



HONORING JACKIE ROBINSON'S LEGACY



Courage & Intelligence

Jack Roosevelt Robinson, grandson of a former slave, was born to a family of farmers in Cairo, Georgia in 1919. Robinson was the youngest of five born to Jerry & Mallie Robinson. Originally making only twelve dollars a month, Robinson's father was able to negotiate with the land owner for a sharecropping setup. Sharecropping is a practice where a landowner allows someone to live on and farm the land they owned in exchange for a share of the crops produced. While this improved their living situation, Jerry Robinson was not happy. One day when Robinson was still a young child, his father left the home and just did not come back. Running the farm as a single mother of five quickly became unsustainable for Mallie, who would decide with her sister to move to California.

When she arrived Mallie only had three dollars to her name. While living in the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena was a better environment for the five kids, it was still very difficult for young Jackie. Finances being tight, food was served sparingly in the repurposed post-office on Pepper Street that the Robinson's called their home. At a young age Jackie felt compelled to take up small jobs such as mowing lawns and delivering papers to earn extra scratch to support his family. It was a struggle for Jackie to find many opportunities in his mostly white neighborhood. Most areas in California had no laws demanding segregation like what were seen in the South during the time period, but many places of business still chose to have segregation policies. Coffee shops that African-Americans worked at were not allowed to be patronized by them during off-hours, while the local swimming pool was only open to black people every Tuesday. At the movies, African-Americans were made to sit up in 'nose- bleed' balcony seats, far away from white patrons. One place where segregation and skin color did not seem to matter was the local ball field, and that is where Jackie Robinson first cultivated his passion for athletics.



Photo of the front yard of Jackie Robinson's home on Pepper Street

Everyday after school he'd rush to play ball with the other neighborhood kids. In spite of this one refuge, everywhere else in life, Jackie and his other black and immigrant friends felt the pressure of being so thoroughly othered by his community. Before long he and his friends formed what was known as the 'Pepper Street Gang'.

They'd cause mischief around town; stealing small items like produce from stands and sneaking into movie theater matinees. One really clever venture saw them hiding in the rough of the local golf course to steal balls that they would later take down to the same club to sell back to them. It wasn't long before Robinson had several run-ins with law enforcement.

Carl Anderson was a local African-American auto mechanic who had been keeping an eye on the kids to keep them from getting into too much trouble. One day he took the young Jackie aside and told him about how he was hurting his mother with his actions and potentially putting his future in danger. "It doesn't take guts to follow the crowd," Jackie would later recall the man saying. 'Courage and intelligence lie in willing to be different.' These words really stuck with Jackie and he re-dedicated himself to academics. By the age of twelve he was attending Washington Junior High where he began throwing everything into athletics. It was around this time that family and friends would remark on what a natural athlete he was, seeming to excel at any sport or physical contest. Urban legend claimed that the first time he played Ping-Pong he won a citywide championship!



An Athlete for All Seasons

While primarily known for baseball, Jackie Robinson achieved accolades in many forms of athleticism.

- Jackie Robinson was the first athlete in UCLA's history to win varsity letters in baseball, basketball, football, and track.
- Robinson was one of the four African American players on the Bruins' football team in 1939. Robinson finished the season with 12.2 yards on 42 carry attempts. This still is the school football record for highest rushing yards per carry in a season.
- At the 1940 NCAA championship, Robinson won the long jump challenge with a record of 24ft and 10 inches.
- Robinson played semi-professionally on an integrated football team in Hawaii known as the Honolulu Bears during the 1941 season.

A Military Career Cut Short

Jackie Robinson was accepted into Pasadena Junior college right out of high school in 1937. There were only seventy African-American candidates enrolled out of four thousand. The college itself was very progressive for the time with relatively lax segregation policies, though some were still present. During his time there he only cultivated more of his sports skill, beginning to attract national attention for his athleticism. He left junior college mid year and was one of the most hotly sought after candidates for collegiate sports in the country. Jackie's brother Frank urged him to join the University of California at Los Angeles. The same year Jackie began taking classes at UCLA, 1939, Frank was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident. Frank was the sibling Jackie was closest with and Frank was his main column of emotional support in regards to his athletic ambitions, The pain of losing that column demanded an outlet, so he poured more of himself into sports and was able to achieve major success in several different fields. His pain was diffused further with the meeting of his future wife, Rachel Isum, also a UCLA student within the school's nursing program. After two years into UCLA, Jackie was no longer eligible for football or basketball per the university's rules. He was still qualified for the baseball team, but was nonplussed by the idea; at the time Jackie Robinson considered baseball the sport he was weakest at, believe it or not. "I was convinced that no amount of education would help a black man get a job," Robinson had said in regards to his career prospects post education, disillusioned by segregation in America.

