

Jackie Robinson

Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born on January 31, 1919 in Cairo, Georgia. Jackie was a grandson of a southern slave and a son of a poor sharecropper. Jackie was the youngest of five children. When Jackie was an infant his father abandoned the family. Knowing no one else to turn to, Jackie's mother, Mallie, pulled up stakes in Georgia and moved her family to Pasadena, California. In California, the family lived with his mother's brother, Jackie's uncle. Jackie had to sell newspapers on street corners to help his family out financially.

Even in pleasant Pasadena racial prejudices persisted. The uncrossable street in Pasadena was named North Fair Oaks; this street divided the blacks from the whites. Jackie's family was the only black family on their block and the prejudices they encountered only strengthened their bonds with each other. While Jackie was young he ran with a Pasadena gang. This gang was mild by today's standards but still enough to get him into scrapes with the law. But his mother, devoutly Methodist and a domestic worker, held the family together.

Jackie attended the University of California at Los Angeles. There he became the first man to letter in four separate sports: track and field, basketball, football, and, of course, baseball. His teammates said that he would have been more popular were it not for a smoldering anger that flared when he sensed racial injustices. While attending UCLA, Jackie also met his future wife, Rachel Islum. They eventually married on February 10, 1946.

Jackie Robinson was drafted into the army in 1942. A series of conflicts occurred while he rose to the rank of lieutenant. He was tried in a court martial after one dispute over seating in a military bus. He could have been dishonorably discharged but instead was acquitted.

In 1945, after fighting in World War II, Jackie joined the Negro Leagues' Kansas City Monarch's baseball team. Although Jackie was an All-Star, he still didn't enjoy the Jim Crow-enforced lifestyle he had to live.

Meanwhile, The Brooklyn Dodger's manager, Branch Rickey, was secretly scouting black baseball players for a supposed "Brown Dodgers" team. Really Rickey was looking for a black player to break the major league color barrier. On August 28, 1945, Rickey asked Jackie if he could hold his temper and not retaliate for the abuse he was sure to receive if he played for the Dodgers. Jackie Robinson accepted the challenge and in 1946 he entered "organized baseball" with Brooklyn's top minor league team, the Montreal Royals. Jackie led Montreal to the championship of the minor leagues and was beloved by the French-Canadian fans. But he had suffered tremendous abuse on and off the field.

On April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first black to play at baseball's top level. Jackie was now playing for the Dodgers. Several of his teammates started petitions to keep him off the team. Other teams also organized boycotts, but they all fizzled. A campaign of verbal and physical abuse continued throughout Jackie's baseball career. Often, opposing pitchers and base runners would test their racial theory that blacks were easily intimidated. Hotels also refused to let Jackie stay in their rooms and death threats in the mail were also typical. Jackie Robinson's bravery and self-discipline in rising above all these obstacles won the respect, sometimes grudgingly, of most of the players. Fans also turned out in record numbers to see his electrifying playing.

Jackie led the National League in stolen bases and finished second in runs scored. At the end of his first year he was named rookie of the year, on a pennant-winning team. Jackie Robinson went on to become one of baseball's greatest and most popular stars. Jackie Robinson died on October 24, 1972 in Stamford, Connecticut at the age of 53.



“A life is not important except in the impact it has on other's lives.”
-Jackie Robinson