

Two Books in One

By Jim Raup

Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell . . . have you heard of these guys? That is easy, you say? How about Turkey Stearnes, Pete Hill, Martin Dihigo, John Henry Lloyd, Rube Foster? Perhaps you know the Branch Rickey name, but what about Gus Greenlee, J. L. Wilkinson, Frank Leland, Effa Manley, Ed Bolden, C. I. Taylor? Everyone knows about Jackie Robinson, but how many know of Bud Fowler or of Moses Fleetwood Walker or can say what they have in common with Robinson?

The answers to these questions and to many others can be found in Black Baseball In Living Color / The Art of Graig Kreindler. The principal author of this work, and the benefactor who commissioned Kreindler's art, is Jay Caldwell, a Negro Leagues enthusiast and Black Baseball historian. His co-authors are Isaac C. Brooks, Jr., Gary Gillette, W. H. Johnson, Tom Odzer, and Dave Wilkie, and each has significant expertise in Black Baseball. Editors are Bill Nowlin and Carl Riechers, and Joyce Stearnes Thompson supplied a Foreword. Graig Kreindler, the country's finest baseball artist, provided his meticulously detailed paintings to supplement and to enhance each chapter.

This book contains two distinct works. The first is a history of Black Baseball, which includes the founding of the Negro National League on February 13, 1920 in Kansas City, various Negro Leagues established later, and many predecessor teams which enabled Black baseball players to play the game they loved but were not yet organized into leagues with rules. Arranged chronologically roughly by decades, the chapters detail activities of the principal actors, not only players but also owners and other executives, which led to badly-needed

structure, leagues, and rules. The authors examine Black Baseball from its origins in the 19th Century, its movement into egalitarian Latin America during winters, its development of strategic play and “small ball” in the Deadball Era, its Foster-led formation of the first Negro League in 1920, its struggles during the Great Depression and two World Wars, and finally its emergence into the sunlight of integration beginning with Jackie Robinson’s signing with Brooklyn in 1945 and continuing, albeit slowly, thereafter.

Jay Caldwell believes these Black Baseball players should be known as real men with superior athletic talent and skills, not mythological heroes performing superhuman feats. Readers should understand many of the myths about Black players were intentional exaggerations to gain notice and attention from white America. Interspersed among the history are delightful mini-biographies of Cool Papa Bell, Rube Foster, Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and Jackie Robinson. These chapters detail the exploits of these men, both real and embellished, and the authors endeavor to make the line between myth and reality clear.

Bell was not called out sliding into second base because he was struck by a line drive he just hit past the pitcher. Speed is the first characteristic associated with Bell, though; he was the fastest player of his era and maybe was the fastest in baseball history. Gibson did not hit 800-900 homers, but he was arguably the best hitter in Black Baseball, and he had prodigious power which produced numerous tape-measure home runs. Tall tales about long balls he hit had the unfortunate result of causing doubt about Gibson’s true ability. Paige did not send his fielders into the dugout then strike out the next three hitters on nine pitches with only him and his catcher on the field. Paige was, however, arguably the most talented pitcher of Black Baseball, and no less an expert than Dizzy Dean called him one of the 5 or 10 best pitchers of all time. Many today think he may be one of the top 5. Satchel Paige was a tremendous drawing card for Black

Baseball and was a tireless self-promoter. Maybe he created some myths himself! The authors of the chapters on stars of Black Baseball heeded Jay Caldwell's admonition and presented the stars, around whom many myths have swirled, as real men whose true exploits needed no embellishment to establish their greatness. Only the harsh realities of racial segregation and discrimination prevented white America from acknowledging their elite abilities sooner.

Readers will learn how Black players' star power eventually captured the attention of white America, especially white baseball fans and the white press. Satchel Paige burst on the scene in 1934 while playing in the newly-integrated Denver Post Tournament. This event, which began in 1915, was well-known and respected for the quality of its competition, and the Tournament's games were highly publicized. Paige and his catcher played with the otherwise all-white House of David team, and the Tournament also invited the Kansas City Monarchs, an all-Black team. The undefeated House of David beat the Monarchs in the championship game, and Paige won the "Leading Pitcher" award. The Black players' success and obvious skill created significant favorable coverage in the white press. Paige returned with different Black teams to win the Post Tournament in 1936 and 1937, and his integrated semi-pro Bismarck team won the first National Baseball Congress Tournament in 1935. Black Baseball owners quickly recognized Paige's drawing power and encouraged his barnstorming tours with the Dean brothers in the 1930s and with Bob Feller in the 1940s. These games drew large crowds and were lucrative, but more important, the quality of the competition between the teams segregated by race demonstrated the best Black players could compete equally with white Major League Baseball players.

