

3-4-1998

Jackie Robinson

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Jackie Robinson" (1998). *On Sport and Society*. 499.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/499>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
March 4, 1998

It has been the year to remember the achievements of Jackie Robinson both in and outside of baseball. Robinson's breaking of the color line had a social significance which transcended the game of baseball. At the season opener at Shea Stadium the President of the United States recognized Jackie Robinson, and the Acting Commissioner of Baseball retired Jackie's number for all of major league baseball. Radio and TV programs have examined the events of 1947, social commentators have recalled Robinson's contributions to American life, and baseball historians have paid their tributes to this remarkable man.

At baseball's annual All-Star game next week in Cleveland, the man who broke the color line in the American League and in Cleveland will finally receive some of the recognition he deserves. Larry Doby's experiences in the American League were not really all that much different than Jackie Robinson's in the National League, except that Doby was second and he did have Robinson to draw on for both advice and encouragement.

Only a few months after Robinson's debut in Brooklyn, on the 5th of July 1947, Bill Veeck signed Larry Doby to a contract and that day he joined the Indians for a game against the White Sox in Chicago. As historian Jules Tygiel has shown Doby's experiences in some ways replicated those of Robinson, while in other respects they were vastly different, as were the personalities of the two men.

Both had been born in the South and raised outside the region. Both were raised by their mothers who worked as domestics. Both were talented athletes in many sports. Both attended intergrated schools. Both served in the military and faced segregation for the first time there.

Robinson was aggressive and self-confident. Doby was shy and soft-spoken. When confronted by segregation in the military Robinson struck back, while in similar circumstances Doby says he "just went into a shell."

Doby's first stint in desegregated baseball was much different from that of Robinson. Doby did not have a year of preparation in the minors and a raft of instruction from Branch Rickey. Three hours after signing a contract Doby faced major league pitching as a pinch hitter.

Bill Veeck held a quick team meeting to prepare the Indian players for the second of baseball's great experiments, and when Doby came into the locker room most players greeted him politely, while one player from Texas turned his back on him. There was little hostility and some players like Joe Gordon and player-manager Lou Boudreau did their best to make him feel welcome. Doby faced the same range of insults and obscenities, many with a racial tone, that had been rained on Robinson by opposing players.

The 1947 season did not go well in Cleveland. From the first wild swinging strike-out in a pinch hit role, Doby suffered through the games and his game suffered accordingly. By the end of July management decided that he needed to be converted into an outfielder. His .156 batting average and shoddy play in the field were far from the spectacular performance of Robinson during his first year. Cleveland black sportswriter "Doc" Young concluded that Doby's problems stemmed from the pressures of being a symbol.

The following season Larry Doby arrived at spring training a new man, and quickly had training camp talking about his vast improvement. Veeck moved spring training to Arizona to get Doby away from the segregation of Florida, but as it turned out the hotel in Tucson did not allow Negroes. The loneliness was still there. Doby had no one to share his off-hours as he was often forced into segregated housing. When a teammate hit a home run Doby was not sure if he should wait at home plate and shake his hand, so he retreated to the dugout where he could shake the hand of a white man out of public view.

In the first months he was a streak hitter and still had occasional problems in the outfield, but the addition of Satchel Paige at mid-season ending his racial isolation seemed to steady his performance. In August he had a 21 game hitting streak and down the stretch in September Doby was a key figure in the pennant drive. He hit .301 with 14 homers and 65 RBI's. In the World Series his .318 and was a key to the Indian World Championship. It was a remarkable resurrection which launched him on his thirteen year career primarily in Cleveland with stops in Chicago and Detroit. He led the league in home runs in 1952 and '54, RBI's in 1954, and Slugging Percentage and runs scored in 1952, and was a six time American League All-Star.

Overshadowed from the beginning by Jackie Robinson, and then overshadowed by the showmanship of Paige in Cleveland, it took Doby a few years to earn the recognition due him. Next week he

will be recognized for his achievements as a player and a pioneer, and perhaps he will finally be given his due.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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