

From the Buffalo Soldiers to Satchel: Early Black Baseball in North Dakota

Most baseball historians know of the integrated semi-professional team based in Bismarck in the early 1930s that featured Satchel Paige and several other Negro League stars. The most detailed account is from Tom Dunkel's recent book, *Color Blind*. However, that team was formed mainly to keep pace with two rivals, Dickinson, 100 miles to the west, and Jamestown, 100 miles east of Bismarck. In the late 1920s Jamestown, and a few years later Dickinson, built integrated powerhouse teams by employing several black stars from the Negro Leagues. Later, in the 1950s, dozens of blacks played in North Dakota member cities in the Northern and Manitoba-Dakota Leagues.

However, since the turn of the century and before, blacks were playing baseball in the state, either on integrated or all-black barnstorming teams touring through the state or as hired members of small town teams. This essay summarizes the black ball players and teams that played in North Dakota from the late nineteenth century through the early 1930s when Bismarck team manager and car dealer Neil Churchill started building the team that won the national semi-pro championship in 1935.

Town Baseball in North Dakota

In the early 1900s, baseball was an important summer pastime in rural North Dakota, and almost every small town organized a team. Sometimes independent leagues were formed, but usually teams played three or four times a week against neighboring towns and in tournaments in larger cities during special events such as Fourth of July celebrations. The season was short, beginning when spring planting was completed and the weather warmed in mid-May and ended at the end of July or early August when "farmers begin to get busy with harvest and cannot bother with baseball."ⁱ

Having a winning team was seen as a source of community pride, and soon teams realized they needed to supplement their local players with outsiders to remain competitive with their rivals. The positions of pitcher and catcher required the most skill, and if an outside player, regardless of his race, could help the local team beat a neighboring town, the newcomers were generally accepted and even welcomed. Shortly after the turn of the century, several blacks were playing on predominately white town teams all over North Dakota.

Imported players were compensated, sometimes indirectly and other times with a salary funded by local businessmen and subscriptions from fans. When the team in the small town of Mott, North Dakota was organized in 1919, the "old-timers" (veteran local players) were joined by two brothers from Watkins,

Minnesota, one a “pitcher of fame” and the other a “crack shortstop”. When the new players arrived in town, one took a job in the local bank and the other was employed managing a cream station.ⁱⁱ

In 1919, the Lakota, North Dakota baseball club placed an ad in the Help Wanted – Male section of the classifieds in the *Grand Forks Daily Herald* that read “BASEBALL PITCHER WANTED AT ONCE, No ‘has been’ or ‘would be’ need apply: \$125.00 per month. Also three infielders wanted.”ⁱⁱⁱ A couple of years earlier the Minot team made it known they were in need of a good pitcher and that “he would be provided a salary and furnished a job whereby he will be able to pull down a good bunch of coin.”^{iv}

In addition to having a baseball team, almost every small town published a newspaper, usually a weekly edition. North Dakota was not immune to racial prejudice in the first decades of the twentieth century, but in the reading of hundreds of accounts in small and large town newspapers from a century ago, there seemed to be very little overt racism, at least in print. The words “Colored”, “Negro”, and “Dusky” were often used, but usually in the context of identifying a physical characteristic, like being left-handed, of a new player on the local team. Newspaper stories about the games and players were written for a local audience and there was no need to mention that any of the players were black, because most of the readers attended the games, and already knew that.

Organized Baseball, under the umbrella of the National Agreement, was slow to come to the state. The 1887 Red River Valley League had a formal organization and playing schedule but it wasn’t until ten years later, 1897, that the League, with a Class F Designation, was a part of Organized Baseball. The league operated just the one season and there is no record of any black players being considered by teams in these leagues.