This reviewer first learned of the Black East-West All-Star Game by reading chapter 10, even though the Game was played continuously from 1933 to 1962. Gus Greenlee, owner of the

Pittsburgh Crawfords, wanted to emulate the white All-Star Game with Black players and to promote the images of the individual star players, not teams. The East-West Game quickly became a spectacle and a showcase for Negro Leagues players' talents and skills; Negro Leagues owners manipulated All-Star rosters to ensure the very best Black players would be in the Game. During the 1940s, the East-West Game was the place for Black celebrities to see and to be seen. Held annually at Chicago's Comiskey Park, attendance included many white fans and often equaled or exceeded attendance at the white All-Star Game. The East-West All-Star Game became the most important continuous Black sporting event in the United States. The Games helped the owners' financial coffers, but the real significance of the East-West All-Star Games was their contribution to eventual integration by showcasing Black Baseball stars' skills and talent. All but the most prejudiced white observer could see the stereotype of Black player inferiority was false. The authors skillfully contend a connection existed between increasingly more white recognition of Black baseball players' true abilities and society's slow but steady move away from segregation toward eventual integration. Paige and countless other Black players accomplished more than win games and create statistics. In so doing, they slowly eroded prejudice of white fans and players, paved the way for Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby, and contributed to the demise of segregation, the most destructive element of United States society.

This reviewer's choice of most interesting is chapter 12 on integration of white professional baseball, primarily because of the author's presentation of little-known aspects of these events. Jackie Robinson's signing a contract with Branch Rickey to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers is well-known. Robinson's cruel torment by racists on and off the field and his struggle to live under the oppression of Jim Crow laws also are well-known. Civil Rights activists and many historians praise Rickey and Robinson as icons of the embryonic civil rights movement.

Robinson certainly deserved the accolades, but perhaps Rickey did not. Rickey's courage in signing a Black player to improve his team and to attract Black paying customers and determination in bringing Robinson to Brooklyn in 1947 should not be denigrated, but his methods were not all motivated by social consciousness or by altruism.

Rickey stole Robinson from the Kansas City Monarchs without warning, consultation, negotiation, or compensation. Robinson was under contract to play for Kansas City, but Rickey ignored the contractual relationship. The Monarchs' owners were surprised and outraged by losing their player with no notice, but Rickey did not care about them or about any effect on the Negro Leagues. The author informs readers Rickey viewed the Negro Leagues with disdain and called them "rackets," not leagues. He subsequently ignored a letter from Effa Manley, owner of the Newark Eagles, which supported baseball's integration and welcomed its opportunity for Black players but asked for the "courtesy" of negotiation before signing her players. This book presents a more complete picture of Rickey's historic integration of the National League with Robinson, which the author calls "re-integration" because of Bud Fowler and Fleetwood Walker who ephemerally integrated white teams in the late-1800s.

Readers also will learn two Black players broke major league baseball's color line in 1947, not only one. In July of 1947, Larry Doby signed with Bill Veeck to play for the Cleveland Indians in the American League and was put in the major leagues a mere three days after he signed. Robinson spent the 1946 season in minor league Montreal to prepare for his ordeal in Brooklyn, but Doby had no preparation at all. Both men faced identical hardships: racism on and off the field, dirty play directed at them, segregated hotels and restaurants, and Jim Crow laws and rules. As Doby himself said later about those awful days:

The only difference was Jackie got all the publicity. You didn't hear much about what I was going through because the media did not want to report the same story.

Larry Doby was as much a civil rights pioneer as Jackie Robinson, but no one told Doby's story.

