

*Department of Humanities, Northumbria University*

**Honours Dissertation**

**‘In no other business in America is the color line so  
finely drawn as in baseball’:**

**An analysis of black baseball’s failed attempts at  
achieving Major League professionalism, 1887-1939**

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## List of Abbreviations

AA	American Association
EL	Eastern League
IL	International League
ML	Major League
MLs	Major Leagues
NL	National League
NNL	Negro National League

# Introduction

Segregation in American baseball originated from pre-Civil war beliefs about ethnicity and rights, which subsequently carried over to the post-war era.<sup>1</sup> Although Constitutional amendments 13 and 14 brought an end to slavery and guaranteed black people civil rights respectively, the amendments did little to alter the perception held by the majority of white people- that they were superior to blacks.<sup>2</sup> By the late 1880s, racial laws across the country were established by white people to define what black people could and could not do in society.<sup>3</sup> By this point however, baseball had already witnessed instances of racial laws and prejudices that stopped black players from joining certain leagues.

On October 16, 1867, the Pennsylvania State Convention of Baseball denied the all-black Pythian Base Ball Club (Philadelphia) access to the minor National Association of Baseball Players league.<sup>4</sup> The League committee denied the team entry, as they believed that only white players conducted themselves professionally and therefore were not willing to accept any club that had a black player in it.<sup>5</sup> The decision to exclude black players from the League, according to historian Ashley E. Gurevitz, reflected the racial prejudices towards black people that were present following the end of the Civil War.<sup>6</sup> This instance of exclusion based on professionalism subsequently set an example for Major League (ML) teams to follow, to stop black players from joining their leagues.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Merl F. Kleinknecht, 'The Negro Leagues: A Brief History' in Dick Clark and Larry Lester (eds.) *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: The Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1963), pp.19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Theresa R. Richardson and Erwin V. Johnningmeier, *Race, Ethnicity, and Education: What is Taught in School* (Connecticut: Information Age Publishing), p.182.

<sup>4</sup> Rick Swaine, *The Integration of Major League Baseball: A Team by Team History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), p.9.

<sup>5</sup> 'National Association of Base Ball Players Committee', *Ball Player's Chronicle*, December 19, 1867.

<sup>6</sup> Ashley E. Gurevitz, 'Breaking Black Baseball's Color Line', *Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, (2015), p.89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Baseball's first ML, the National League (NL), formed in 1876. Made up of eight all-white teams, there was no formal rule that excluded black players from joining the NL.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, teams were reluctant to incorporate black players into their roster. Only one black player, William E. White, played in the NL before the colour line was officially broken in 1947. White passed as being white and played one game for the Providence Grays (Rhode Island) before people realised his real ethnicity – which resulted in him being released from the team.<sup>9</sup> Established in 1882, baseball's second ML was the American Association (AA). Like the NL, the AA similarly did not have a formal rule that excluded black players from entering it. Teams, again, were reluctant to incorporate black players into their squads, and only two black players, Moses 'Fleetwood' Walker and Weldy Walker, played in the AA in 1884.<sup>10</sup> Although black players played in both leagues, they were exceptions to the general rule of exclusion black players faced at the highest level of the sport.

According to historians Gerald R. Gems et al, the goal for black baseball was to be integrated into the MLs, as it would have been a 'symbolic gesture of true freedom' that showed the advancement of black people more generally in America since slavery.<sup>11</sup> Although no official rule existed that barred black people from joining the MLs, a general consensus existed amongst team owners, based on racial prejudices, which reasoned that black players should not be part of the MLs.<sup>12</sup> The idea of racial superiority meant ML team owners argued that black players were not talented enough to join the MLs.<sup>13</sup> As well as this, instances of conflict during minor-league interracial International League (IL) games allowed ML team owners to argue that black players could not control their emotions and were violent players.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, this made ML team owners believe that black players were not professional enough to join the MLs as they lacked 'refinement

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Moffi and Jonathan Kronstadt, *Crossing the Line: Black Major Leaguers, 1947-1959* (Nebraska: Bison Books, 2006), p.1.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Clipper*, June 28, 1879, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Steven A. Riess 'Race & Ethnicity in American Baseball, 1900-1919' in Paul J. Zingg (ed.), *The Sporting Image: Readings in American Sport History* (Boston: University Press of America, 1988), p.251.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald R. Gems et al., *Sports in American History: From Colonisation to Globalisation* (Illinois: Human Kinetics, 2008), p.237.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie A. Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues, 1869- 1960* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), p.4.

<sup>13</sup> Alan F. Corcos, *The Myth of Human Races* (Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1997), p.49.

<sup>14</sup> 'The Colored Ball Players Disgraceful', *Toronto World*, May 27, 1887.

and discipline'.<sup>15</sup> This dissertation argues that black baseball during the period 1887-1939, was not able to change the stance of ML team owners as black baseball continually harmed the validity of their own professionalism.

The period 1887–1939 was chosen for this research as it covers three key periods in black baseball. The first period, 1887–1921, was when the majority of interracial barnstorming games (also known as exhibition games) occurred. Lawrence D. Hogan's *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball*, argues that black players proved they were as talented, if not more so, than white players as they managed to beat white teams the majority of times during interracial exhibition games.<sup>16</sup> Although black teams did win the majority of interracial games against white competition, Hogan fails to acknowledge that barnstorming was negative in proving that black baseball was professional enough to be integrated into the MLs. Chapter one of this dissertation argues, through the use of newspaper reports of exhibition games, that black players were not always able to display their talents during games, as players had to contend with biased officiating. Newspaper reports are also used to argue that both black players and black fans were violent during these barnstorming games. These instances provided evidence for ML team owners to argue that black players that barnstormed were not professional enough to join the MLs.

The second significant period in black baseball was the establishment of the Negro National League (NNL). Historian Robert C. Cottrell argues that the NNL was positive, as it established a professional league which allowed black players to display their talents.<sup>17</sup> However, not all historians agree that the NNL was able to improve black baseball's image of professionalism. Frank Foster's *The Forgotten League: A History of Negro League Baseball* argues that the NNL was hindered by the lack

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<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Burk, *Much More Than A Game: Players, Owners, & American Baseball since 1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p.61.

<sup>16</sup> Lawrence D. Hogan, *Shades of Glory: The Negro Leagues and the Story of African-American Baseball* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Cottrell, *The Best Pitcher in Baseball: The Life of Rube Foster, Negro League Giant* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p.4.

of a formalised league schedule, which made it appear unorganised and sporadic.<sup>18</sup> Although chapter two of this dissertation agrees that black baseball was not able to display its professionalism through the NNL, it develops its argument from areas that historians have overlooked. This chapter argues that the NNL was not viewed as professional as black teams did not have their own stadiums, and relied upon white teams to rent their stadiums out to them. As well as this, the NNL was not able to get the black press to effectively promote the League when it was launched. This meant League players did not receive adequate publicity that highlighted their high levels of talent.

The final significant period in black baseball, before integration, occurred during the 1930s, when some black teams performed comedy routines during their games. Bill Kirwin represents the general consensus amongst historians, by arguing that clown teams ‘weakened attempts by serious black teams to be regarded as serious competition’ as they made black baseball appear to be a joke.<sup>19</sup> Alan T. Powers furthers this analysis, and argues that the acts clown teams engaged in were negative as they involved racial stereotypes that were reminiscent of those used during blackface minstrel shows.<sup>20</sup> Although Powers acknowledges that the in-game clown acts were reminiscent of minstrel shows, other elements to clown teams were also evocative of minstrel performers. Chapter three argues that the location the clown teams were based, the team name, and appearance were also characteristic of minstrel shows. Quotes by black team owners and by the black media are utilised to argue that members of the black community saw black clown teams as being detrimental to black baseball’s professionalism. Despite these teams perpetuating negative black stereotypes, they continued to operate, as they made a lot of money. This allowed ML team owners to argue that black baseball did not take itself seriously, and teams, like during barnstorming, chased money.