For the next few years a loosely organized league of independent teams, many with black players, operated in the northeastern part of the state. There was no set schedule so the baseball editor of the *Grand Forks Daily Herald* asked each team to wire in their game results on a weekly basis and the paper printed a table of wins and losses. Needless to say there was much dispute over the standings, but usually there was consensus over which team had the best record and could lay claim to the state championship.

The Northern League was formed in 1902, first as an independent league, and after that, as a Class D circuit. In addition to Winnipeg, Manitoba and Crookston, Minnesota, the North Dakota member cities in the league were Devils Lake, Cavalier, Fargo, and Grand Forks. However, small town independent

baseball continued to thrive, and with blacks ineligible to play in Organized Baseball, including the Northern League, an increasing number continued to play on small town teams in North Dakota.

Bish Dorsey

Baseball was played in the Dakota Territory (North and South Dakota became states in 1889) since the early 1870s, and possibly as early as 1869.^v The first blacks to play baseball in North Dakota were soldiers in the U.S. Army that were called "Buffalo Soldiers" by the local Indians. Black soldiers were stationed at Fort Buford, near present day Williston, North Dakota, from 1891 until the post was abandoned in 1895. During part of the time, the Troop H of the black 10th Cavalry held the baseball championship of the post, having established a no-loss record by beating the companies of the black 25th Infantry and the white 20th Infantry.^{vi}

The first known black civilian to play on an integrated team in North Dakota was Bishop "Bish" Dorsey. He was born in Missouri in 1876 but lived in Grand Forks since his childhood. In 1895, at the age of 19, he began playing with the local semi-pro club. He also worked at various jobs including a bellhop, elevator operator, and railway porter and was mustered into the state militia, the equivalent of the modern day National Guard. Dorsey was a key member of the 1899 Grand Forks team that won the state independent championship and was described by local sportswriters as a "brilliant center fielder" and a "stone wall third baseman".^{vii}

In the fall of 1899, on November 27, Dorsey was working as a bartender in a saloon in neighboring East Grand Forks, Minnesota. A drunken white patron verbally abused Dorsey using a racial slur and the altercation became physical. The drunk hit Dorsey in the face with a beer glass and Dorsey he hit the drunk over the head with a wooden stick, killing the man. A short time later he surrendered to authorities, was convicted of third-degree murder, and was sentenced to 21 years in the Stillwater (Minnesota) State Prison.

His friends looked after his pregnant wife (he married earlier in 1899), and he also wrote a farewell letter to his former teammates, wishing the team well and asking they remember him every time they took the field. After many appeals, Dorsey was eventually pardoned in 1912 and came back to Grand Forks. It is not known how long he remained in the city, but at the time of his WWI draft registration in 1917 he was living in Seattle, Washington. According to the 1930 and 1940 US Census records, Dorsey was living as a border in Boston, Massachusetts. No record of when or where he died has been found.

Walter Ball

Probably the most famous of the early black players in the state was right-handed pitcher Walter Ball. Some sources indicate Ball played in Grand Forks in 1899, but he did not arrive in the state until a year later. By this time he had already established a reputation as a skilled pitcher in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1900 he pitched for both Devils Lake and Grand Forks, apparently simultaneously, as his job as a porter on the railroad brought him back and forth between the two cities frequently. Newly married and with an infant son, Ball had an excellent season in 1900. In one game a Grand Forks fan offered to provide a pair of baby shoes for every one of Ball's strike outs and "Ball won shoes enough to last the baby for the next two years."^{viii}

Unable to come to terms with the Grand Forks club the next season, Ball was back in the state, splitting his time between the Lakota and York, North Dakota teams. He even served as captain of the York team, an almost unheard of honor for a black player on a mostly white team. When Grand Forks entered the Northern League in 1902, Ball assumed he would be asked to re-join his former team. During that time the color line was firmly in place in Organized Baseball, and he was told he was not wanted. Ball later went to Chicago where he became one of the most successful pitchers in early black baseball.

