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South Bend Tribune

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Dodgers' Jackie Robinson: Baseball's equality pioneer

Baseball's hottest rookie of 1947 was a former college athlete of national acclaim, a dependable hitter, a steady if unspectacular fielder — and a black man.

His name was Jackie Robinson. Major League Baseball 1997 will devote its season to commemorating Robinson the athlete, and the courage he brought to the effort to integrate the sport 50 years ago.

That Branch Rickey, general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, was the engineer of the Great Experiment, and Robinson the actual player, was no accident.

It was said that Rickey still smarted from the humiliation of a racial incident 40 years earlier in South Bend. A black player with his Ohio Wesleyan University football team had been denied registration as a regular guest at the old Oliver Hotel. Rickey was fazed to have a cot brought to his room to accommodate the young man.

The Dodgers had their pick of black players whom they could have snatched up for the regular season. But Rickey wanted Robinson because, he said, Jackie possessed the courage NOT to fight back in the face of the inevitable on-the-field bigotry. Rickey understood, and made sure Robinson did too, that the first black player would be under close scrutiny by the entire nation — both on and off the playing field.

Robinson was no stranger to bigotry or hypocrisy. His older brother, Mack, had lost his job in a purge of blacks from the municipal payroll of Pasadena, Calif. It happened at a time Mack Robinson was representing the United States at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and finishing second to Jesse Owens in the 200 meter dash.

Repeated over the years are the stories of an anti-Robinson petition among other Dodgers players, and strike threats by at least two other opposing teams, St. Louis and Philadelphia. National League President Ford Frick (a native of Waukegan, Ind.) retailed by jangling suspension of any Cardinal player who participated in a strike. One never materialized.

Robinson was not the greatest baseball player of his generation, although he could have been the greatest overall athlete. His long-jumping at Pasadena Junior College is legendary. When he transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles, the basketball and football coaches competed for Robinson. (Robinson eventually became a running back for the Bruins.)

Robinson played only 10 years in the big leagues, battling 311 overall. He competed in 1,582 games in a career limited by having joined the Dodgers at the advanced age of 33. Robinson provided the intangibles the Dodgers so sorely needed in that era — fierce but clean competitiveness. He helped propel Brooklyn into six World Series, including its first-ever championship in 1955.

Equally important, Robinson earned the respect of opponents — some of whom had openly expressed their animosity to him in his rookie year.

Robinson died at the young age of 53. Some have suggested pent-up emotions contributed to his fatal heart attack. If that's so, it could be said he gave his life for a cause.

Baseball at times leads, at other times follows, societal trends. At times suspicious moments have included the 1994 strike that reemerged from greed.

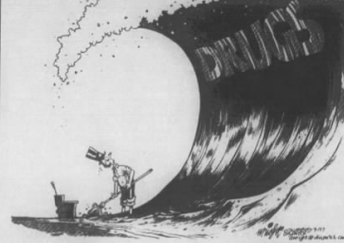
But one of the sport's shining moments, perhaps its finest, came with the removal of the color barrier half a century ago. It is something that cannot be erased by ignoble events.

DOONESBURY

By GARRY TRUDEAU



OPINION



River has room for all fishermen

Why do fly fishermen need their own areas? They are welcome on the whole river, always have been and always will be. It is because they don't want to be bothered by other fishermen or by the fact that they think they're better than other fishermen.

As a fisherman who fishes bass, bluegills, and largemouth bass, I can honestly say they all have their own challenges. And I enjoy them all, but I do not believe that any style deserves its own section of the river. Some fishermen like to fish all three techniques in the same spot.

The catch and release and fly fishing only rules proposed a right down the block from my house. I take my children there on Sunday afternoons. When my son catches his first steelhead, an I suppose to tell him he can't take it home and show him the look on an eight-year-old's face and tell him that.

There is room for everyone on the whole river. We don't need a minority group of fishermen to dictate to the majority. Let's keep the whole river open to everyone, no matter what style of fishing they like.

RONALD H. TREASH
South Bend

What can we do to help these blackbirds or crows that lost the strength of tree limbs and telephone lines in "Leaper Park area"?

Maybe a big sign saying "Hawks — not crows" would help.

DON VOGL
South Bend

Petition drive
On Feb. 26, a Tribune editorial supported the effort to limit congressional campaign contributions and campaign spending, and the people's petition drive.

The cost of last year's federal elections was \$2 billion. For each PAC, campaign and caucus gave over 10 percent even though they paid the interests of only a smaller fraction of citizens \$5 million. I don't think so, either.

We can fight Big Money with Big Involvement. I am a local volunteer for Common Cause, the nationwide citizens lobby spearheading a petition drive. Anyone who wants a petition can write me at 718 JMS Building, 618 N. Main St., South Bend, Ind.

STEPHEN G. DRENDALL
South Bend

Swift kick
Regarding the death threats to N.D. football player Jim Sauer.