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<sup>18</sup> Frank Foster, *The Forgotten League: A History of Negro League Baseball* (Kentucky: BookCaps, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Bill Kirwin, ‘Introduction’ in Bill Kirwin (ed.), *Out of the Shadows: African American Baseball from the Cuban Giants to Jackie Robinson* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p.viii.

<sup>20</sup> Alan T. Powers, *The Business of Baseball* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2003), p.94.

# Chapter 1

## 'It is time to call a halt in baseball playing between whites and blacks': Barnstorming, 1887–1921

Beginning in the 1860s, white baseball teams travelled America, taking part in exhibition games against all levels of competition.<sup>21</sup> These 'barnstorming' contests were organised to spread the sport to the nation, in an attempt to increase its widespread appeal and popularity.<sup>22</sup> Shortly after white players began to barnstorm, black players also started to barnstorm as part of all-black teams. Although black teams barnstormed throughout the 1860s and 1870s, this chapter will examine the impact of black teams barnstorming from 1887 onwards. 1887 was the first year black players began to be phased out of the IL, which meant the amount of black players barnstorming increased.<sup>23</sup> By 1921, ML Commissioner Kenesaw M. Landis sought to 'preserve the integrity' of white baseball by stopping players who had competed in the ML World Series from engaging in barnstorming contests.<sup>24</sup> Landis believed that white baseball's image was being tarnished through losses to black barnstorming teams, as top white talents were suffering losses to unranked black players.<sup>25</sup> As a result of ML stars no longer being allowed to barnstorm, the number of interracial barnstorming contests that occurred after 1921 reduced in comparison to years prior. Due to this, this chapter shall only examine contests up until 1921.

Although there is relatively little research surrounding the topic, historians have highlighted barnstorming as a positive factor in improving black baseball's image. As these games attracted large audiences, Jules Tygiel argues that interracial games provided black players the chance to prove

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Barthel, *Baseball Barnstorming and Exhibition Games 1901-1962: A History of Off-season Major League Play* (North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 2006), p.6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jim Reisler, *Before They Were the Bombers: The New York Yankees' Early Years, 1903-1915* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2002), p.126.

<sup>24</sup> 'Ruth Suspended, Fined By Landis', *Sporting News*, December 15, 1921.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph A. Reaves, *Taking in a Game: A History of Baseball in Asia* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p.64.

their talents to a lot of people.<sup>26</sup> Timothy M. Gay argues that black teams savoured the opportunity to demonstrate their talents against ML barnstorming teams to show that they belonged in the MLs.<sup>27</sup> However, this chapter shall challenge this popular stance through the use of newspaper reports of barnstorming games to argue that black players barnstorming hurt black baseball's image. Although black players were excluded from the MLs, minor leagues were open to them. However, the top all-black teams did not join these leagues as they could make more money by barnstorming. This made ML team owners believe that black players were motivated by money, not the love of the sport. During interracial barnstorming contests, black players were not always able to display their talents, as biased umpires were put in place to ensure the white team won. As well as limiting the amount of games black teams won, unfair decisions also led to violence by black players and fans. These instances hurt black baseball's professionalism, and provided more examples for ML team owners to draw upon when arguing why black players were not in the MLs.

The first salaried professional all-black barnstorming team was the Cuban Giants (New York).<sup>28</sup> Although the team was created in 1885, the Giants did not become professional until 1887, as the players could not commit all of their time to the team as they worked at a holiday resort.<sup>29</sup> During their non-pro years, the Giants successfully established themselves as the top black team in the nation, due to their impressive win record.<sup>30</sup> When the team gained enough money to turn professional, which allowed the players to quit their hotel jobs, the Giants were presented with an offer to join the interracial minor Eastern League (EL).<sup>31</sup> However, the Giants turned down the offer to join the EL, in favour of adapting a fulltime barnstorming schedule.

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<sup>26</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p.140.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy M. Gay, *Satch, Dizzy & Rapid Robert: The Wild Saga of Interracial Baseball before Jackie Robinson* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p.31.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *When the Game Was Black and White: The Illustrated History of Baseball's Negro Leagues* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), p.8.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Smith, *Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), pp.317-318.

<sup>30</sup> J. Gordon Street, 'The Cuban Giants', *New York Age*, October 15, 1887.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White: A History of Legendary Black Players and All-Black Professional Teams* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.37.

The reason why the Giants rejected the offer to join the EL was that they would not be allowed to play games outside of their league schedule.<sup>32</sup> Barnstorming teams were free to play whenever they wanted, and would often play as many as three teams on one day.<sup>33</sup> Although on a game-by-game basis barnstorming did not pay as much as a team would receive for participating in a single league game, by being able to play multiple teams on one day top level barnstormers were able to maximise their earning potential and make more than those in a minor league.<sup>34</sup> The rejection of the EL was significant, as the Giants were regarded as the top black team in the country and therefore expected to set an example for other black teams to follow. Other black teams did ultimately follow the example the Cuban Giants set, and did not join a league. The Page Fence Giants (Michigan), for example, had no interest in joining a league and did not even establish a home field.<sup>35</sup> This led to the perception that black players that barnstormed chased money, which was not a quality ML team owners wanted. ML team owners did not want players that would attempt to switch team mid-season if they were offered more money, as it harmed the competitiveness of the Leagues.<sup>36</sup>

Although black teams attempted to disprove the idea that they were not as good as white players, unfair officiating during barnstorming games made black players appear less talented than they actually were and sometimes cost them the game.<sup>37</sup> When a black team wanted to set up an interracial fixture against a white team they contacted the white team's booking agent. Booking agents were tasked with organising the practical elements of the game, which included; deciding a date for the game, finding a venue to host the game, and hiring officials to referee the game.<sup>38</sup> As

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Michael E. Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003) p. 124

<sup>34</sup> Brad Snyder, *Beyond The Shadows of the Senators* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), p.34.

<sup>35</sup> Hogan, *Shades of Glory*, p.74.

<sup>36</sup> The MLs previously had trouble with players switching team midway through the season. See, Adrian Burgos, *Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos, and the Colour Line* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), p.7.

<sup>37</sup> Todd Peterson, *Early Black Baseball in Minnesota: The St. Paul Gophers, Minneapolis Keystones and other barnstorming teams of the deadball era* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), p.57.

<sup>38</sup> John B. Holloway, *Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975), p.82.

white booking agents were in a position to decide who officiated the game they sometimes hired biased umpires to ensure the white team won, or at the very least, the black players look bad. Although black players asked the umpire to officiate the game fairly, black players were continually subjected to unfair officiating.

The white newspaper, *Zumbrota News*, reported that two players for the all-black St. Paul Gophers (Minnesota) were called as being 'out' by the white umpire during a loss to the minor-league all-white Red Wings (New York).<sup>39</sup> Although the report did not explicitly say the umpire favoured the white team, it did say that the two Gopher players who were 'out' were in fact 'safe by a mile'.<sup>40</sup> As the players were safe by such a glaring margin, and it occurred on two occasions, the newspaper report suggests that it was not an honest mistake made by the umpire but in fact unfair officiating. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, another white Minnesota based newspaper, similarly stated the troubles the Gophers faced with officiating when facing white teams. During a game against a makeshift white team in 1910, black players had to swing for every pitch that was thrown, even though they should have been called as foul balls.<sup>41</sup> Due to the poor quality of the pitches, black players missed a lot when attempting to hit the ball.<sup>42</sup> Fans in attendance would have believed that the black players were not talented enough to deal with the pitches the minor-league players were delivering, which made the black players look bad.