Pierce, Ramsey and Benson Counties

During the first decade of the 1900s, many of the top independent teams in the state were clustered in the North Central part of the state. In addition to Walter Ball, the small town of York, North Dakota had at least three other black players in the early 1900s. One was a man named Bobby Crump who was also the town's barber, although unlike York's other black players, he wasn't a paid recruit from outside the state. He was a long-time resident of York and lived in town year around with his family. Likely, he only filled in as a substitute player on the ball team when needed.

Bobby (Robert L.) Crump was born in Mississippi around 1886 and came to Pierce County, North Dakota sometime in the early 1900s with his parents (George W. and Sarah) and six siblings. Robert's father George, who also worked as a barber, lived in North Dakota the rest of his life. He died in 1929 and was buried in Wolford, North Dakota. The 1910 U.S. Census shows Robert living in Albert, Benson County, North Dakota and, like his father, working as a barber. He was married to Minnie and they had five children, all born in North Dakota.

In 1910 he took out an ad in the classifieds in the *Grand Forks Evening Times* that said: "Wanted. Good barber. Top wages to the right man. \$16.00 per week. Scandinavian preferred. Robt. L. Crump, York, ND." It wasn't clear if his shop was so prosperous that he needed to add a second barber, or felt the need to recruit a Scandinavian to attract white customers. By the 1920 and 1930 U.S. Censuses Crump was living in Renville County, North Dakota. Sometime after that he returned to the South and city directories between 1942 and 1959 show him and Minnie living in Decatur, Alabama and operating the Railroad Street Barber Shop.

The 1902 York team had two black players, Wes Martin, who like Crump was a barber, and catcher Bud Johnson. Martin's identity was more difficult to determine. The best information is that James Wesley Martin was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1885 or 1886 and immigrated to the United States in 1902. He found his way to North Dakota and pitched for the York town team. There are also reports of him playing for Cando, North Dakota in 1905. He got married in Illinois in 1907 and in 1909 resurfaced with the Wolford, North Dakota team. He claimed to have been a member of the all-black Minneapolis Keystones in recent years.

In addition to pitching for the Wolford team and occasionally umpiring, Martin may have also been employed as a farmhand. A couple weeks after the 1909 season ended, the local paper noted that "Wes Martin had returned yesterday ... having finished his contract of shocking 1,500 acres of grain."^{ix} He then returned to his off-season home in Devils Lake where he tried to resume his boxing career. Middleweight "Kid" Martin claimed to have fought a Negro heavyweight from Duluth, Minnesota to a draw the previous winter.^x The 1910 U. S. Census shows him as single, working as a barber, and living as a boarder in Grafton, North Dakota, but what became of him after that is not known.

South Central North Dakota

In 1902 the small town of Napoleon employed a black catcher named Dan Lewis. It is not known when Lewis arrived, but after he failed to return to town after the team's game against neighboring Steele on July Fourth, it was thought he had been killed by jumping off a railroad car. Later it was reported Lewis was alive and well as the fatality was "some other colored man." Apparently, he and several other teammates left town shortly thereafter, and a couple weeks later it was reported "what was left of the Napoleon club" lost a game to Wishek in which another catcher had to be secured from Kulm.^{xi}

In the early 1900s, one of the best black pitchers in the Upper Midwest was George Wilson. In 1903 he was the only black member of a St. Cloud, Minnesota team (Walter Ball pitched for St. Cloud in 1902)

that toured North Dakota. The team stopped in Bismarck in late August and won two of three games from the home team. Wilson pitched but it was reported a “lame arm” would shut him down for the rest of the season. Just before St. Cloud arrived, Bismarck signed a black catcher, only referred to as “Johnson”. He was also in the Bismarck line up a few days later in a game against Fargo. It was possible that this was York catcher Bud Johnson, but no definitive information was found to prove that. Wilson and Johnson are the first two blacks known to have played baseball in Bismarck.