Robinson had a better career batting average and more stolen bases; Doby had more home runs and more RBI. Robinson was Rookie of the Year in 1947 and National League's batting champion and Most Valuable Player in 1949; Doby was American League's home run champion in 1952 and 1954. Doby was an All-Star seven times; Robinson was an All-Star six times. By any objective measure, including the unfair treatment they received for each being the first Black player in their league, Robinson and Doby were comparable players in every meaningful way. Despite an objective analysis of their performance, presented effectively by a chart in chapter 12, Robinson was elected to Major League Baseball's Hall of Fame in 1962, but Doby was not selected until 1998. One wonders how much general knowledge of Robinson's impact on segregation and lack of awareness of Doby's identical impact affected the wide gap in the years each was selected to receive Major League Baseball's ultimate honor. PS: Bill Veeck did consult Effa Manley about signing Doby.

The second distinct work a purchaser of Black Baseball In Living Color / The Art of Graig Kreindler receives in addition to its superb history is the breathtaking art of Graig Kreindler. Following each chapter is a collection of Graig's paintings which corresponds to men, teams, and events described in the chapters. These headshot paintings are "studies" in the artist's vernacular, and except for one painting of Paige and Gibson together, they are 5" x 7", and all are oil on linen mounted on boards. Graig Kreindler paints from photographs and is an exhaustive researcher in an effort to capture each detail and each nuance correctly. As his statement in the

book explains, a photographic record of Black Baseball is scarce and sometimes is non-existent. Libraries, museums, and memorabilia collectors often aid Graig's research. He wants his work to be historically accurate down to the most minute detail.

A more art-knowledgeable person than this reviewer can and no doubt has evaluated Graig Kreindler's work, but art experts and laypersons agree his work is incredible. He is a genius with light, shadows, and details such as wrinkles in a uniform or smudges on a uniform or cap. He insists the ballparks he paints be as accurate as the players are, and his research also encompasses those details. When one first sees a Graig Kreindler painting, one may think it is a photograph, but it actually is realistic art created by a supremely talented artist who loves his subject and his work.

Graig Kreindler is simply the finest baseball artist in America. A bonus which accompanies each of his 240 paintings is a thumbnail description of the player's career and accomplishments. The art and companion information are much like baseball cards many readers bought in packs with bubblegum in their halcyon days of youth. Graig Kreindler's paintings and his comprehensive knowledge of Black Baseball history are powerful enhancements of this book.

The good news is the days of segregated baseball are long over. Beginning in the 19th Century, Black players organized their own teams in order to play, and white America ignored them or derided their ability to play. Racial discrimination and segregation relegated these athletes to the shadows and to the ultimate indignity of a ban from playing on the same field with whites. Slowly but surely the real-life talent of these Black athletes chipped away at white baseball's foundation of racism and intolerance. The overpowering lesson of Black Baseball In Living Color / The Art of Graig Kreindler is a simple one, which now is irrefutable without the

need for embellishment or myth-making: But for the barrier caused by racial segregation, the best Black Baseball players could have competed equally with white players at the highest level of professional baseball.

There is a happy, but deplorably belated, recognition of Negro Leagues which readers may want to research and to follow. In 2020, Major League Baseball recognized seven Negro Leagues as “major leagues” from 1920-1948 and agreed to include verified statistics from those leagues into its existing statistics and records. The seven leagues are Negro National League, Eastern Colored League, American Negro League, East-West League, Negro Southern League, Negro National League II, and Negro American League. Leader boards changed, and some may find research into statistical integration to be as interesting as players’ integration. Black Baseball’s important contributors finally are taking their long overdue places alongside greats of white baseball and at last are receiving recognition for their greatness overt racism denied them for so long. By 2022, 37 of the 339 inductees of the once all-white Major League Baseball Hall of Fame were inducted solely on their performance and contributions in Black Baseball. The chapter author asks, quoting Abraham Lincoln, how many the number would be if the country had adhered to its stated creed of being a nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” How many, indeed?

Black Baseball In Living Color / The Art of Graig Kreindler is a welcome addition to one’s collections of baseball history and of baseball art. There is a helpful League Terminology section for the beginner in learning about Black Baseball. Extensive, comprehensive end notes provide excellent sources for further research for the reader who wants to learn more. Any baseball fan will find the history to be interesting and the art to be amazing; fans of Black

Baseball will find this book to be a valuable research tool. The book may be purchased in hard cover or paperback at www.baseballartllc.com.