According to historian Steven R. Hoffbeck, the most glaring example of unfair officiating against a black team occurred in 1909, during a four game series between the second place ML Chicago Cubs and the all-black Leland Giants (New York).<sup>43</sup> After winning the first game, the Cubs were tied 5-5 going into the final inning of the second game. Manager of the Giants, Andrew 'Rube'

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<sup>39</sup> *Zumbrota News*, 'Gophers Players Called Out', September 28, 1907.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 'Poor white pitching', August 12, 1910.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen R. Hoffbeck, 'Bobby Marshall, the Legendary First Baseman' in Stephen R. Hoffbeck (ed.), *Swinging for the Fences* (Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), p.70.

Foster, called a timeout before the final pitch was thrown to discuss the game plan with his pitcher.<sup>44</sup> Some Cubs players protested the decision to delay the game, and surrounded Foster, which prompted Giants players to go over to the dugouts to defend their manager.<sup>45</sup> While attention was fixed on what was happening on the side-line, right fielder for the Cubs, Frank Schulte, managed to steal home base- subsequently scoring the go ahead point.<sup>46</sup> Although Foster protested that the run should not stand as the player was not allowed to steal a base during a break in play, the umpire let the run stand and awarded the Cubs the victory.<sup>47</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune*, a white newspaper, reported on the second game between the Cubs and Giants. Despite the blatant biased officiating which favoured the Cubs, writer for the *Tribune* Ring Lardner wrote that the umpire had made the correct decision in awarding the Cubs the victory.<sup>48</sup> Unlike the two Minnesota newspaper examples highlighted earlier, that acknowledged that black players experienced unfair officiating, the *Tribune* took a different stance and did not acknowledge anything to be wrong with the umpire's decision. One reason for this could be down to who the Giants were playing. Unlike the Gophers, who faced minor-league players when newspapers highlighted they were being unfairly treated, the Giants were playing a top ML team. As a result of this, the *Tribune* would not have wanted to report that the Giants were unfairly beaten as it would have made readers believe that the Gophers were as talented as the Cubs- which could have made a case for their integration into the MLs.

As well as unfair officiating costing black players' victories, the perception held by black players that they were not being awarded calls their way served as a catalyst for initiating the sometimes confrontational side to black baseball. In 1891, an all-black team from Charleston and an all-black team from Savannah competed in a barnstorming game. During the game white umpire

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<sup>44</sup> Gay, *Satch, Dizzy & Rapid Robert*, p.23.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Hoffbeck, *Bobby Marshall*, p.70.

<sup>48</sup> Ring Lardner, 'Cubs vs Giants', *Chicago Tribune*, October, 1909.

William Betancourt awarded a decision against the team from Savannah, which angered them.<sup>49</sup> Captain of the Savannah team, John Thompson, swore at Betancourt, which caused Betancourt to hit him.<sup>50</sup> As soon as this happened the other Savannah players grabbed weapons and surrounded the umpire. According to the South Carolina based newspaper *The State*, a 'bloody riot was imminent', until the police turned up just in time to defuse the situation and arrest Thompson.<sup>51</sup> During the report of the game, *The State* used language such as 'howling' to describe the players for the Savannah team as being out of control.<sup>52</sup> Racial animosity was high in South Carolina at the time, so it is not surprising that emotive language was used during the article to depict black players as unprofessional.<sup>53</sup> As this happened during an all-black game, instead of an interracial game where the white umpire's decisions could be influenced because he wanted the white team to win, ML team owners could argue that black players did not respect the authority of umpires at all.

Another instance of black players displaying violence following an umpire's decision, this time during an interracial barnstorming game, occurred in 1915. Playing against a white makeshift team, second baseman for the all-black Indianapolis ABCs, Bingo DeMoss, disagreed with a call made by the umpire.<sup>54</sup> DeMoss believed the umpire favoured the white team, as he awarded a white player a base when he thought he was out.<sup>55</sup> Fellow ABC teammate Oscar Charleston also thought the white player was out, and agreed that the umpire was not officiating the game fairly.<sup>56</sup> Angered by this, DeMoss and Charleston attacked both the umpire and player during the next play.<sup>57</sup> Fights subsequently broke out amongst the two teams, and only ended when the police arrived. Both

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<sup>49</sup> 'Cursed the White Umpire', *The State*, July 8, 1891.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> South Carolina had recently published laws denying black people the right to vote based on the idea of black inferiority. See Carter A. Wilson, *Racism: From Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (California: Sage Publications, 1996), p.107.

<sup>54</sup> Gay, *Satch, Dizzy & Rapid Robert*, p.24.

<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Defender*, 'ABC barnstorming game', October 30, 1915.

<sup>56</sup> Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues: A Photographic History* (Mattituck: Amereon House, 1992), p.111.

<sup>57</sup> *Indianapolis Star*, October 30, 1915.

DeMoss and Charleston were charged with assault, and sentenced to time in prison.<sup>58</sup> Due to the violence, the police captain for Indianapolis stated in an interview for the *Indianapolis Star* that 'it is time to call a halt in baseball playing between whites and blacks'.<sup>59</sup> Although historian Neil Lanctot argues that instances of violence during barnstorming games were often made out to be worse than they were by the media, this quote by the police captain allowed ML team owners to argue that it would not be good to bring black players into the MLs, as violence would break out during games.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, it did not matter to the ML team owners if these reports were distorted to make the black players appear more violent than they truly were, as it added to the idea that they were unprofessional.

As well as the behaviour of black players being scrutinised during barnstorming games, black fans were also scrutinised, and their bad actions added to the unprofessional image black baseball held. Although black fans typically behaved well during all-black games, during interracial barnstorming games black fans were prone to anger due to white players getting favourable calls.<sup>61</sup> Black fans attended interracial games to see how their black teams matched up against white teams. Due to this, black fans became angry when the white team either received an unfair call, or, intentionally injured a black player without any repercussions. During a game against an all-black barnstorming team, manager of the all-white minor league Toronto Maple Leafs Chales E. Cushman told his players to intentionally hurt a player on the opposing team.<sup>62</sup> Cushman's intention behind the injury was to send a message to the opposition that it was going to be a hard fought game, although it is unknown if the injury decision was also racially motivated. The viciousness of the subsequent injury forced the black player to leave the game on a stretcher to receive medical treatment. Black fans in attendance became enraged at the white player, as they had paid to see the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Neil Lanctot, 'A General Understanding' in Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (eds.), *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.70.

<sup>61</sup> Dorothy S. Mills and Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.600.

<sup>62</sup> Dennis Pajot, *The Rise of Milwaukee Baseball: The Cream City from Midwestern Outpost to the Major Leagues, 1859-1901* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2009), p.167.

black player compete and he had forced him out the game. When no foul was given for the injury black fans stormed the field which forced the game to end.<sup>63</sup> This, like the examples of black players reacting poorly to an umpire's decision, showed ML team owners that not only did the players not respect the umpire's calls, but neither did the fans.

Although black teams won the majority of interracial barnstorming contests, their actions during games that they lost did not convince ML team owners that they should be integrated into the MLs. For black players, it was not enough to just be talented, as ML team owners needed to see proof that black players could deal with hostility.<sup>64</sup> The newspaper reports that detailed violence and mobs that occurred during games black players were involved in were sufficient enough proof for ML team owners to brand black players, and their fans, as unprofessional. There was one exception to this branding however, as the Cuban Giants were regarded as a team that never disagreed with an umpire's decision or got involved in fights.<sup>65</sup> However, the Cuban Giants were not viewed positively by ML team owners as they viewed their rejection of the EL as a sign that they wanted to make money instead of play in an organised league. This therefore meant that black teams that barnstormed damaged black baseball's professionalism, and hurt their chances of gaining integration into the MLs.

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<sup>63</sup> 'Nowhere So Sharply Drawn As In Base Ball', *Sporting Life*, April 11, 1891.

<sup>64</sup> Jerry Malloy, 'Introduction' in Jerry Malloy (ed.), *Sol White's History of Colored Baseball, With Other Documents On the Early Black Game, 1886-1936* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p.lv.

<sup>65</sup> James E. Brunson III, *The Early Image of Black Baseball: Race Representation in the Popular Press, 1871-1890* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2009), p.108.