Wilson had first been to the state a month earlier. The Sheldon, North Dakota team hired “the professional colored pitcher out of St. Cloud, Minn.” for a big game against rival Page for a July 9, 1903 game played in the nearby town of Buffalo, North Dakota. Wilson pitched a 1-0 shutout with the only run of the game coming on his home run. The game caused quite a row between the two towns. Page, which fielded an all-local team, was upset, not that Wilson was black, but the Sheldon had to resort to importing an outsider to beat them.^{xii}

In 1904 and 1905, a top integrated team from Renville, Minnesota made a tour through North Dakota. George Wilson was now with this Renville club along with two other black players, pitcher Bert, aka “Brick” or “Lefty” Jones, and catcher Rat Johnson, who was in fact George “Chappie” Johnson, a future star for many years in the Negro Leagues. The Renville club shutout Bismarck 7-0 on July 9, 1905 with Wilson pitching and Johnson behind the plate.

Jones had pitched briefly the year before, 1904, in far western North Dakota. After losing the first two games of a series against Bismarck, Dickinson management imported Jones from the Renville club to face their rival in the final game of their series on July 4. Jones was roughed up for 15 hits losing 8-1 and the local weekly, the *Dickinson Press*, was not impressed with the new pitcher saying “A colored southpaw from Renville, MN was imported and he did not do very much.” The *Bismarck Tribune* was less kind saying “Brick turned out to be a gold brick.”^{xiii} This was Jones’ only known appearance with the Dickinson club. However, after a three year hiatus, Bert Jones returned to North Dakota in 1907 and was the star pitcher for Bottineau, one of the top independent teams in the state.^{xiv}

Dick Brookins

Dick Brookins had an undistinguished career in professional baseball, playing four seasons of minor league ball (1906-1910) at the Class D level. What was remarkable about Brookins was that he may have been the last acknowledged African-American to play in Organized Baseball before Jackie Robinson broke the color line in 1946. Several sources suggested Brookins was a Negro and had “averted

detection” during most of his career but how much, if any, African-American blood Brookins had was never proven; no one knows for certain his actual racial heritage. Brookins himself said that his dark skin color was explained by his Native American ancestry.^{xv}

He started his professional career with Green Bay in the Wisconsin State League in 1906. He played with the same team the next year until midway through the season when he joined the Houghton, Michigan club in the Northern Copper League. Brookins’ race was never mentioned by the local press in either of these two cities. In 1908 he joined the Fargo (North Dakota) Browns of the Northern League and for the first time the issue of his race was raised. On June 24 the *Hannibal (Missouri) Courier Post* reported “the playing of Brookins, a Negro, with the Fargo team, is causing trouble in the Northern League ...”^{xvi}

For the most part Brookins was well accepted by his teammates. During the times he was a journeyman player on a second division team, no one cared much whether he was Negro or not. It was only when he or his team were doing well that opposing teams would raise an issue about his race. In 1908 another Northern League team considered signing a black pitcher named George Wilson (the same George Wilson who pitched for Sheldon in 1903). Although league and National Association rules did not allow the signing of black players, the team reasoned that if Fargo had a black player (Brookins), they should be allowed to have one as well. Nothing became of this, and Brookins continued to play third base for Fargo until the league disbanded in August. He then joined an independent club in Hibbing, Minnesota for the rest of the season.

Brookins was out of baseball in 1909 but in 1910 joined the Regina, Saskatchewan club in the Western Canada League. He barely made the team as a utility infielder, but soon he (and his race) became a pawn in wrangling between his manager and various officials with the league and opposing teams. The result was that he was banned from Organized Baseball, and after playing in only twenty games, left the team. Brookins drifted back to Hibbing where he found work as a fireman in one of the local mines and continued to play baseball with the local independent team over the next decade. He and his family (he was married with five children) eventually moved to California where he worked as a railroad carpenter.