He took many different jobs; he worked as an athletics director at the National Youth Administration (a vocational training and placement) campus for disadvantaged youth. Having achieved notoriety for his college sports career, Jackie was offered a spot on the Honolulu Bears semi-pro football team for \$100 a day. To supplement his income he worked during the day as a construction worker at Pearl Harbor. An ankle injury forced his attendance in the football games to dip and so too did his enthusiasm. December 5th, 1941, Jackie shipped back home on the transport ship *Lurline* just three days before the Japanese would bomb his former work place. The attack on Pearl Harbor precipitated the United States entering World War II, and along with that would come the draft. Jackie Robinson was selected and subsequently stationed in Fort Riley, Kansas where he was assigned to a cavalry regiment. Despite acquitting himself well in terms of character reviews, marksmanship, and caring for the horses, Jackie felt his applications for the Officer program were repeatedly ignored. Around this time, Jackie befriended nationally famous African-American Boxer, Joe Louis. Louis had some friends in Washington DC and leveraged them to get Robinson and several of his companions enrolled in the officer program. Before completing basic training Jackie had been promoted to Second Lieutenant.

His career wouldn't last long however. Shortly after his time in Kansas he was transferred to Fort Hood, Texas, soon to be shipped out overseas. Texas was still deeply segregated, by law, including stipulations on where a person of color could sit on the bus. One day Robinson chose to sit with a friend in the middle of the bus he was taking on the military base. Milton N. Reneger, the white bus driver, ordered him to sit in the back. A missive for DC had established that on army posts there was to be no segregation and so Jackie refused to move. After a heated verbal argument, Milton seemed to relent but upon arriving at their location he called over the Military Police and Jackie was arrested.

When Jackie confronted the investigating duty officer about his racially motivated line of questioning, the duty officer recommended he be court-martialed. Robinson's Unit commander refused to authorize charges and so Jackie was transferred to a regiment that would. He was charged with multiple offenses, the chief ones being insubordination and public drunkenness, despite the fact that Jackie Robinson did not drink.

At this time Jackie Robinson had garnered national attention for his athletic endeavors more than once, so when fellow African-American Officers wrote to newspapers telling people of the injustice Jackie was being subjected to, the charges were summarily dropped. The length of the trial interfered with his deployment. While his comrades in his Unit were facing the Germans on Omaha Beach, Jackie was trapped in legal proceedings. In November of 1944 Jackie Robinson was honorably discharged from the military and so was in need of a new career.



Playing for the Monarchs

During Jackie's discharge process he at one point found himself playing catch with a fellow black soldier by the name of Ted Alexander. Ted suggested that baseball might be a good career option and suggested the 'Negro Leagues'. While extremely competitive, the Negro League teams were not given the same equitable treatment as the Major Leagues. They did not get to play in stadiums, but rather sandlots and open fields or empty properties. They played mostly exhibition games throughout the South and were turned away from many restaurants and inns, being forced to sleep in their travel bus or else on the benches of rail stations.

Style of play differed from the Major Leagues as well. Speed was far more heavily emphasized within the Negro Leagues, leading to very fast paced games where inside-the-park homeruns weren't unusual and neither was a runner advancing from first to third base off of bunts. Jackie Robinson began his professional baseball career with the Kansas City Monarchs, one of the more prestigious of the Negro League teams, for a salary of \$400 a month. Despite not having taken baseball seriously in five years and believing baseball was the sport he was weakest at, in the first season he led the team with a .345 batting average. Despite succeeding above and beyond within the Monarchs, Jackie soon began to tire of the amount of travel and crowded work schedule, sometimes playing up to four games in a day.

What made things worse was the constant hostility and discrimination they face on the road for being African-American ball players.

One anecdote sees Robinson and his team stopping for gas in Oklahoma. For twenty years the team had been filling up at this specific station along their route. Jackie went to use the bathroom only to be greeted by a sign that said 'White Men Only'. The gas station owner demanded to know what he was doing, being told he wasn't allowed to go inside. "Take the hose out of the tank", Robinson had said. Jackie made it clear to the owner that they would not be buying any gas at an establishment where people of his skin color were barred from using the restrooms. The owner, confronted with losing a long time source of revenue relented and allowed them full use of the facilities. From then on the Monarchs never got gas from a station that refused people of color to use the restrooms.

While Jackie Robinson was making a name for himself, on the other side of the country Brooklyn Dodgers general manager, Wesley Branch Rickey, was making some big moves. Branch Rickey had his eye on ending segregation in baseball, an ambition that he held to for over thirty years.

One of his talent scouts took note of Robinson's ability and approached him, asking if he would be interested in a meeting back in Brooklyn. Robinson and Rickey were both eager to sign a contract, but Rickey wanted to keep it confidential, telling Robinson to only tell his mother and Rachel Isum, now his fiancé. Rickey wanted to sign on more black players to hopefully avoid any single player being targeted and also he wanted to wait until the closing of the football season so more people would pay attention to the story. When he was formally introduced as the next signee for the Montreal Royals (draft team for the Dodgers) at a press conference in October of 1945, reactions were polarized. J.B. Martin, president of the Negro League congratulated Robinson and spoke on how people of color across America would 'always remember this day and date. Robinson was 28 years old at the time.



Robinson starred as himself in his own biopic titled 'The Jackie Robinson Story'.

