate."

Harridge's pleas gathered no momentum, though, and over the next 20 years baseball had what might be considered its Golden Age of barnstorming. Touring teams led by such future Hall of Famers as Dizzy Dean, Bob Feller, Satchel Paige and Jackie Robinson highlighted this era.

By the 1950s, however, barnstorming tours were falling victim to the proliferation of radio and television coverage of the game. Where once cities and towns with no major league teams were excited for these exhibition games, the novelty had now worn off thanks to advances in technology.

By then, however, history had already been written. The seeds that grew into America's National Pastime had been sewn – in part – by the men and women who took baseball all around North America for almost a century.

Their story lives on as long as baseball continues to flourish.

TONI STONE, CONNIE MORGAN AND MAMIE JOHNSON BLAZED A TRAIL FOR WOMEN IN THE NEGRO LEAGUES

BY JOHN ROSENGREN

After Jackie Robinson led the exodus of talent out of the Negro Leagues and into the majors – and the fans followed – Syd Pollack, owner of the Indianapolis Clowns, was desperate to resuscitate interest in his team.

The Negro National League had folded in 1948, and by 1953 the Clowns were one of only four teams left in the Negro American League. Pollack, whose promotional hijinks had earned the Clowns a designation as "the Harlem Globetrotters of baseball," had tried dressing King Tut in a tuxedo and employing a daffy dwarf as sideline entertainers.

But in the '50s, Pollack signed three women who had the talent to be more than simply gate attractions.

The first was Toni Stone, whom Pollack signed in 1953. Stone had played hardball with boys since she was a girl in St. Paul, Minn. By 16, she was pitching for a semipro team, the Twin Cities Colored Giants. She played with two more semipro teams, the San Francisco Sea Lions and the New Orleans Creoles, before agreeing to play second base for the Clowns and become the first woman to play in the Negro American League.

The fans did turn out, and some rooted for Stone's success, but in the convention-bound '50s, not all of them were ready to embrace the idea of a woman playing on a men's team. They yelled at her from the stands: "Why don't you go home and fix your husband some biscuits?" Her husband, Aurelious Alberga, whom she had married in 1950, might have preferred that, but Stone was determined to prove herself. Pollack wanted her to wear a skirt like the players in the All-American Girls Professional League. Stone said no.

Much as Jackie Robinson's white teammates in Brooklyn weren't all ready to have a different colored teammate, not all of Stone's Indianapolis teammates accepted her as an equal. Some made passes at her, which she quickly rebuffed. Others tried to sabotage her play by throwing the ball to her at second base in such a way that it positioned her in the path of incoming spikes.

Playing on a men's team presented challenges off the field as well. Stone had to change in the room used by the umpires. On road trips, she often stayed at brothels, a practice that began when the proprietor of the hotel where the team stayed figured she must be a prostitute – when he saw her get off the bus with 28 men – and gave her directions to the nearest brothel. Stone, who could identify with the brothel workers as an outsider, was welcomed by them.

Stone did not play as often as she would have liked, appearing in only about 50 of the 175

games the Clowns played in 1953. After the season, Pollack sold her contract to the Kansas City Monarchs, whom Stone played with in 1954 before retiring. During her two years in the National American League, she had a career batting average estimated to be .243, but at one point in the 1953 season she was batting .364, fourth in the league, right behind Ernie Banks. Legend has it she rapped a single off Satchel Paige, but the archives don't corroborate the story. Still, the persistence of those who believe the story – including Martha Ackerman, author of the Stone biography "Curveball" – bears testament to Stone's skills, making such a feat plausible.

Determined to draw fans in support of his team, Pollack next signed 19-year-old Connie Morgan to replace Stone. The athletic Morgan had already played five seasons with the women's North Philadelphia Honey Drippers from her hometown (batting .338 over that period) and basketball for the Rockettes. When she read an article in the newspaper about Stone playing for the Clowns, Morgan wrote Pollack to request a tryout.