The All-Nations Tour of 1916

Satchel Paige is widely regarded as the best black pitcher ever; maybe the best pitcher of any race. Others argue that John Donaldson, although not as flamboyant as Paige, was even better, and was the greatest black pitcher in history. New York Giants manager John McGraw was once quoted as saying “If Donaldson were a white man ... I would give \$50,000 for him and think I was getting a bargain.”^{xvii}

Donaldson had a remarkable career that spanned more than 30 years. He played with the Kansas City Monarchs and other teams in the Negro National League, small town teams in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest including Scobey and Plentywood, Montana and numerous traveling all-star teams. During the decade of the teens, Donaldson was the star attraction on a barnstorming team called the All-Nations (named because their players were of several nationalities including blacks, whites, Asians, Indians and Latin Americans).

During the summer of 1916 the All-Nations team traveled throughout North Dakota, playing 28 games over a six week period and lost just four games. They played in eighteen different towns ranging from Langdon in the northeast, Dickinson in the southwest, and Williston in the northwest. The four losses, to Brinsmade, Cando, Inkster, and Dickinson, all came in games where Donaldson did not pitch. Years later, while pitching for a team in Bertha, Minnesota in 1927, he threw a no-hitter against Fargo.

Bill Drake

During the early 1900s, it was common for traveling, or “barnstorming” teams to make tours through the state and take on local teams. The most noted touring clubs were two-all black teams based in the Twin Cities; the Minneapolis Keystones and the St. Paul Colored Gophers. Although they were not primarily a baseball team, the Nashville Students, a traveling black minstrel show, toured the Red River Valley in 1900. While performing in Fargo and Grand Forks, the Students also played baseball against local teams, the first known occurrence of games between all-white and all-black teams in North Dakota.^{xviii}

In early June 1915, the Tennessee Rats, another traveling all-black baseball team based in Missouri, defeated the Brinsmade, North Dakota town ball team 1-0 on the local grounds. A week later, it was announced that pitcher Bill Drake, who had been a member of the Rats, had been signed off the Tennessee club by Brinsmade. Soon after he joined the club, All-Nations came through Brinsmade and Drake pitched against their star black pitcher John Donaldson. The clubs battled to a scoreless tie before the game was called due to darkness after 12 innings. Drake was the only player on the 1915 Brinsmade team that was not a local native; the rest of team was made up of local town residents and area farmers.

Bill Drake returned to Brinsmade in 1916 and was joined by several other imported players. Other than his status as a former member of the all-black Tennessee Rats, there was no mention of the fact that Drake was black. In addition, the race of the new members of the team was not noted. After a

successful season, in early August it was reported that Drake, along with six other members of the team (which would have been at least half, if not a majority, of the team) had left town for the season. The report went on to say “During their stay here the boys proved themselves gentlemen in every respect and we can all hope to see them back again next season.”^{xix}

Drake did return to Brinsmade in 1917 and in addition to several other imported players, he was joined by at least one other black player, catcher Sam Bennett. The club easily beat most of the area competition and after defeating the Grand Forks club in July, it was said “Drake and Bennett, the colored battery for Brinsmade, are without a doubt the best performers in the state of North Dakota.”^{xx}

Brinsmade also scheduled games that summer against the Fargo-Moorhead and Warren, Minnesota Northern League teams. They lost all of the games, but by narrow margins, a testament to the quality of the Brinsmade club. In late July, Brinsmade defeated Williston three straight for the championship of the state and according to the local weekly “have decisively beaten the strongest independent teams in the state, and can well lay claim to the championship.”^{xxi}

World War I resulted in declining attendance the loss of several players to the draft, causing the Northern League to end play for the 1917 season on July 4. There was talk of forming a “new Northern League”, a four-team league involving Brinsmade, New Rockford, Minot and Williston for the rest of the summer. There was no mention if the proposed league would have sought recognition under the National Agreement in Organized Baseball, but it would have been interesting to see how the participation by Brinsmade’s black players would have been handled, but the issue never came up. Williston wanted to retain their independent status, the idea was abandoned, and baseball ended in North Dakota for the year.