## Chapter 2:

# **‘It is unbelievable that an effort to promote a colored baseball league would awaken only half-hearted interest’: Negro National League, 1920–1924**

Black baseball before 1920 existed mostly through travelling exhibition games and regional circuits.<sup>66</sup> In 1887, black team owners believed black players were soon going to be integrated into the MLs. Due to this, there was an attempt to launch an all-black league so that there would be a pool of black talent ready for eventual ML integration.<sup>67</sup> The National Colored Base Ball League was established but after only one week the League folded due to financial instabilities.<sup>68</sup> In 1913, black baseball magnate Andrew Foster wrote in the *Indianapolis Freeman* that the only way to advance black baseball would be if they followed their white counterpart and organised into a league.<sup>69</sup> The Western Circuit of Negro Base Ball was subsequently created in 1920, with Foster serving as President.<sup>70</sup> Originally called the Western Circuit, the initial idea was to eventually expand eastwards and introduce an eastern circuit to the League.<sup>71</sup> However, the eastern circuit never materialised and by 1921 the Western Circuit name was phased out in favour of the NNL. The original teams in the league were the; Chicago American Giants, Chicago Giants, Cuban Stars West (New York), Dayton Marcos, Detroit Stars, Indianapolis ABCs, Kansas City Monarchs and St. Louis Giants.<sup>72</sup>

Merl F. Kleinknecht argues that the organisation of black teams into a league format successfully introduced stability and structure that had previously been missing from the black game.<sup>73</sup> Gerald Gems et al adds that by establishing their own league, teams in the NNL were free

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<sup>66</sup> Roger A. Burns, *Negro Leagues Baseball* (California: Greenwood, 2012), p.177.

<sup>67</sup> John Holloway, *The Complete Book of Baseball's Negro Leagues: The Other Half of Baseball History* (Florida: Hastings House Publishers, 2001), p.21.

<sup>68</sup> Art Rust Jr., *Get That Nigger Off the Field: The Oral History of the Negro Leagues* (Michigan: Book Mail Services, 1992), p.13.

<sup>69</sup> Rube Foster, 'What the Greatest Pitcher of his Time Thinks of the Baseball Situation', *Indianapolis Freeman*, 1913.

<sup>70</sup> *Kansas City Sun*, February 28, 1920, p.9.

<sup>71</sup> 'Negro Base Ball League Enters Arena', *The Tulsa Star*, February 14, 1920.

<sup>72</sup> 'National Negro Base Ball Association is Formed', *The Tulsa Star*, February 28, 1920.

<sup>73</sup> Kleinknecht, *The Negro Leagues: A Brief History*, p.18.

from the white community to create their own parallel black sporting culture and these teams subsequently gained 'greater control over their destiny', as they no longer had to deal with white booking agents that exploited black teams in exhibition games.<sup>74</sup> However, this chapter shall challenge these viewpoints by arguing that the creation of the NNL did not bring stability to the black game as white team owners still maintained a level of control over NNL clubs.

Typically, historians that argue the NNL was not able to introduce stability to black baseball, such as Larry Moffi and Jonathan Kronstadt, highlight the lack of an official league schedule that resulted in each team having played a different amount of games by the end of the season.<sup>75</sup> Also, the lack of any formal contract between the player and team allowed for players to switch teams frequently with no consequences, which made the NNL appear incapable of controlling its players.<sup>76</sup> This chapter shall take a different approach however, and argue that as the majority of NNL teams did not own their own stadium they relied upon white clubs to rent their stadiums out to them. Often these rental agreements exploited black teams for large sums of money, and sometimes, white teams refused to rent their ballpark to a black team. As well as this, a parallel sporting culture could not truly be created as the black media did not consistently report on NNL results- even in cities where a league team was based.

When the agreement to launch the NNL was signed, it was rare for a black team to own their own ballpark.<sup>77</sup> Originally, baseball stadiums were small structures made out of wood that were not able to host a lot of fans, due to the threat that they may collapse.<sup>78</sup> By the early 1900s, technological advancements meant that stadiums could be made of steel-reinforced concrete, which

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<sup>74</sup> Gems et al, *Sports in American History*, p.235.

<sup>75</sup> Moffi and Kronstadt, *Crossing the Line*, p.6.

<sup>76</sup> Robert F. Burk, *Much More Than A Game: Players, Owners & American Baseball since 1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p.59.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah L. Trembanis, *The Set-Up Men: Race, Culture and Resistance in Black Baseball* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2014), p.31.

<sup>78</sup> James Quirk and Rodney D. Fort, *Pay Dirt: The Business of Professional Team Sports* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.156.

allowed them to be bigger and hold more fans than the smaller, fragile wooden ballparks.<sup>79</sup> On average, the building cost of a steel-reinforced concrete stadium was \$500,000.<sup>80</sup> Although these stadiums cost a lot, ML team owners were able to find investors from private companies to contribute to the building costs. Conversely, black teams were not as successful in finding investors, but when they did, they were not willing to pay for a concrete stadium.<sup>81</sup>

In 1919, the future NNL St. Louis Giants secured investment from local black businesses to build a stadium.<sup>82</sup> The Giants needed a new home field, as their lease for the white owned Federal Park had been terminated due to racial hatred.<sup>83</sup> Although the investors were willing to pay for a stadium for the Giants, they were only willing to pay for the construction of a wooden stadium.<sup>84</sup> As the stadium was made out of wood, it could not hold a lot of fans, and appeared out-dated in comparison to the new concrete stadiums ML teams were having built at the time. Additionally, black owned wooden stadiums were a fire threat, as the Ku Klux Klan burned them down due to their racial hatred of black people.<sup>85</sup>

In order to secure a home-field to host home games, most NNL teams entered into discussions with white teams to rent the use of their stadium when they were not using them.<sup>86</sup> Both the lack of black ballpark ownership and the use of white stadiums to host NNL contests was a limitation to the black game in the eyes of Foster, as he argued that it appeared as if black baseball could not support itself.<sup>87</sup> However, by entering into an agreement with the Cincinnati Reds to establish Redland Field as their home ground, the Cuban Stars West were able to positively

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<sup>79</sup> Robert F. Lewis II, *Smart Ball: Marketing the Myth and Managing the Reality of Major League Baseball* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2010), p.16.

<sup>80</sup> Quirk and Fort, *Pay Dirt*, p.157.

<sup>81</sup> Trembanis, *The Set-Up Men*, p.31.

<sup>82</sup> 'Baseball', *St. Louis Argus*, April 25, 1919.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> William A. Young, *J.L. Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs: Trailblazers in Black Baseball* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2016), p.95.

<sup>86</sup> 'Western Circuit Organised: to Become Effective April 1, 1921', *Chicago Defender*, February 21, 1920.

<sup>87</sup> Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.242.

transform their image of an exclusively travelling team to one with a consistent home.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the positive, professional change in image NNL teams received for establishing a home-field, agreements with white teams for use of their stadium were not always fair or sustainable.

Although the use of ML stadiums allowed for more fans to attend NNL games than would have been possible at the few available black stadiums, the price of renting these stadiums was high. Historian Robert K. McGregor argues that due to Foster's power as a capable booking agent he was able to negotiate better rates for the use of ML stadiums than any of the NNL teams could have done so on their own.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, although Foster may have been able to secure better agreements, white stadium owners still managed to exploit black teams for the use of their ballpark. The Cuban Stars West had to pay 25 percent of their gate receipts to cover the cost it took to rent out Redland Field.<sup>90</sup> On other occasions, after expenses were deducted, NNL teams received just 40 percent of the gross profit, with the rest going to the stadium owner.<sup>91</sup> Assistant league booking agent Eddie Gottlieb stated that rental costs black teams had to pay for the use of white ballparks increased so much that it was not a viable option for a team to play at certain white stadiums anymore.<sup>92</sup> Rent prices increased as stadium owners realised they could exploit black teams and demand more money from them, as they needed somewhere to play. As a result of the increased rental costs, some black teams had to switch to smaller ballparks. This change in location resulted in some NNL teams folding due to financial reasons, as less fans attended their games which meant the team struggled to make money.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.260.