Oscar Charleston, the Clowns' manager (and a Hall of Fame center fielder), had scouted Morgan and called her "one of the most sensational" female players he had ever seen. Perhaps upon his recommendation, Pollack granted Morgan's request when the Clowns played an exhibition in Baltimore against the Orioles. Impressed, he signed Morgan, who had been primarily a catcher for the Honey Drippers, to play second base.

She encountered many of the gender barriers that Stone had. The Baltimore Afro-American ran a photo of Morgan in her uniform alongside another of her wearing a white dress and gloves with the caption: "Miss Connie Morgan: The baseball player and the lady." (The previous year, Ebony had published similar photos of Stone, one in her uniform, the other in a dress: "Dressed in street clothes, Toni Stone is an attractive young lady who could be someone's secretary, but once in uniform she is all ball player.")

Yet the Afro-American also recognized Morgan's unqualified baseball ability. In an account of a May game, it described how Morgan "electrified over 6,000 fans...when she went far to her right to make a sensational stop, flipped to shortstop Bill Holder and started a lightning double play against the Birmingham Barons."

The New York Amsterdam News validated the talents and temperament of Stone, Morgan and Mamie Johnson (whom Pollack also signed in 1954) when the Clowns played the Monarchs in a doubleheader at Yankee Stadium: "The girls take a back seat to no one on the field."

Morgan played just one season in the National American League, splitting time at second base with Ray Neiland, batting third and posting about a .300 average.

While Stone broke the gender barrier all alone, Morgan had the support of a female teammate in Johnson. Some accounts have Johnson barnstorming with the team in late 1953. A pitcher with a slider, circle change, screwball and a curveball she claimed to have learned from Paige, she did not throw hard but she had good control.

They called the 5-foot-3 – or maybe 5-foot-2 – Johnson "Peanut." Story has it that in her first game pitching for the Clowns, Hank Baylis peered from the batter's box to the diminutive pitcher on the mound and called, "What makes you think you can strike a batter out? Why, you aren't any larger than a peanut?" She struck him out, and the nickname stuck.

BARNSTORMING TIMELINE

1860: Brooklyn Excelsior tour NY state

Red Stockings and Athletics tour Great Britian

1875: Blondes vs. Brunettes, first female barnstorming tour

1878: New Bedford, MA team pulls out of International League to barnstorm

1888-89: Albert Spalding takes Major Leaguers on world tour

c.1890s: Bloomer Girls teams begin touring

1913-14: New York Giants and Chicago White Sox tour the world

1915: First House of David barnstorming tours

1921: Babe Ruth and Yankees barnstorm, violating MLB rules

1927: Bustin' Babes and Larrupin' Lous tour America

1929: Kansas City Monarchs tour with portable lighting system

1931-1935: Pete Alexander pitches for and manages a House of David team

1934: Major Leaguers with Babe Ruth tour Japan

1946: Bob Feller's All-Stars tour against Satchel Paige's Negro All-Stars

1962: Willie Mays-led tour cancelled after four games

1986-present: Bi-annual Major League All-Stars vs. Japanese All-Stars in Japan

1994-1997: Colorado Silver Bullets womens team tour against men

2010: Los Angeles Dodgers go to Taiwan in goodwill tour

Good story, but newspaper accounts of her signing with the Clowns identify her already as Mamie "Peanut" Johnson. Like Morgan, she was an excellent all-around athlete born in South Carolina who reportedly was the first girl at her Long Branch High School (New Jersey) to play football, basketball and baseball. In 1953, the 18-year-old Johnson went to Washington for a tryout with the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.

She and her friend, also African American, hadn't realized that the AAGPBL remained all-white. After being ignored for 15 minutes, Johnson turned to her friend and said, "We better go. I don't think we're wanted here."

Johnson found a men's semipro team that did want her, which is where a scout for the Clowns saw her and recommended her to Pollack. The men were skeptical at first about this pint-sized pitcher, but she earned their respect with her talent. "After you prove yourself as to what you came there for, then you don't have any problem out of them, either," she said in a 2003 interview with National Public Radio.