Drake and Bennett returned to St. Louis where they finished the season with their all-black teams. Both would have long and successful careers in the Negro Leagues. Although he primarily caught in Brinsmade, Bennett played multiple positions with St. Louis-based colored teams. He once claimed he gave pointers on playing the outfield to white Hall of Famer Tris Speaker.^{xxii} Drake pitched for several black teams, including the Kansas City Monarchs, and later picked up the nickname “Plunk” for his propensity to hit opposing batters who crowded the plate.

Bobby Marshall

Bobby Marshall was arguably the best all around athlete, black or white, ever in the state of Minnesota. He integrated high school sports programs at Minneapolis' Central High School in the late 1890s and the University of Minnesota football team where he became only the second black All-American. Marshall played in the NFL and is a member of both the pro and college football Hall of Fames. In addition to football, he excelled in track and field, boxing, tennis, basketball, wrestling, ice hockey and baseball and played many sports competitively well into his 40s.

In 1907, the small town of LaMoure, North Dakota stocked its team with several college players, among them Bobby Marshall. The local paper provided the following assessment: "The playing of Bob Marshall has always been a source of great satisfaction to the fans ... [he is] the best third baseman in this section of the country. Surely he has always played consistent ball. He is sure on picking up grounders, has an easy throw to first, and while not an infallible batsman, yet he is very dependable with the stick." The paper went on to say "He should be warmly welcomed next summer if he sees fit to return." ^{xxiii}

After earning his law degree from the University of Minnesota, Marshall joined the St. Paul Colored Gophers, an all-black touring baseball team. Marshall returned to North Dakota in June 1911 with the Gophers and played a number of games including contests against Jamestown, Bismarck and Mandan. Marshall may also have played briefly with the Regent and Mott, North Dakota teams in 1919.^{xxiv} No specific mention of Bobby Marshall was found in the 1919 editions of the town's weekly papers, although one indirect reference was made. In a game in June, when the Mott starting pitcher was unable to finish a game, the game story only added "... Marshall was also used..."^{xxv}

The Twenties

After the Northern League folded before the end of the 1917 season, the league did not reorganize again until 1933. However, other professional leagues were formed in the Dakotas. The Class D Dakota League operated in 1921 and 1922 with representation from Wahpeton (with Breckenridge, Minnesota), Fargo, Jamestown, Valley City, Bismarck and various teams from South Dakota. In 1923 the North Dakota teams broke away and formed their own four-team league with Carrington/New Rockford (which transferred the franchise to Valley City mid-season), Minot, Jamestown, and Bismarck. However, independent baseball continued in most other communities. Many teams were made up of salaried outsiders, and black players were still prevalent on many of those teams.

In 1927 the Bismarck White Sox were still an all-white team. That summer the biggest game of the year was against a team from Parshall, North Dakota featuring a black battery of pitcher Logan Hensley

and catcher Sam Bennett. Hensley was in the middle of a long Negro National League career, mostly with the St. Louis Stars. Bismarck manager Neil Churchill countered with his own ace pitcher for the game, Charley Boardman, and the former major leaguer beat Hensley and Parshall 1-0. The next season Hensley rejoined his St. Louis team, but Sam Bennett returned to Parshall and was reunited with pitcher Bill Drake, his former teammate in Brinsmade ten years earlier. Also, in 1928, Kenmare, a small town in northwestern North Dakota, employed Tom "Steamboat" Williams, the "famous colored pitcher."^{xxvi}

The win over Parshall would be one of the few for Bismarck over all-black or integrated teams during the next several years. In 1929 Jamestown signed two blacks; catcher Chappie Gray and pitcher Freddie Sims. Sims played with the Kansas City Monarchs in 1920 and both had played against, and beaten, Bismarck the previous year when they were members of the traveling All-Nations team. The talented battery gave Jamestown a decided advantage over the all-white Bismarck team. In addition, several other all-black barnstorming teams passed through Bismarck that summer and beat the local team.

