

Jackie Robinson



First African American in Major League Baseball
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Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born in Cairo, Illinois on January 31, 1919. He was the son of Georgia sharecropper Jerry Robinson and his wife Mallie. Jackie's family moved to Pasadena, California in 1921 where he attended John Muir Technical High School and Pasadena Junior College. Jackie then attended the University of California at Los Angeles, (UCLA) where he starred on the track, basketball, football, and baseball teams.

Jackie enlisted in the Army during World War II and served as a moral officer. He was discharged in 1945, having achieved the rank of 1st Lieutenant. During his Army enlistment there was an incident in which a camp bus driver told Jackie to move to the rear of the bus. Jackie refused and the driver complained to the authorities. Jackie received a court-martial but was acquitted.

He began his professional baseball career in 1945 with the Kansas City Monarchs of the old Negro League. Jackie, along with three other black baseball players also tried out that year with the Red Sox at Fenway Park but was rejected.

In 1946 Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers organization signed Robinson to a minor league contract and placed him with the Montreal Royals of the International League where he won the leagues batting title.

Jackie broke the color line in Major League Baseball when he became a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. He had to endure many racial insults and slurs during those first years and the St. Louis Cardinals actually threatened to go on strike and not play against the Dodgers, if Jackie was allowed to play.

He was voted Rookie of the Year in 1947 and in 1949 he won the National League batting title with a .342 batting average and led the league with 37 stolen bases. He was also voted the leagues MVP.

During his career Robinson, played outfield and all three bases. He was selected on six National League All Star teams between 1949 and 1954. His lifetime batting average was .311 and he had 734 RBIs. He was a major factor in the Dodgers winning six National League Pennants. He was elected to Baseball's Hall of Fame in 1962.

Jackie was traded to the New York Giants in 1956, but retired prior to the season and went on to become a leader in the business world and in Civil Rights. Shortly before his death he wrote an autobiography entitled "I Never Had it So Good."

Jackie Robinson died on October 24, 1972 in Stamford, Connecticut.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana