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Jackie Robinson



Jackie Robinson with his bride-to-be. She's Rachel Isum and was a nurse in California before they met.

JACKIE ROBINSON, the sensational backfield star of the UCLA football teams of 1939 and 1940, is about to shoulder one of the toughest and most responsible postwar jobs. He is going to be the first Negro athlete to enter big-time organized baseball. The eyes not only of the sports world but of everybody concerned with the destruction of racial prejudices in America will be upon him.

Robinson will make the big experiment next spring when he joins the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers' farm club in the International League. When Branch Rickey, the Dodgers' president, broke the unwritten but "sacred" lily-white tradition of the modern baseball industry and signed Robinson to a contract, the event was celebrated in a rash of sports-section headlines from the *San Francisco Chronicle* to the *New York World-Telegram*. Now that his phone has stopped ringing and he is able to eat breakfast without brushing a half-dozen newspaper photographers off his Shredded Wheat, Robinson has had time to reflect about the future and what it holds for him. He has his fingers crossed but he doesn't think it will be the ordeal that some people expect.

"Maybe I should buy a lot of cotton to stuff in my ears," he smiles. "I don't think I'll have to take anything I didn't have to take before but maybe there'll be more people ready to give it to me."

The main reason for the reluctance of the major and minor leagues to open the doors to Negroes, of course, is the club owners' fear of reaction from the great numbers of white

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Southern ball players who dominate their payrolls. Robinson recalls, however, that he played against many white Southerners during his college and professional football career. "And everything worked out okay," he says. And football, being a rougher type of contact sport than baseball, would be more likely to provoke antagonisms.

"I played football against Southern Methodist, Texas Christian and Texas A&M," he says. "Those boys played hard football and they really gave me a smacking at times. But I can say with perfect honesty that I never saw anything in any of those games that would indicate they were giving me the business because I was a Negro. The white boys on my club were getting smacked just as hard as I was."

Robinson wouldn't be mixed up with the Dodgers and International League baseball today if it weren't for an ankle that he broke in 1932 while playing football for Pasadena

Junior College just before he went to UCLA.

The ankle didn't keep him from being drafted into the Army in April 1942. In those days they were taking everybody except the guys whose Seeing Eye dogs had flat feet. And once he was in the Army, the ankle didn't keep him from going to OCS, either.

But in the summer of 1944, when Robinson was a lieutenant in the 761st Tank Battalion at Camp Hood, Tex., it kept him from going overseas with his outfit.

"My CO sent me to the hospital for a physical checkup and they changed my status to permanent limited service. After that I kicked around the tank destroyers doing a little bit of everything. Then I wound up as a lieutenant in an infantry battalion at Camp Breckinridge. In October 1944 I was given a 30-day leave and put on inactive duty. I'm still on inactive duty. What I'd like to know is, do I have to go back into active duty to get separated or will they just notify me that I'm out?"

The inactive Lt. Robinson tried playing some pro football on the Pacific Coast after he took off his pink pants and green blouse, but the ankle gave out on him again. He says it won't interfere with his baseball, though.

That next winter—the winter of 1944-1945—he coached basketball at Sam Houston College in Texas. The next spring he began to think about baseball.

Robinson had never played much baseball until he got out of the Army. During his school and college days he was too busy with other sports. Football had been his main dish. He had led the Pacific Coast Basketball Conference in scoring as a forward at UCLA during the 1939-1940 and 1940-1941 seasons, bagging 148 points in 12 games the first winter and 133 points for the same number of games the second year. In 1938 he established a broad jump record of 25 feet, 6½ inches at the Southern California Junior College track meet. But until 1944, when he was an inactive lieutenant, Robinson had played no baseball worth mentioning except a few games with a team called the Pasadena Sox in 1938 and 1939.

In his first summer out of uniform, he tried out as an infielder on the fast Kansas City Monarchs, one of the best Negro clubs, and made the grade with plenty to spare. He wound up as the regular shortstop, batting for a nice .300. Then last August Branch Rickey called him in for the talk which led to his signing with Montreal.

Right now he is taking it easy in New York, waiting to get married "the first Sunday in February" to Rachel Isum, a nurse from California. Jackie, incidentally, is a native of Cairo, Ga., but he has lived most of his life with his widowed mother in Pasadena, Calif. He's only 26 years old.

"I realize what I'm going into," he says. "I realize what it means to me and to my race and to baseball, too. I'm very happy for this chance and I can only say that I'll do my best to make the grade."

By Sgt. BOB STONE
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