Johnson played into 1955 with the team but left before finishing the season, saying she wanted to spend more time with her young son. By her own account, Johnson went 33-8 during her time with the Clowns, though Negro League historians question the validity of that record (the record books are incomplete on the subject).

Not disputed, though, is the fact that she was the first female pitcher in professional baseball and one of three courageous women to play in the Negro American League.



Mamie "Peanut" Johnson excelled in several sports before finding a spot as a pitcher with the Negro American League's Indianapolis Clowns. (National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum)

Though Stone, Morgan and Johnson faced resistance during their playing days, the years have been kind to their memory. Stone was inducted into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1985, and St. Paul named a city baseball field after her. Morgan was inducted into the Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame in 1995. And in a ceremonial MLB draft of living Negro League players in 2008, Johnson was selected by the Washington Nationals.

Long after they retired, these women, who challenged the way society viewed their gender, have earned the respect they deserved.

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN BASEBALL

FROM THE NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

Women have been playing baseball almost as long as men have. Their long connection with the game began in the 1860s and has continued through the efforts of individual pioneers like Amanda Clement, Jackie Mitchell, Toni Stone, Maria Pepe, and Ila Borders.

TIMELINE

1866: The first organized team of women players is formed when Vassar College, then an all-women's college, starts its first baseball team. The Vassar Resolutes' uniform will consist of ankle-length dresses made of wool. (Women of this era are expected to wear dresses at all times, even if they are participating in physical exercise.) Sadly, the team will be forced to disband in 1878 because of parents' concerns over the safety of baseball for their daughters.



1898: Lizzie Arlington became what is believed to be the first woman to play on a men's professional team, appearing for the Philadelphia Reserves, as well as the minor league Reading Coal Heavers, where she pitched one inning with two hits, one walk, and no runs. After not being allowed to appear in another game with Reading, Arlington's career came to an end.

1904: 16-year-old Amanda Clement becomes the first female ever paid to umpire a baseball game. Each summer, she will umpire about 50 games, receiving between \$15 and \$25 per game. She will become a gate attraction, with some fans coming out specifically to watch her umpire. She will leave baseball in 1910, having earned enough money to pay for her college education.

Early 1900s: At the age of 17, Alta Weiss joins a men's semi-professional team, known as the Vermillion Independents. For her debut, a crowd of over 1,200 fans comes out to watch her pitch. Weiss becomes a sensation, causing special trains to be arranged so that large groups of fans can travel to attend her games. Like Amanda Clement, she earns good money through baseball, and uses it to further her education. The money that Weiss will earn as a pitcher will enable her to attend medical school and become a doctor.

1911: Helene Britton becomes the first female owner of a major league team, assuming the presidency of the St. Louis Cardinals on March 28. After Britton's uncle Stanley Robison passes away on March 24, 1911, she is named the recipient of three-fourths of his estate, including all of the St. Louis club's stock. Britton will remain the owner of the Cardinals until 1918, when she sells the team and ballpark to Sam Breadon.

1920: The 19th amendment is added to the Constitution, finally giving women the right to vote in political elections. (It is important to remember that African-American women and other women of color are often unable to benefit from this change in the law due to racist policies.) Following the 19th amendment, America will enter a period of social and political change, with women challenging gender expectations by wearing more revealing clothes and cutting their hair short.

1931: 16-year-old Jackie Mitchell signs a contract with a men's minor league team, the Chattanooga Lookouts. Soon after, the Lookouts will stage an exhibition game against the NY Yankees, arranging for Mitchell to pitch against Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig. Mitchell will strike out both Hall of Famers. Some skeptics will claim that the event was staged, but Mitchell will maintain under her death that she simply surprised them with her tough sinkerball. One week later, Commissioner Landis will rule that Mitchell's contract is null and void, beginning a ban of women players that will last until 1993.