<sup>89</sup> Robert K. McGregor, *A Calculus of Color: The Integration of Baseball's America League* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2015), p.29.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.260.

<sup>91</sup> Harvey Frommer, *Rickey and Robinson: The Men Who Broke Baseball's Colour Barrier* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 1982), p.99.

<sup>92</sup> Rust Jr., *Get That Nigger Off the Field*, p.46.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Historian Stanley Glenn argues that white teams did not mind if black teams used their stadiums when they were not using them, as many stadium owners were willing to put their racial views aside in order to make more money.<sup>94</sup> Although the state of Kansas displayed instances of racial intolerance as it enforced segregation in schools, the City Monarchs were allowed to rent the white owned Association Park.<sup>95</sup> What is more surprising than the team being allowed to rent the stadium is that the Monarchs were allowed to remove the segregated seating signs and use the home team changing facilities.<sup>96</sup> However, not all NNL teams were as successful in gaining access to a stadium. According to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Baltimore Orioles owner, Jack Dunn, would not rent his stadium out to black teams due to 'race hate'.<sup>97</sup> Although the Monarchs were allowed to have unsegregated seating arrangements in their games, other teams were not allowed this and had to adhere to the stadium owner's rules regarding segregated areas. NNL player James 'Cool Papa' Bell (active 1922- 1946) stated that although some white people attended NNL games and sat in the same block as black fans they were mostly always separated by a rope.<sup>98</sup> This meant that segregation was sometimes a feature of NNL games, even if the league did not want it to be.

Black baseball received a lot of attention from the black media in 1920, when initial talks were held to organise teams into a league format. Although many black newspapers had a small readership, the black press focused on promoting black efforts to try and achieve social equality.<sup>99</sup> The most popular black newspaper was the *Chicago Defender*, which circulated over 100,000 copies weekly and had offices across the East coast.<sup>100</sup> The *Indianapolis Freeman*, although not as popular

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<sup>94</sup> Stanley Glenn, *Don't Let Anyone Take Your Joy Away: An inside look at Negro League baseball and its legacy* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2006), p.11.

<sup>95</sup> James C. Carper, "The Popular Ideology of Segregated Schooling: Attitudes Toward the Education of Blacks in Kansas, 1854–1900," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*, Vol.1, Issue 1 (1978), pp. 255

<sup>96</sup> Young, *Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs*, p.40.

<sup>97</sup> Lanctot, *A General Understanding*, p.77.

<sup>98</sup> David Zirin, *A People's History of Sports in the United States: 250 Years of Politics, Protest, People and Play* (New York: The New Press, 2008), p.51.

<sup>99</sup> Clint C. Wilson II, *Whither The Black Press?: Glorious Past, Uncertain Future* (Indiana: Xlibris Corporation, 2014), p.67.

<sup>100</sup> Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892- 1950* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998), p.8.

as the *Defender*, also boasted a large black readership.<sup>101</sup> Due to their large following, the campaign to create an all-black league gained significant momentum when both the *Defender* and *Freeman* endorsed the idea and continually published articles detailing why forming an all-black league would be beneficial to the black game going forward.<sup>102</sup> Another advocate for the formation of an all-black league was the Pittsburgh based Afro-American magazine *The Competitor*, which stressed that an all-black league would raise awareness of the talent the black game had to offer.<sup>103</sup> Other, smaller, black newspapers also campaigned for an all-black league to be formed, but when the NNL was created general black media attention surrounding the League decreased.

Michael E. Lomax argues that unlike the mutual relationship the white media had with the MLs whereby both groups relied on the other for success, the black media did not have such a relationship with black baseball, and did not rely on it for success.<sup>104</sup> Although they supported the idea of an all-black league, most black newspapers lacked the required levels of finance and staffing to send writers on the road to report on games.<sup>105</sup> Most black newspapers were weekly publications, and since there was no wire services for black newspapers to receive their information, if the editors did not receive the game scores in time for publishing then they would be omitted from that week's newspaper.<sup>106</sup> Two months into the inaugural season and the NNL had received little black media coverage, with no league standing being published in a black newspaper based in a league team city.<sup>107</sup> As the *Competitor* strongly supported the idea of an all-black league from the start, it wanted the NNL to succeed as it spent a lot of time campaigning for it to be created. Also, the *Competitor* believed that league coverage was good for the players in it, as it meant people who did not attend the games could learn about how talented black players were. Due to this, in July 1920, the

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<sup>101</sup> Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis, 1920-1970* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 2005), p.58.

<sup>102</sup> Brian Carroll, *The Black Press and Black Baseball, 1915-1955: A Devil's Bargain* (New York: Routledge, 2015) p.17.

<sup>103</sup> 'The Future of Coloured Baseball', *The Competitor*, February 1920.

<sup>104</sup> Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.255.

<sup>105</sup> Trembanis, *The Set-Up Men*, p.13.

<sup>106</sup> Dick Clark and Larry Lester (eds.), *The Negro Leagues Book* (Cleveland: The Society for American Baseball Research, 1994), p.8.

<sup>107</sup> Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.255.

*Competitor* criticised other black newspapers for not covering the NNL in an article where they stated that it was, 'unbelievable that an effort to promote a colored baseball league would awaken only half-hearted interest'.<sup>108</sup>

Before the start of the new season in 1921, team owners in the NNL agreed that there should be more of an effort to cover league games and create more publicity.<sup>109</sup> The Columbus Buckeyes, a new addition to the NNL, received media coverage in the *Ohio State Journal* in a spread detailing the seven new players they added to their roster.<sup>110</sup> Two weeks later, the same spread appeared in the *Defender*, this time with the addition of a column dedicated to league wide batting statistics.<sup>111</sup> Although the spread was a reprint, which shows the reliance of the black media on other newspapers for information, the inclusion of the batting statistics was an advancement in the level of coverage delivered in a black newspaper, as batting statistics had never previously been published. As the *Defender* was the most popular black newspaper in the nation, it made sense for it to provide the most coverage of the NNL, as the news would reach the largest amount of people. However, the NNL management did not incentivise league team city newspapers to cover their respective home team, or report on wider NNL news, meaning, they were not able to properly amass sustained media attention throughout the season. Although the *Defender* had the resources to send reporters to cover league games, following their July 30 publication they never published batting statistics again. As no other black newspapers appeared willing to cover the NNL, the *Defender* did not want to be the only one providing league coverage as they would have been required to collect all of the information themselves.<sup>112</sup>

As well as receiving little media coverage in the black press, white newspapers were also reluctant to cover NNL games. During the 1920s, ML management discouraged white contact with black teams, which subsequently resulted in the white media rarely reporting on black league

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<sup>108</sup> 'Big League Making Progress', *Competitor*, July, 1920.

<sup>109</sup> Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.260.

<sup>110</sup> 'Stretching First Sacker and Seven New Members of Buckeye Ball Team', *Ohio State Journal*, July 17, 1921.

<sup>111</sup> 'Seven New Members of Buckeye Ball Team', *Chicago Defender*, July 30, 1921.

<sup>112</sup> Lomax, *Black Baseball Entrepreneurs*, p.260.

games.<sup>113</sup> The *Sporting News*, which was widely regarded as the 'national magazine on baseball', refused to cover NNL games at all.<sup>114</sup> On the occasional instance a NNL game was covered in a white newspaper, the game report was typically found under the semipro/ high school sport section- showing how highly white journalists viewed the competition level of the League.<sup>115</sup> As a result of the lack of media coverage by both the black and white press, the NNL was unable to make a case that black players were talented enough to be integrated into the MLs, as the media did not draw attention to the talented players that played in the league.