In addition to the strengthened Jamestown club, the small town of Enderlin, North Dakota also featured a black battery; a left-handed pitcher named Vivens, and a catcher named Emery. Emery's identity remains unknown, but a Johnny Vivens pitched for the all-black Tennessee Rats in 1916, no doubt the same man. In 1929 Enderlin beat Bismarck handily and, behind 16 strikeouts by Vivens, defeated Jamestown's ace Freddie Sims 11-0. This was the first known game in North Dakota in which both teams had black batteries.

Also that year Churchill hired what may have been the team's first non-white player when he imported a Native American pitcher, "Indian Joe" Day, from Shields, North Dakota on the nearby Sioux reservation for a big game against Jamestown. The final game of the 1929 season in Bismarck was between two traveling teams, the all-black Cuban Giants and the House of David. The Giants featured an aging, but still effective, John Donaldson, and brothers Art and Charlie Hancock, who would both join the Jamestown club the next season.

After Bert Jones' brief appearance in Dickinson in 1904, the team did not employ another black player until 1933. When the Dickinson club was hit with several injuries in early August, they signed catcher John Van and infielder Benny "Hump" Hamilton. Van had been the catcher for the great black pitcher Webster McDonald on a semi-pro team in Little Falls, Minnesota a few years earlier. Hamilton had been signed off the Sioux City Ghosts, a traveling black team that passed through town earlier that summer.

The *Dickinson Press* made no mention of Van and Hamilton's race, so it is possible several other black players played in town earlier, without being identified as such.

That same year, in June of 1933, Bismarck signed its first black player, pitcher Roosevelt Davis, who was followed a month later by catcher Quincy Troupe.^{xxvii} Over the next two years Churchill added more black players, culminating in the national championship team of 1935.

Saul Davis

Although he did not play on integrated teams until the 1930s, no account of early black baseball in North Dakota would be complete without mention of Saul Davis. The light-hitting shortstop had a solid career in the Negro National League during the 1920s and on several barnstorming teams in the 1930s. One of his traveling teams, the Zulus, passed through Minot, North Dakota in 1934. He was left behind by his team after he went on a drinking binge with some locals after the game and he remained in Minot the rest of his life.

Davis played with a local amateur team, the Minot Merchants, until he was in his 50s. He married, had a family, and operated several successful restaurants, including Saul's Barbeque, in the city. He was also involved in some other business enterprises including bootlegging and prostitution for which he was arrested many times, and was once convicted and sentenced to a prison term. However, later in life he was a beloved member of the community, even receiving a distinguished citizen award from the mayor of Minot.

Summary

Blacks had been playing baseball on integrated independent teams in North Dakota for more than fifty years before Jackie Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers. During the summer of 1920, a young white pitcher named Albert Chandler played with a semi-pro team in Grafton, North Dakota. He likely played against blacks either with rival town teams or traveling barnstorming clubs. Perhaps these experiences helped shape his attitudes about racial integration a quarter century later when he was Baseball Commissioner Happy Chandler.

When baseball's color line was broken and major league teams began signing black players, racial segregation was still prevalent in many parts of the country. During the 1950s small towns throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North and South Dakota helped young black stars such as Henry Aaron, Lou Brock, and Willie Stargell get their start in professional baseball in the Northern League. The upper

Midwest was one of the few areas of the country where these young players could gain the experienced needed to reach the major leagues and eventually develop into Hall of Fame players.

Also, after the decline of the Negro Leagues, dozens of black stars played in the semi-pro Manitoba-Dakota League. In addition to various Canadian teams, Bismarck, Dickinson, Williston, and Minot, North Dakota all had entries at different times in the league that operated from 1950 to 1957. Now mostly too old to be considered prospects by Organized Baseball, Willard Brown, Willie Wells, Leon Day, Ray Dandridge, and Satchel Paige were among the many black stars that finished their careers in the Manitoba-Dakota League.