1935: Effa Manley and her husband Abe purchase the Brooklyn Eagles, a Negro Leagues franchise that they will soon move to Newark. Manley will run the business operations of the Eagles, managing the payroll and negotiating contracts with the players. She will work to improve conditions for players, including the securing of the best available hotel accommodations at a time when many hotels are segregated. Manley will also become an active force in the Civil Rights Movement.

1943: Chicago Cubs owner Phil Wrigley, concerned about the negative impact of World War II on baseball, forms the All-American Girls Professional Softball League.

The league will soon switch to baseball and become known as the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL). At tryouts in Chicago, 280 women attend, but only 60 will make the final cut. The players will be fitted with skirted uniforms, told to wear makeup, and required to attend charm school, all part of an effort to maintain a "ladylike" image of being feminine and proper.

Early 1950s: Denied the chance to play in the AAGPBL, <u>Black women find a place to play in the Negro Leagues</u>. Three women will play in the Negro Leagues - Toni Stone, Mamie Johnson, and Connie Morgan - ostensibly as a way to improve dwindling attendance at games.

1972: Despite improvements stemming from the Women's Liberation Movement, problems remain, including a lack of equality in Little League Baseball. A New Jersey girl, Maria Pepe, sues Little League Baseball in order to play. The Supreme Court will rule that Little League must give girls the opportunity to try out.

Out of this ruling will come another ruling, called Title IX, stating that no one will be discriminated against on the basis of gender within schools, ensuring that high schools and colleges cannot exclude females from participating in varsity sports.

1992: Camden Yards, the creation of Baltimore Orioles executive Janet Marie Smith, opens in Baltimore. Smith directed the design of the ballpark, now regarded as the pioneer of a new era of major league parks.

1994: Ila Borders becomes the first woman to pitch in a men's college baseball game. Three years later, she will <u>sign a professional contract with the St. Paul Saints</u> of the independent Northern League.

1994: Two years after the movie, A League of Their Own, becomes a sensation, professional women's baseball returns when <u>the Colorado Silver Bullets are formed.</u> It is an all-women's team managed by Hall of Fame pitcher <u>Phil Niekro</u>. Approximately 1,300 women try out for the team, but only 24 will make the final roster.

2006: Effa Manley becomes the first woman inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

2014: Mo'ne Davis of Philadelphia becomes the first girl to win a game and pitch a shutout in the history of the Little League World Series, drawing national attention for girls in amateur baseball.

2017: Claire Smith is named the winner of the prestigious BBWAA Career Excellence Award. She is the first woman to receive the honor.

2020: The San Francisco Giants hire Alyssa Nakken as an on-field coach, making her the first female to hold such a position in the history of the major leagues.

2020: The Miami Marlins hire Kim Ng as their new general manager. A longtime executive, Ng becomes the first woman to serve as a GM in the major leagues.

2021: Rachel Balkovec takes the helm as manager of the New York Yankees' affiliate in Tampa, FL. Balkovec becomes the first fulltime female manager of a minor league team affiliated with MLB.

2021: The Boston Red Sox hire Bianca Smith as a minor league coach, making her the first Black woman to serve as a coach in the history of professional baseball.

2022: Joining the Staten Island FerryHawks of the Atlantic League, Kelsie Whitmore becomes the first female player to sign a contract with a league affiliated with Major League Baseball.

2023: Olivia Pichardo becomes the first woman to appear in an NCAA Division I baseball game when she pinch-hit for Brown University.

2024: The Oakland A's announce that Jenny Cavnar will become the first woman in major league history to serve as a team's regular play-by-play broadcaster.



