

# **Swinging Racism Out of the Park**

## **Cassidy Jackson**

Having courage is the ability to go against pain, fear, and judgement. Baseball in the 1940s was nothing like it is today due to a lot of racism and colorism. Fairness and equality towards other races that weren't white wasn't normalized in society, nor was it in baseball. This was considered a white man's sport until Jackie Robinson came, changing the league and world for good. Jackie Robinson is a black history hero because he helped pave the way for black athletes and the black community through the challenges he faced, his contributions, and left a lasting legacy for future generations.

Robinson was born on January 31, 1919, in Cairo, Georgia. He was the son to a sharecropper and grandson to former slaves and grew up in Pasadena, California to a single mother of five. Once he graduated from Pasadena Junior College, he went to play sports at UCLA. While at UCLA, he participated in basketball, baseball, track and field, and football. After college, he went to enlist in the U.S. Army during World War II, but was discharged for standing up for his rights and not sitting in the back of the segregated military bus.

When Jackie Robinson returned from the Army, he decided to join the Negro League to play shortstop for Kansas City Monarchs in 1945. During that time, Branch Rickey, manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, asked him to come and join the team. Being on the Dodgers wasn't very easy for Jackie Robinson. His teammates didn't want to play with him, and he endured racist insults from fans and other teams, death threats, and was told he can't fight back by Dodger management. He would experience pressure each time he stepped up to bat during games, which likely made him feel nervous. However, he persevered and became one of the best baseball players (of any race) there ever was.

As the years passed by, things started to change for the better in Jackie and many other African Americans' favor. Robinson won Rookie of the Year in 1947, Most Valuable Player in 1949, and was the first African American to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. Not only did he do great things in baseball, but he paved the way for many African Americans. Robinson was an active member of the NAACP, which is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He became an activist for the Civil Rights Movement, often speaking out for African Americans that couldn't speak for themselves. He co-founded a black operated and owned bank in Harlem called Freedom National Bank of Harlem, letting African Americans access their money and get financial aid if needed. He also became the first African American VP of a major company, the coffee company Chock full o' Nuts. He used his position to help improve working conditions for the employees of the company. Jackie Robinson continued to fight for civil rights until he passed away on October 24, in 1972, in Stamford, Connecticut.

Thanks to Jackie Robinson, athletes no longer need to be concerned about racial barriers when participating in sports. Lots of opportunities now exist for African Americans. Even though Robinson has helped paved the way for African American athletes, unfortunately, some racism still exists in sports. African American athletes, such as Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James are always speaking out against racial injustices. Speaking out for yourself and others about racism still matters. On a personal note, Jackie Robinson inspires me to be the best athlete that I can be. Knowing what he went through motivates me to push all negative thoughts and words from people when I play out of my mind. Our country is forever changed due to Jackie Robinson's courage. He helped us to push further, dream bigger, and continue the fight for equality.