Many of the blacks who played on town teams in North Dakota in the first three decades of the 1900s also had successful careers in the Negro Leagues. In addition, part of the reason for the success of the Northern and Manitoba-Dakota Leagues, and the black players that played with member teams, may have been that generations of baseball fans in North Dakota were accustomed to having blacks as members of their community and ballplayers on the local diamonds.

Sources:

Stephanie Abbot Roper, From Military to "Nigger Towns", African-Americans in North Dakota, 1890-1940, unpublished paper

Bruce Berg and Reggie Aligada, Common Ground: McElroy Park's Jack Brown Stadium (Jamestown), Common Ground Press, North Dakota State Library, 1996

Stephanie Abbot Roper, African-Americans in North Dakota, 1800-1940, unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks

Stew Thornley, Baseball in Minnesota: The Definitive History, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006

Steven R. Hoffbeck, Swinging for the Fences: Black Baseball in Minnesota, Historical Society Press, 2005

Todd Peterson, Early Black Baseball in Minnesota: The St. Paul Gophers, Minneapolis Keystones and Other Barnstorming Teams of the Dead Ball Era, McFarland, 2010

Thomas P. Newgard, William Sherman and John Guerro, African-Americans in North Dakota: Sources and Assessments, University of Mary Press, Bismarck, 1994, Appendices page 195

Todd Peterson, A Perfect Right to Play, the National Pastime, SABR, 2012 (Bobby Marshall, Dick Brookins)

Solomon Otto, "I Played Against Satchel for Three Seasons: Blacks and Whites in the Twilight Leagues", Journal of Popular Culture, Spring, 1974, Volume 7, Pages 797-803

Scott Roper, "Another Chink in Jim Crow: Race and Baseball on the Northern Plains, 1900-1935", in Out of the Shadows: African American Baseball from the Cuban Giants to Jackie Robinson, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 2005

<http://www.pitchblackbaseball.com>

John Holway, Voices From the Great Black Baseball Leagues, Courier Dover Publications, 2012

Bill Kirwin, The Mysterious Case of Dick Brookins,

- ⁱ Willston (ND) Graphic, August 3, 1916
- ⁱⁱ Mott (ND) Pioneer Press, May 22, 1919
- ⁱⁱⁱ May 30, 1919
- ^{iv} Ward County (Minot, ND) Independent, May 6, 1915
- ^v Medical History of Fort Buford, Dakota Territory, 1868-95", Washington: National Archives, 1960.
- ^{vi} Seymour, the People's Game, page 567
- ^{vii}
- ^{viii} Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald, August 3, 1900
- ^{ix} Wolford (ND) Mirror, September 9, 1909
- ^x Wolford (ND) Mirror, September 30, 1909
- ^{xi} Napoleon (ND) Homestead, July 11, 1902
- ^{xii} Page (ND) Record, July 10, 1903
- ^{xiii} Bismarck (ND) Tribune, July 4, 1904
- ^{xiv} Hoffbeck
- ^{xv} Peterson
- ^{xvi} Kirwin
- ^{xvii}
- ^{xviii}
- ^{xix} Brinsmade (ND) Star, August 4, 1916
- ^{xx} Grand Forks (ND) Daily Herald, July 5, 1917
- ^{xxi} Brinsmade (ND) Star, July 26, 1917
- ^{xxii} Holway
- ^{xxiii} LaMoure (ND) County Chronicle, July 19, 1907
- ^{xxiv} Hoffbeck
- ^{xxv} Mott (ND) Pioneer Press, June 19, 1919
- ^{xxvi} Kenmare (ND) News, May 10, 1928
- ^{xxvii} Dunkel