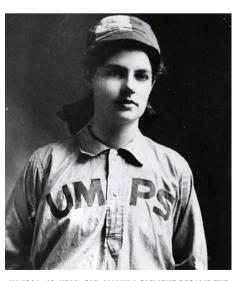
IN 1931, 17-YEAR-OLD JACKIE MITCHELL (LEFT), A PITCHER FOR THE CHATTANOOGA LOOKOUTS, STRUCK OUT BABE RUTH AND LOU GEHRIG IN AN EXHIBITION GAME AGAINST THE YANKEES. (NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM)



THE MIAMI MARLINS HIRED KIM NG AS THEIR GENERAL MANAGER IN 2020, MAKING HER THE FIRST WOMAN TO SERVE AS A GM IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES. (NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM)



IN 2006, EFFA MANLEY, LONGTIME OWNER OF THE NEWARK EAGLES, BECAME THE FIRST WOMAN INDUCTED INTO THE HALL OF FAME. (LARRY HOGAN/NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM)



IN 1904, 16-YEAR-OLD AMANDA CLEMENT BECAME THE FIRST FEMALE EVER PAID TO UMPIRE A BASEBALL GAME. (NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM)

THE NEGRO LEAGUES ARE MAJOR LEAGUES — BUT MERGING THEIR STATS HAS BEEN ANYTHING BUT SEAMLESS

BY STEPHEN J. NESBITT

On Dec. 16, 2020, Sean Gibson awoke in Pittsburgh to a few inches of freshly fallen snow and a flurry of missed calls from friends and reporters. Major League Baseball had just announced it was formally recognizing seven Negro Leagues as major leagues and adopting the statistics of the more than 3,400 players in those leagues from 1920 to 1948 into the official record.

Gibson read MLB's press release that morning in stunned silence. The desegregation of baseball's record books would mean his great-grandfather, Josh Gibson, <u>a legendary Negro Leaguer</u>, a Baseball Hall of Famer, a prolific power hitter and a Black man who died at 35 three months before Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier, would soon be rightfully listed alongside all-time MLB greats in a handful of single-season and career hitting categories.

But how soon the statistics would be incorporated was not made clear. Sean Gibson figured he'd hear an update on MLB's progress in 2021. Or in 2022.

"Now here we are in 2023," he told The Athletic earlier this spring. "I think we've been patient. We're just hoping things happen soon."

MLB's plan to integrate Negro League numbers and statistical legacies with its own remains years from completion. More than two years after its announcement, MLB is still in the initial phase of the project: data acquisition.

The league office was unable to reach an agreement with <u>Seamheads Negro Leagues</u>

<u>Database</u>, the most complete set of Negro League statistics ever compiled, to use its data. The league ended its protracted negotiation with Seamheads this spring and now intends to use Retrosheet's <u>nascent database</u> — a work in progress that Retrosheet president Tom Thress said likely won't be finished for at least five years — as the basis for its records.

The next phase would be for Elias Sports Bureau, MLB's official statistician, to verify the database and determine how to fold it into the league's official record, a process that a league spokesperson said will include input from Negro League researchers and families. That alone will be a Herculean task, one requiring the review of original documents underlying the database and myriad judgment calls regarding how to account for incomplete or conflicting information. Some of baseball's sacred numbers will be eclipsed. Records will fall. Hell will be raised. But none of that will be done before the database is, which all adds up to a lot more waiting.

An MLB spokesperson said there remains no set timeline for the completion of the project. "What we said from the beginning was, this is more about doing it correctly as part of history than doing a rush job," the spokesperson said. "That's why we went to the people (Seamheads) that had the expertise and the most knowledge on those statistics first."

The news that MLB and Seamheads are not partnering, prolonging an already lengthy project, comes as an unwelcome surprise for those hoping the finish line was in sight. "I'm shocked,"

Sean Gibson said after hearing the update. He sighed. "It's sad. I feel like Major League Baseball jumped the gun. They should have had all that worked out before they made the announcement."

In the aftermath of MLB's December 2020 announcement, some in the research community expressed concern to The Athletic that MLB and Elias were ill-prepared to handle the complexities and dilemmas of incorporating Negro League numbers, but none questioned where the data would originate. It was all but spelled out in the league's press release: Commissioner Rob Manfred specifically commended Seamheads researchers Gary Ashwill, Scott Simkus, Mike Lynch and Kevin Johnson, then John Labombarda, head of editorial at Elias, was quoted as saying, "We look forward to working with (MLB's official historian) John Thorn and the people who worked on the research and construction of the Seamheads Negro Leagues Database."