For the shame of it: Threatening to end a life created by God because of a lack of faith. Besides, the word "murder" has been the biggest factor in this kid's game.

Just as the actor in the movie remarked when he saw the bridge on the River Kwai blow up, "Madness, sheer madness."

Who are these casual loose-wind cronies who do this kind of thing? They hide their cowardice behind a telephone call or write letters in the darkness while staring in their beds.

As for the so-called friends of the fine young man who crossed the threshold of life in that institution of higher learning to the north.

With friends like these, no enemies need apply. In the process of maturation (which in their case may take longer than usual, due to their latent development) these people will realize their foolishness, and with their heads bowed, maybe their parents should give them a good whack on the back of the head when they see them in the place where the sun don't shine. Out!

LEE MCKNIGHT
Mishawaka

LaSalle debate team
Regarding the Vow letter Feb. 13 from John Verten, arch of Mishawaka.

He stated that as school in the South Bend and Mishawaka school corporations had a National Forum League (NFL) speech team. While we do not have an NFL speech team, LaSalle High School does have an NFL debate team. I don't know if Verten was writing only about speech teams, however, I believe

that the debate team is equally important.

The LaSalle team is coached by Karen Peterson, who volunteers her time in order for the school to have such a team. Her untiring work as well as the effort put forth by the involved students is to be commended. They have competed in many competitions representing the South Bend Community School Corp., as the only debate team in the corporation.

I am a LaSalle High School teacher.

BETH A. BECKERSDORF
South Bend

Try a prayer
It has been said that more things are wrought through prayer than this world has ever thought of. So let us pray for the best that the future has in store for us.

The latest legal controversy (football coach Joe Moore's lawsuit against the university for alleged age discrimination) must be a not proper quick and universal. This is not the first time we have asked Our Mother Mary for help when the university was in trouble. So I am suggesting that the next time you stop for a prayer, include this intention in it. There are just too many distractions already at the university, so why add another? We hope that the many prayers which will be heard by the Lord will be the best for all.

Maybe a big sign saying "Hawks — not crows" would help.

DON VOGL
South Bend

No excuses
The two elected officials provide the best quality candidates for the positions they stand before them. The mayor and the city council members on Feb. 11, covering the Mishawaka Water Treatment Plant make no excuse.

Their excuse was that the plant is not a pleasant thing to look at, not to mention possible related health hazards. Granted, this might have been an acceptable excuse. However, the men should have been charged up as soon as possible and kept under control until demands quality services for our revenue, not excuse.

N.D. "DENNY" MURPHY
Mishawaka

Jail solution
Stephens' Mills and Central high apartments are very nice, and we are sure the Robertson Building Apartments will be equally as nice. These old buildings have really been made into something useful and are bringing beauty into downtown South Bend.

So why can't the buildings in the Studebaker Corridor be made into a new jail? The size seems quite ample to hold more prisoners, it is centrally located, it would be an improvement over all those buildings just sitting there.

Wouldn't it be wise to have one solution to solve these two problems? We would be eliminating an eyesore and supplying the jail that we need.

Granger
ROBERT AND NANCY ELSNER
Mishawaka

The good and the bad
I read about the new lawsuit coming out starting June 1 and I would like to suggest that the Tribune give thought more to its selection of comes for the people.

From my point of view "Dishonest" has been a failure. I don't understand it at all and consequently have given up reading it.

Also, "Honey" has lost all of its humor and originality since the change in cartoonists. I believe it could easily be replaced and not missed. NEVER touch "The Letter" or "The Horse." They do come any better than this one.

JOHN ADAMS
St. Joseph

Send your letters to Voice of the People, South Bend Tribune, 225 W. Collins Ave., South Bend, IN 46626. Fax them to (219) 238-1786, or send them via e-mail to vopt@att.net.

MALLARD FILLMORE
ALL RIGHT, O.J., YOU'VE WON THE PRIZE. COMMERCIAL NEWS HAS BEEN DONE WITH THE MALLARD FILLMORE.

THAT'S IT, DANNIS! NOW FOR THE NEXT!

By BRUCE TINSLEY

For Mike Smith, Calicut.

FOR TILL ABOUT 100.

Choices are between FBI and Clinton

CAL THOMAS

If forced to choose between the Federal Bureau of Investigation, with all its recent flaws, and the Clinton White House, which is nothing but

flawed, who would you be more inclined to believe in a dispute involving who is telling the truth?

The president claims he was never told about alleged attempts by the Chinese government to penetrate the American elections system and that the FBI instructed the National Security Council staff during a briefing not to tell him. But the council issued a statement denying the president's account and insisting it had plans to restrict even White House access to the dissemination of the

choices of Clinton and the FBI or any information provided to the NSC staff.

If I go with the FBI on this one, the president is equally important. The LaSalle team is coached by Karen Peterson, who volunteers her time in order for the school to have such a team.

Her untiring work as well as the effort put forth by the involved students is to be commended. They have competed in many competitions representing the South Bend Community School Corp., as the only debate team in the corporation.

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