An All-Star Legacy

During his relatively short career with the Dodger's, Jackie Robinson achieved a staggering amount of accolades

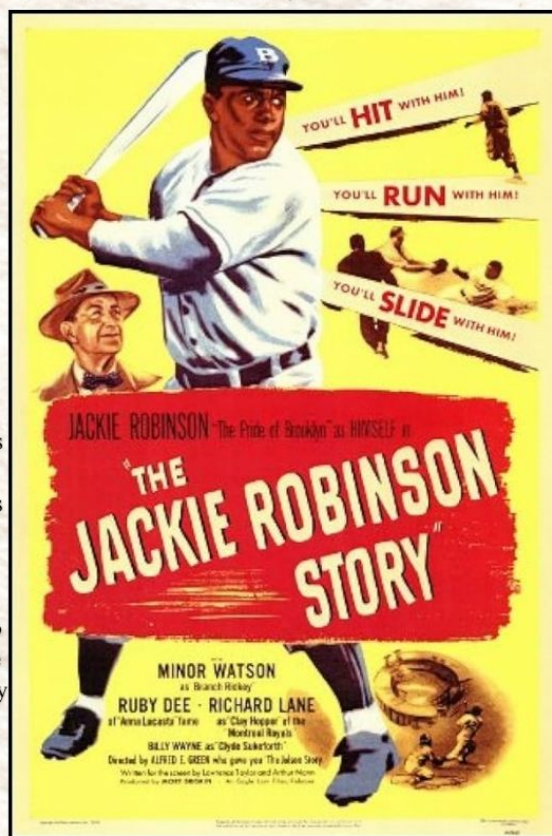
- MLB Rookie of the Year (1946)
- National League MVP (1949)
- National League Batting Champion (1949)
- 2x National League Stolen Base Leader (1947-1949)
- 6x All-Star (1949-1955)
- World Series Champion (1955)
- Baseball Hall of Fame (1962, 77.5% of first ballot)

Career Batting Average: .313
Home runs: 141
Runs batted in: 761

Jackie Robinson's jersey number, 42, has since been retired across all MLB teams.



Jackie Robinson's jersey, on display at the National Museum of African American Heritage and Culture, Washington DC



During his time in baseball Jackie Robinson was a trailblazer for African-American's in sport. Not only that, but Jackie Robinson helped show people African-Americans performing at the highest levels of popular culture, whether over the radio, in the pages of print, and even in Hollywood. Robinson succumbed to the complications of diabetes and heart disease, passing away in 1972. However his remarkable legacy lives on, influencing and shaping generations, standing as a testament to overcoming adversity.

"I speak to you only as an American who happens to be an American Negro and one who is proud of that heritage. We ask for nothing special. We ask only that we be permitted to compete on an even basis, and if we are not worthy, then the competition shall, per se, eliminate us."

-Jackie Robinson



On April 18th, 1946 twenty-five thousand people attended Robinson's debut game against the New York Giants. In the first inning, Robinson hit the ball out of the park for a three-run home run. The Dodgers walked away with a 14-1 win over the Giants in their first game. Robinson would be the first Royal to win the league batting title with an average of .349. By the end of the season the question on everyone's mind was just when the Dodgers would officially sign him.

Into the Major Leagues

Robinson would head down to Cuba for Spring Training with the Dodgers in 1947. Players on the team could see which way the wind was blowing and so some of the Dodgers organized a petition wherein they would refuse to play if Robinson was signed. Robinson did not balk and in seven exhibition games between the Royals and Dodgers he batted a staggering .625 and stole seven bases. Leo Durocher, manager of Spring Training, was outraged when he heard of the petition. In a team meeting he said, "I'm the manager and I'm paid to win and I'd pay an elephant if he could win for me and this fellow Robinson is no elephant... he's only the first, boys! The first!"

By the following April it was made official. He showed up at the Dodgers clubhouse and donned his uniform, embroidered with the now iconic 42. He would receive the standard Major League salary of \$5,000 a year. The Major Leagues would not receive him warmly as he was subjected to jeers and racial slurs from hundreds of fans in the bleachers. He was also the target of rough physical play by his opponents. One time he was subjected to a cleat that caused a seven inch gash in his leg. Notably, the St. Louis Cardinals threatened to strike if Robinson was allowed to play and further threatened to spread that strike throughout the league. The commissioner of Baseball at the time, Happy Chandler was not very happy. He threatened to suspend any striking players without pay. "I do not care if half the league strikes," he said. "Those who do it will encounter quick retribution. All will be suspended and I don't care if it wrecks the National League for five years. This is the United States of America and one citizen has as much right to play as another."

In the face of adversity, Robinson was not without allies. He gradually began to win over the the press, many articles written in support of his integration within the MLB. Dodger's team mate Pee Wee Reese publicly said, "You can hate a man for many reasons. Color is not one of them." Reese was one of the first of his teammates to offer him words of reassurance or encouragement. Over time, the more abuse Robinson received the more his own team would rally behind him in turn, uniting the 30 men. Dodgers fans and detractors could not argue with results. By the end of the season he had achieved the 1947 Rookie of the Year Award, he was even featured on the cover of TIME magazine. Jackie Robinson would help take the Dodgers to six World Series. He helped his team to win the 1955 World Series against the Yankees.