It seemed a foregone conclusion the rewriting of MLB's record books would be based on the indispensable database created over the past decade and a half by Seamheads researchers. And yet, that partnership never fully materialized.

Representatives from the league office and Seamheads met on and off over the past two-plus years, but after a meeting around Opening Day this spring failed to result in a deal, MLB elected to pursue Retrosheet as an alternative. According to sources familiar with the negotiations, the sticking point for Seamheads was not compensation but rather concerns about control of the data, how it would be used and who would have a say in its implementation.

An MLB spokesperson declined to divulge details of the discussions. Seamheads researchers turned down multiple interview requests for this story.

Because Retrosheet is a nonprofit that makes its historical play-by-play accounts publicly available and free of charge, that route features fewer roadblocks for MLB — the trade-off being that Retrosheet's database is still being built. MLB does not have (or need) a formal agreement in place with Retrosheet regarding its Negro Leagues data, but according to sources familiar with their conversations, their partnership is expected to include a consulting agreement.

MLB contends it did not act prematurely in revealing its plans to integrate Negro League stats, as it was one part of a larger announcement made as the culmination of the league's 2020 centennial celebration of the founding of the Negro National League.

In the announcement, MLB also stated it was "correcting a longtime oversight in the game's history" by elevating the Negro Leagues to major league status, and admitting error on the part of the 1969 Special Committee on Baseball Records, which excluded Negro leagues from consideration when it identified six other "major leagues" since 1876. In the past two years, as negotiations with Seamheads held up the statistics project, MLB made other efforts to promote the legacies of Negro League players, such as the Webby Award-winning series "Undeniable" — MLB's first-ever animated show — and a Negro Leagues storylines mode on MLB The Show.

"The 2020 recognition of the Negro Leagues from 1920-1948 as Major Leagues has provided a greater platform for the stories of 3,400 players to be told to a new generation of fans," MLB said in a statement to The Athletic last week. "The inclusion of their records into Major League history speaks to their triumph, in their own day and now. The statistics will point fans to underlying lessons that the Negro Leagues have taught to Baseball and to America."

There was from the outset of MLB's Negro Leagues statistics efforts a mismatch between internal and external expectations. Initially, those involved with the project expected it would be completed in a matter of years, not months, even if a deal with Seamheads came together quickly. MLB has historically been thorough and systematic with incorporating changes to the record. (It took 70 years for Hack Wilson to get <a href="https://linear.org/historical-normal-network

Larry Lester, a renowned researcher and a co-founder of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, was specifically mentioned in MLB's December 2020 announcement but has not been involved in its Negro League efforts. He wondered why he was hearing this update from a reporter, not from the league. Lester suggested MLB be more transparent about its process by giving quarterly reports on its progress — or lack thereof — to assure the public the incorporation of Negro Leagues statistics is still a priority. "When I go to a store and see it's crowded," he said, "it makes me feel good when the person behind the counter says, 'We will be right with you.' I know it's not true, but it makes me feel better that you recognize me coming through the door."

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When Dave Smith started Retrosheet in 1989, its founding mission was both basic and impossibly lofty: to uncover playby-play data for every pre-1984 Major League game, computerize those accounts and provide them to the public for free. For the past 34 years, hundreds of Retrosheet volunteers have helped the non-profit inch closer to that goal, scouring scorebooks and newspaper microfilm to piece together baseball history one play at a time.



NEGRO LEAGUE STARS OSCAR CHARLESTON, JOSH GIBSON, TED PAGE AND JUDY JOHNSON IN SAN FRANCISCO. (CLARENCE GATSON / GADO / GETTY IMAGES)

"This seems insurmountable,"

Smith would say to researchers lost in the weeds of early 1900s American and National League seasons, "but it's a finite number of games."

Then that number grew in 2020. It's still technically finite, but it's much more difficult to nail down.

"With the AL and NL, we know what that number is. We can calculate it. We know the schedule of the 1885 Boston Beaneaters," said Thress, who succeeded Smith as Retrosheet president last year. "The problem is, I have no idea how many games the 1936 Kansas City Monarchs played."

With Retrosheet's Negro Leagues database, which Thress began in the summer of 2020, he hoped to provide what did not already exist publicly: game-level stats. For as comprehensive as the Seamheads database is, the data is displayed in season and career totals. "When they say Josh Gibson hit 18 home runs in 51 games in 1936, I don't know what those 51 games are," Thress said. Ashwill told The Athletic in 2021 that Seamheads planned to eventually display day-by-day numbers. That has yet to happen. That means others, like Thress, can't simply look through Seamheads game logs to recreate season schedules. He had to start from square one.

It quickly became clear to Thress that he wouldn't be able to achieve Retrosheet's gold standard: the full play-by-play rundown. In many cases, it simply did not exist. Some box scores were available, but other times he'd find a line score with a sentence of summary. "In some cases, we don't even have a line score," he said. "There's a two-sentence blurb that the Memphis Red Sox beat the Birmingham Black Barons last night, 3-2. That's all you know. The challenge there is, how do we present this data? Because it doesn't fit in Retrosheet's baseline format."

The answer was to modify Retrosheet's standard. Now, the requirements for a game to be added to the site's <u>Negro Leagues database</u> are that it be clear when a game was played, where it was played and its final score. "If that's all you know, that's all you know," Thress said, "and we want to be able to present that." For the 1948 season, Retrosheet found 542 games. It has box scores for 242; the others give as much information as possible.

It is agonizingly slow work, but rewarding. Researchers liken unearthing a box score lost to time to striking gold. Once, while at a speaking engagement in Excelsior Springs, Mo., author Phil Dixon mentioned he couldn't find a certain 1920s Kansas City Monarchs game in any newspaper in the state archives. An audience member told him bound editions of the local newspaper were kept in the vault at a bank in town. Dixon descended into the basement of the bank and emerged a short time later with photos of the lost Monarchs box score on his phone.

While working on the 1943 Negro American League season, Thress saw a reference in the Chicago Defender to a Chicago American Giants game against the Birmingham Black Barons in Kewanee, Ill. "I lived in Chicago for 29 years," Thress said. "I had never heard of Kewanee." None of the three newspaper archives he's subscribed to have access to the Kewanee Star Courier. Then he discovered it was searchable through the town library's site. "And damned if I didn't find a box score for that game," Thress said. "That was the most amazing thing."

Currently, the team working on Retrosheet's Negro League database comprises Thress and four volunteers. Thress builds season schedules. Volunteers fill out a game file for each contest and return it to Thress. More volunteers might help, Thress said, but the bottleneck is at his desk. This isn't the only thing he's working on. On a recent Saturday, Thress was proofing the 1913 AL/NL season when he paused to discuss the Negro Leagues project with a reporter.

Retrosheet researchers typically work in reverse. So, in 2020, Thress started with the 1948 Negro National League season. Now he's working on 1939. (The 1943-48 seasons are already available on Retrosheet's site.) By that math, Thress said, it'll take five years to complete the project. "I'd love for it to be quicker," he said. "I fear it's more likely to be longer. But I don't know."

While MLB remains years away from incorporating Negro League statistics into its official record, the visibility of those numbers has already increased exponentially. Baseball Reference, the go-to source for major league statistics, started licensing Seamheads' extensive Negro Leagues database in June 2021. While that agreement doesn't include game-level data — box scores and individual game logs that MLB and Elias will require for their record-keeping — Baseball Reference now displays season and career totals for Negro Leaguers and includes them among its leaderboards. So instead of Barry Bonds joining Babe Ruth and Ted Williams among the career leaders in OPS+, it's Oscar Charleston in third.