The reluctance by the black media to cover NNL games meant that the League could not be regarded as a professional organisation. Black baseball's professionalism was also harmed because the majority of NNL teams did not own their own stadium. While some black teams struggled to find somewhere to establish as a home-field, white teams were having new, expensive stadiums constructed. This shows the difference in black and white baseball. White baseball had the support of the media and controlled the majority of stadiums in the nation. Black baseball, on the other hand, did not have a working relationship with the press and still relied upon ML team owners to help them put on games by providing them with a stadium to use.

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<sup>113</sup> Burk, *Much More Than A Game*, p.33.

<sup>114</sup> Burns, *Negro Leagues Baseball*, p.178.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 3

### ‘Clowning Around’: Clown Teams, 1934–1939

In 1907, Sol White argued that in order for black baseball to become more professional black teams had to stop promoting themselves based on their comedic routines, and instead, focus on promoting their baseball abilities.<sup>116</sup> To make their team stand out, some black barnstorming teams began to perform comedy acts during their games in the 1880s.<sup>117</sup> Black writer James W. Johnson wrote that the inclusion of comedic routines by some black teams introduced a new and interesting feature to black baseball, something that was missing from the ‘dignified and grim’ ML games.<sup>118</sup> These clown teams drew large crowds that came to watch their in-game performances such as shadowball, which was a synchronized performance of players pretending to play baseball without the ball.<sup>119</sup> Although some black teams continued to employ a few players to clown during their games, by 1920, due to black teams wanting to appear more professional, comedic routines had become relatively rare.<sup>120</sup> By 1930, attendance at black baseball games was at a low point, as the economic depression meant less people came to watch their games.<sup>121</sup> Due to the popularity of white comedy touring teams in the early 1930s, such as the all-Jewish House of Davids who wore fake beards when playing, some black teams resorted to clowning during their games in an attempt to attract an audience.<sup>122</sup> While acts like shadowball remained a feature of clown performances, black clown teams of the 1930s primarily based their comedic acts around embracing the worst racial stereotypes that had been popularised through blackface minstrel shows.

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<sup>116</sup> Sol White, ‘Sol White Official Base Ball Guide’, in Jerry Malloy (ed.), *Sol White’s History of Coloured Baseball, With Other Documents On the Early Black Game 1886-1936* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p.74.

<sup>117</sup> Tygiel, *Baseball’s Great Experiment*, p.18.

<sup>118</sup> James W. Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Knopf, 1930), p.22.

<sup>119</sup> Jimmy Keenan, ‘September 7, 1929: Havana’s Luis E. Tiant knocked out in Baltimore exhibition game’, available at [<http://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/september-7-1929-havanas-luis-e-tiant-knocked-out-baltimore-exhibition-game>], Date Accessed: 21/3/2017

<sup>120</sup> Young, J. L. *Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs*, p.93.

<sup>121</sup> Peter C. Bjarkman, ‘Baseball’ in David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p.302.

<sup>122</sup> Young, J. L. *Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs*, p.93.

Historian William Brascher argues that the popularity of black clown performances made some black team owners think that people would say that clowning was the only thing black players were capable of.<sup>123</sup> Some historians, such as James S. Hirsch, argue that these clown performances were not good for black baseball's images, as they based their acts off negative racial stereotypes of black people that had been present in minstrel shows.<sup>124</sup> Although this chapter agrees that clown acts were linked to minstrel shows, and that they hurt black baseball's professionalism, it seeks to further the research surrounding the topic. Unlike other historians, this chapter argues that the location clown teams were established in was pivotal for their success, as these locations had strong links to minstrel shows which subsequently allowed the team to become popular. The name, appearance, and acts these clown teams engaged in were all overtly racist, which hurt black baseball's professionalism as by performing the racial stereotypes it appeared as if black players accepted them to be true in order to attract an audience. Although well-known talented black players were brought in to play on these teams, in an attempt to make the team appear competitive, they too had to perform acts like the rest of the team. This ultimately made clown teams appear to be more focused around being an attraction instead of putting on a competitive performance, which, like barnstorming teams earlier who appeared to be motivated by money, made black baseball players appear to have their priorities wrong if they wanted to achieve integration into the MLs.

Originating in Louisville, blackface minstrel performances became a popular feature of American culture.<sup>125</sup> In 1828, white actor Thomas D. Rice created a black comedy character called Jim Crow, which was based off of a handicapped slave that worked as a stable hand.<sup>126</sup> Rice believed the slave to be a good person to create a black comedy routine from, due to the slave being in high

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<sup>123</sup> William Brascher, *The Story of Negro League Baseball* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1994), p.66.

<sup>124</sup> James S. Hirsch, *Willie Mays: The Life, The Legend* (New York: Scribner, 2010), p.42.

<sup>125</sup> Michael L. Jones, *Louisville Jug Music: From Early McDonald to the National Jubilee* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014) p.45.

<sup>126</sup> Benjamin G. Brawley, *A Social History of The American Negro* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), p.214.

spirits despite possessing a 'laughable limp'.<sup>127</sup> During the act Rice, with a face covered in makeup to make himself appear black, performed a song-and-dance routine where he sang in 'typical Negro dialect', which was broken English.<sup>128</sup> The Crow character proved to be a huge success with the Louisville crowd, as it played up to the perception white people had of black people- that they were idiots. Due to the success of Rice's character other blackface minstrel characters were created, and toured the nation.<sup>129</sup>

Minstrel shows experienced huge success across the nation, either as a mainstay act in a theatre or as a troupe that visited different towns.<sup>130</sup> These performances provided a hugely distorted view of black people, as they depicted them as ignorant, dim-witted individuals.<sup>131</sup> Despite the negative stereotypes these shows delivered, some black actors were recruited to join minstrel acts by white producers.<sup>132</sup> Following the end of the Civil War, many in the north attended minstrel shows which advertised that a black person was going to perform, as they believed it was a chance for them to learn about black people.<sup>133</sup> During these shows black performers told stories about their life. Although the audience took these stories to be truthful depictions of black life they were not, as the black performers had to adhere to the director's command when telling the story. This often meant the stories included racial stereotypes that were in line with the rest of the minstrel performance.<sup>134</sup> By 1880, attendance figures for professional minstrel shows began to decline, as people became interested in other forms of entertainment, such as vaudeville.<sup>135</sup> However, minstrel

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<sup>127</sup> Edmon S. Connor, 'Thomas D. Rice Jim Crow Legacy', June 5, 1881.

<sup>128</sup> Ray B. Browne and Lawrence A. Kreiser Jr. *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), p.140.

<sup>129</sup> Marvin McAllister, *Whitening Up: Whiteface Minstrels and Stage Europeans in African American Performance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p.97.

<sup>130</sup> Susan Smulyan, 'Twentieth-Century Amateur Minstrels' in Kathleen Franz and Susan Smulyan, *Major Problems in American Popular Culture* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), p.52.

<sup>131</sup> Browne and Kreiser Jr., *The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p.140.

<sup>132</sup> Seymour Stark, *Men in Blackface: True Stories of the Minstrel Show* (New York: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), p.132.

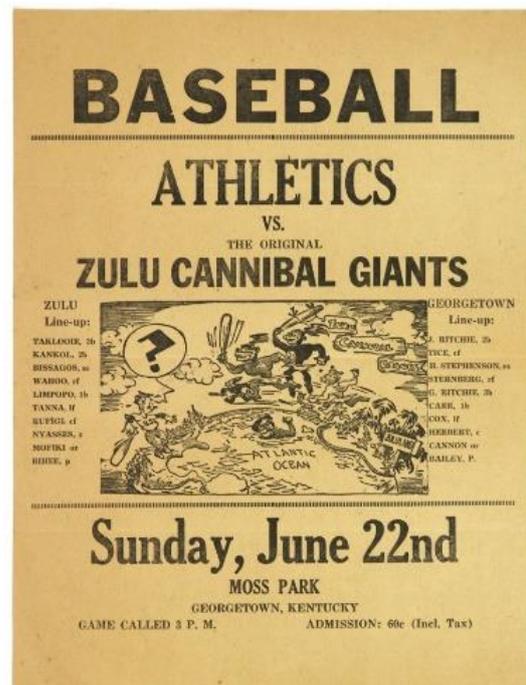
<sup>133</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.376.