FanGraphs <u>followed suit</u> in February 2023, updating its statistical database with Negro Leagues data licensed from Seamheads. David Appelman, founder and owner of FanGraphs, acknowledged that his site generally plays second fiddle to Baseball Reference regarding historical data, but he felt it was important for Negro League statistics to appear on both sites and be easily accessible in the places people are most often perusing statistics. "At this point, if you don't have those Negro Leagues as part of your major league data, there's an incompleteness to it," Appelman said.

Still, some editorial judgment calls, like the ones MLB and Elias eventually will have to make, are required. For instance, Josh Gibson's OPS+ is higher than Ruth, Williams or Charleston, but he is not listed among Baseball Reference's career leaders because he does not meet the 3,000 plate appearance threshold for career rate stats. However, that could change if seasons in which storied clubs competed as independents — such as his time with the Homestead Grays and Pittsburgh Crawfords from 1930 to 1934 — come to be counted as major league seasons. Sean Forman, Baseball Reference's founder, said the site rewrote portions of its code base to account for leagues of different lengths and cases of incomplete stats. Appelman said FanGraphs treated the data as it would any historical major league data, though it did make a slight modification to its Wins Above Replacement formula to account for certain data gaps.

Forman spoke recently to students at University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., about the massive infrastructure installed for generations around chronicling the stories and stats of the American and National Leagues. Newspapers documented every game. The well-funded league offices tracked stats and saved them in bound volumes. The Negro Leagues and Black baseball didn't have the same resources, Forman said, and so when presenting their scattered stats now, "you have to accept that you're making up for some of that lack of investment."

There have long been spirited debates between researchers about which stats to use when comparing Negro League and MLB players. Negro Leaguers sometimes played 100 fewer league games in a season than their MLB counterparts, then participated in unofficial barnstorming contests, All-Star games and series against White teams. Lester prefers to focus on rate stats. He'd compare the strikeouts per nine innings of Satchel Paige versus Nolan Ryan and Roger Clemens. He'd look at Josh Gibson's home runs per at-bats and see he landed somewhere between Bonds and Hank Aaron. "Once people start looking at these numbers and over-analyzing them, which they always do, they'll find there's really no difference," Lester said.

"My small fear is that the Negro League stats will be absorbed into the major league history and disappear like a Walmart coming to a town and all the mom-and-pop stores disappear," he said. "We want to immerse those stats with Major League stats but also keep their independence. That's not easy to do. You want inclusion, but you want exclusivity at the same time."

At the time of MLB's announcement, the Seamheads database included figures from 73 percent of known Negro League games played between 1920 and 1948. They continue to uncover more games and identify errors. Updates are pushed out to Baseball Reference and FanGraphs and, in turn, the unofficial leaderboards reflect the changes.

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Dixon, the researcher who found Monarchs box scores in a bank vault, worries the public will reject Negro Leagues numbers once they see that the small samples of games. He has written numerous Negro Leagues books and knows there are numerous games either not accounted for in the Seamheads database or not considered because they weren't league games. "Hopefully people accept the statistics," he said, "but it'll never be complete."

For Sean Gibson, who runs the <u>Josh Gibson Foundation</u> and is a member of the <u>Negro League Family Alliance</u>, news of MLB's lack of progress toward incorporating Negro League statistics stings on a number of levels. He had hoped that <u>Ron "Schoolboy" Teasley</u>, who at 95 is one of the few surviving players who played in the Negro Leagues from 1920 to 1948, would live to see his name and numbers in MLB's official record. Now the likelihood of that is waning.

Sean Gibson worked with Forman on Baseball Reference's Negro Leagues launch, and he appreciates that awareness of Negro League players and teams is spreading. But for as much as it pleases him to see his great-grandfather's stats on the Seamheads, Baseball Reference and FanGraphs sites, he's anxiously awaiting another. "Nothing is bigger than Major League Baseball," he said. "You can't get no bigger."