<sup>134</sup> Stark, *Men in Blackface*, p.132.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p.68.

troupes operated well into the Twentieth-Century, and proved popular in areas where black clown teams were eventually established.

Established in 1934, the first all-black clown team that performed racialized acts during their games was the Zulu Cannibal Giants (Louisville).<sup>136</sup> As the Cannibal Giants were the first black team to use racial clowning it seemed appropriate for the team to be based in the same city where minstrel performances originated. Although there is no evidence to confirm that team owner Charlie Henry chose to base the team there because of its history of minstrel performances, by establishing the team there it ensured that the games would be well received, as the in-game clowning reflected the racial stereotypes that were characteristic of minstrel shows. Two years later, due to low attendance figures, the Miami Giants decided to use racialized clowning during their games.<sup>137</sup> Miami had a history of black people performing in minstrel shows, with acts typically involving black people dancing for white people.<sup>138</sup> The decision to change to clowning resulted in increased attendance figures for the Miami Giants.<sup>139</sup> Although both the Cannibal Giants and Miami Giants eventually became full-time travelling teams, the decision to base their clown teams in their respective areas allowed them to capitalise on the nostalgia and popularity of minstrel performances, which helped build interest in their teams.



Above: Baseball Athletics vs Zulu Cannibal Giants poster, 1936  
[see Appendix 1]

<sup>136</sup> Allan J. Pollock, 'Send in The Clowns', in James A. Riley, *Barnstorming to Heaven Syd Pollock and His Great Black Team* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), p.82.

<sup>137</sup> Bjarkman, *Baseball*, p.302.

<sup>138</sup> Jim Carrier, *A Traveller's Guide to the Civil Rights Movement* (Florida: Harcourt Books, 2004), p.173.

<sup>139</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, 'Clowning Around: The Miami Ethiopian Clowns and Cultural Conflict in Black Baseball', *Tequesta*, Vol.1, Issue.62 (2002), p.49.

In order to promote interest in the team, the Cannibal Giants attempted to pass their players off as native Africans. During a time when a team name was used to add both a tone and promotional value to a team, the decision to use Zulu and Cannibal meant the team was advertised as savages from Africa.<sup>140</sup> A poster produced by the Cannibal Giants that advertised an upcoming game against the Baseball Athletics (Georgetown) shows that the team openly promoted their players as being wild (Appendix 1).<sup>141</sup> Coming from 'Zululand', players on the poster for the Cannibal Giants are wearing grass skirts and swinging large bats.<sup>142</sup> Team sheets reveal that players performed under native African pseudonyms, such as Wahoo and Limpopo.<sup>143</sup> Like blackface minstrel performers of the past, players wore face paint and makeup- this time to achieve a tribal, savage appearance (Appendix 2).<sup>144</sup> As well as this, players wore grass skirts and carried 'authentic' tribal spears when playing.<sup>145</sup> During the game, players for the Cannibal Giants stopped playing baseball and acted out choreographed fights with the spears, much to the enjoyment of the crowd.<sup>146</sup> The decision to play in an unconventional uniform and perform choreographed fights proved to be huge attractions for the team. Indiana based newspaper *The Republic* reported that the largest crowd of the season came to watch the Cannibal Giants 'perform



Above: Robert Bissant, Zulu Cannibal Giants player, 1938  
[see Appendix 2]

<sup>140</sup> Fred D. Cavinder, *More Amazing Tales From Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p.151.  
<sup>141</sup> 'Baseball Athletics vs Zulu Cannibal Giants', June 1936 [Poster], available at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/>, Date Accessed: 2/4/2017.  
<sup>142</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>143</sup> 'Team Line-up', *The Meriden (CT) Daily Journal*, October 27, 1935.  
<sup>144</sup> 'Robert Bissant Zulu Cannibal Giants photography', 1938 [Photograph] in Dixon and Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball League*, p.111.  
<sup>145</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>146</sup> Young, J. L. *Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs*, p.93.

in costume' against the home team Columbus Monarchs.<sup>147</sup> Although playing under pseudonyms and in costume resulted in the team becoming a huge draw, the extreme measures the team took to become popular showed how far they were willing to pander to the fan's visions of native African stereotypes. Furthermore, it presented the idea that these players were not professional players competing in a game, but, characters taking part in a performance.

Unlike the Cannibal Giants, the Miami Giants did not go as far as to play in grass skirts and carry spears. Instead of wearing a tribal costume, the Giants occasionally donned colourful wigs and played wearing oversized gloves.<sup>148</sup> In order to promote their team as a clown team, the Miami Giants decided to change their name to the Ethiopian Clowns.<sup>149</sup> Although Allan J. Pollock, son of Ethiopian Clowns owner Syd Pollock, argues that the decision to change the name was done to 'honour the black African Kingdom of Coptic Christians', many baseball team owners took offense to the new name.<sup>150</sup> Italy had recently invaded Ethiopia, which meant baseball team owners thought it was in poor taste to name a clown team after a nation that was being attacked.<sup>151</sup> Cumberland W. Posey Jr., owner of the all-black Homestead Grays (Pittsburgh), argued that by having black Americans play under the team name 'Ethiopians' clown acts offended both Ethiopians and black Americans.<sup>152</sup> However, Syd Pollock did not see anything wrong with the name and later revealed in 1941, during an open letter to Posey Jr., that he had been given consent from the Ethiopian government to use the title.<sup>153</sup> Although Pollock may have been granted permission by the Ethiopian government to use the name, as people within black baseball found the name offensive it was not a good way to promote the team.

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<sup>147</sup> 'Cannibal Giants vs Columbus Monarchs', *The Republic*, September 7, 1937.

<sup>148</sup> Martha Ackman, *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone the First Women to Play Professional Baseball in the Negro League* (Illinois: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010), p.93.

<sup>149</sup> Mohl, *Clowning Around*, p.42

<sup>150</sup> Allan J. Pollock 'The Twenties and Thirties: Road Map' in James A. Riley, *Barnstorming to Heaven Syd Pollock and His Great Black Teams* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), p.84.

<sup>151</sup> Mohl, *Clowning Around*, p.42.

<sup>152</sup> Paul Debono, *The Indianapolis ABCs: History of a Premier Team in the Negro Leagues* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 1997), p.119.

<sup>153</sup> 'Open Letter to Cumberland Willis Posey, Jr.', September 30, 1941.

As clown teams were orientated around showmanship instead of putting on a competitive match, many people believed that clown team did not have in-game talented players on their rosters.<sup>154</sup> In an attempt to make their teams appear more talented, legitimate, and add an extra draw, clown teams sometimes added well-known, talented black players to their rosters. Future National Baseball Hall of Famers John 'Buck' O'Neil (active 1934-1955) and Leroy 'Satchel' Paige (active 1926- 1965) were the biggest black talents that played on black clown teams. Paige was a huge draw, as whatever team he joined attendance figures almost doubled.<sup>155</sup> Although these players were recognisable names, with reputations for being great players, both men still had to participate in the clowning routines of the team. O'Neil wore the Cannibal Giants tribal uniform when he played for them in 1937.<sup>156</sup> Although O'Neil stated that none of the players on the team liked to act like 'fools to draw white folk to the park', O'Neil remained a member of the team for the rest of the 1937 season, as he was getting paid a lot.<sup>157</sup> Unlike O'Neil, Paige did not have to wear an unconventional team outfit when he played for the Ethiopian Clowns. Despite not having to play in a costume, Paige still had to perform comedy acts, such as juggling, throughout the game.<sup>158</sup> Although the acts Paige engaged in were not overtly racist in comparison to the spear fights O'Neil performed, he still played for a team that used racialized comedy during other acts, which made it look like he supported them.

Although talented black baseball players sometimes performed on clown teams, the biggest draw in clowning was Richard 'King Tut' King.<sup>159</sup> Originally playing for the Cannibal Giants, Tut switched teams to the Ethiopian Clowns in 1936.<sup>160</sup> Although he did not play during the game, Tut

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<sup>154</sup> Heaphy, *The Negro Leagues, 1869- 1960*, p.235.

<sup>155</sup> Stephanie M. Liscio, *Integrating Cleveland Baseball: Media Activism, the Integration of the Indians, and the Demise of the Negro League Buckeyes* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), p.50.

<sup>156</sup> John 'Buck' O'Neil, 'Foreword' in John Holloway (ed.), *The Complete Book of Baseball's Negro Leagues: The Other Half of Baseball History* (Florida: Hastings House Publishers, 2001), p.6.

<sup>157</sup> Buck O'Neil et al, *I Was Right On Time: My Journey From the Negro Leagues to the Majors* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), p.12.

<sup>158</sup> Young, J. L. *Wilkinson and the Kansas City Monarchs*, p.123.

<sup>159</sup> Roger A. Burns, *Negro Leagues Baseball* (California: Greenwood, 2012), p.175.

<sup>160</sup> 'King Tut', available at [<https://baseballhistorydaily.com/2013/01/30/king-tut/>], Date Accessed: 2/4/2017.

proved to be a major draw due to the comedy routines he performed.<sup>161</sup> As well as engaging in group acts, such as shadowball, Tut performed his own individual routines. The most popular, and divisive, of Tut's routines was a prison act. Shackled by chains, wearing a prison jumpsuit, Tut entered the field from the dugout, purposely tripping over his own feet on the way.<sup>162</sup> Tut pulled faces at the crowd while he stumbled a lap of the field, and then returned to the dugout where he was released from his chains and changed into his baseball uniform for the game.<sup>163</sup> Syd Pollock argued that the routine was meant to represent the advancement of black people in American society, as they originally started off in chains because of slavery but eventually gained their freedom like Tut did.<sup>164</sup> However, many people within the black community were critical of this routine. People did not like the routine as despite the positive message it tried to deliver by Tut falling over his feet and pulling faces to the crowd it continued to display racial stereotypes of black people being stupid criminals. The *Defender* did not agree with this routine and argued that black players 'clowning around', more generally for white team owners was bad, as they performed racial stereotypes in order to make the team owner money.<sup>165</sup>

The decision to focus around clowning harmed black player's chances of gaining integration into the ML. As clown teams were not focused on displaying their in-game baseball talents, and instead prided themselves on being draws, ML team owners argued that these players were more focused on performing an act than playing competitive baseball. As clown players were reminiscent of minstrel performers it harmed black baseball's professionalism when top talented players joined clown teams. O'Neil acknowledged that the Cannibal Giants were a minstrel team, and said when he played for them his tolerance for challenging racism wore down, as he was 'conditioned to accept

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<sup>161</sup> Trembanis, *The Set-Up Men*, p.164.

<sup>162</sup> Allan J. Pollock, 'The Heart and Soul of Black Baseball', in James A. Riley (ed.), *Barnstorming to Heaven Syd Pollock and His Great Black Team* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), p.9.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> *Chicago Defender*, July 29, 1939.

racism' - due to the acts he performed.<sup>166</sup> As players knew the team was bad, and yet stayed for the money, ML team owners argued that black players, once again, chased money at whatever costs.

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<sup>166</sup> Joe Posnanski, *The Soul of Baseball: A Road Trip Through Buck O'Neil's America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p.22.

## Conclusion

In 1947, the colour line was finally broken, as black player Jackie Robinson was hired by Branch Rickey to play for the ML Brooklyn Dodgers.<sup>167</sup> Rickey stressed the importance of professionalism to Robinson, as he stated white fans would only accept Robinson if 'we convince the world that I'm doing this because you're a great ballplayer and a fine gentlemen.'<sup>168</sup> Unlike the efforts by black baseball that have been discussed throughout this dissertation, Robinson successfully convinced white people that he, and black baseball, were professional, which secured his place in the MLs. Robinson was able to achieve this by refusing to fight during games, being focused solely on the games, and because the media highlighted him as an extremely talented player.<sup>169</sup> These three features were all things black baseball had failed to do in the past.

The use of newspaper reports from barnstorming games proved that black players, and their fans, built on black baseball's violent reputation. In-game confrontations played up to the pre-existing idea held by ML team owners- that black players were prone to violence. The failed attempt to properly promote the NNL as a professional enterprise harmed the players in it, as they did not receive adequate exposure to highlight their talents. Finally, instead of being focused on playing a competitive game, clown teams concentrated on putting on a comedy performance. This detracted from the quality of play of other black teams, as black baseball was branded as being unprofessional due to these teams making a joke of games.

Throughout this dissertation the argument has been made that black baseball harmed the validity of their own professionalism. Although this research agreed with some historians that similarly argue that the NNL and clown teams were not good for achieving integration, this dissertation has built on the topic, by looking at different elements that historians have overlooked.

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<sup>167</sup> Fred Stein, *A History of the Baseball Fan* (Jefferson: North Carolina, 2005), pp.59-60.

<sup>168</sup> Peter Levine, *American Sport: A Documentary History* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), p.131.

<sup>169</sup> William C. Kashatus, *Jackie and Campy: The Untold Story of Their Rocky Relationship and the Breaking of Baseball's Color Line* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), pp.81-82.

As a result, this research has highlighted that historians have failed to acknowledge key areas and reasons why black baseball players continued to be excluded from the MLs for so long.

# Appendix 1

'Baseball Athletics vs Zulu Cannibal Giants', June 1936 [Poster], available at <https://ourgame.mlblogs.com/>, Date Accessed: 2/4/2017.

**BASEBALL**

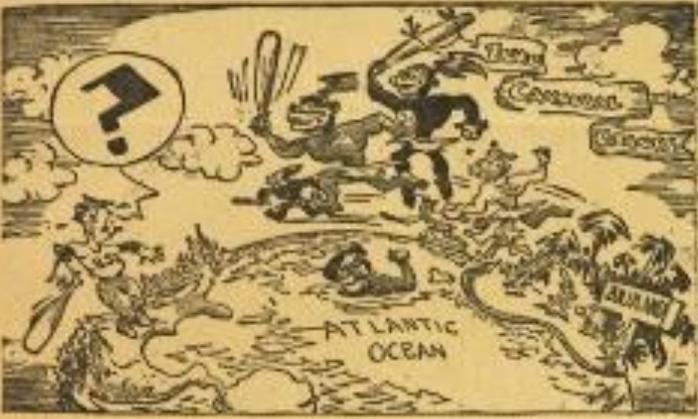
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**ATHLETICS**

VS.

THE ORIGINAL

**ZULU CANNIBAL GIANTS**

<p><b>ZULU</b> Line-up:</p> <p>TAKLOOIK, 2b KANKOL, 2b BISSAGOS, ss WABOO, cf LIMPOPO, 1b TANNA, lf RUFIGI, cf NYASSEN, p MOTIKI, cf HEHE, p</p>		<p><b>GEORGETOWN</b> Line-up:</p> <p>J. BITCHE, 2b TICE, cf H. STEPHENSON, ss STERNBERG, cf G. BITCHIK, 2b CARR, 1b COX, lf HERBERT, c CANNON, ss BAILEY, p</p>
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**Sunday, June 22nd**

**MOSS PARK**

GEORGETOWN, KENTUCKY

GAME CALLED 3 P. M.                      ADMISSION: 60c (Incl. Tax)

## Appendix 2

'Robert Bissant Zulu Cannibal Giants photography', 1938 [Photograph] in Dixon, Phil and Hannigan, Patrick J., *The Negro Baseball Leagues: A Photographic History* (Mattituck: Amereon House, 1992), p.111.



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