

Jackie Robinson

In 1997, MLB retired his uniform number 42 across all major league teams; he was the first professional athlete in any sport to be so honored. Robinson broke the baseball color line when he started at first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947. When the Dodgers signed Robinson, it heralded the end of racial segregation in professional baseball that had relegated black players to the Negro leagues since the 1880s. Robinson was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. During his 10-year MLB career, Robinson won the inaugural Rookie of the Year Award in 1947, was an All-Star for six consecutive seasons from 1949 through 1954, and won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 1949—the first black player so honored. Robinson played in six World Series and contributed to the Dodgers' 1955 World Series championship. Robinson's character, his use of nonviolence, and his talent challenged the traditional basis of segregation that had then marked many other aspects of American life. He influenced the culture of and contributed significantly to the civil rights movement. Robinson also was the first black television analyst in MLB and the first black vice president of a major American corporation, Chock Full o' Nuts. In the 1960s, he helped establish the Freedom National Bank, an African-American-owned financial institution based in Harlem, New York. After his death in 1972, Robinson was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal and Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of his achievements on and off the field. In early 1945, while Robinson was at Sam Houston College, the Kansas City Monarchs sent him a written offer to play professional baseball in the Negro leagues. Robinson accepted a contract for \$400 per month. Although he played well for the Monarchs, Robinson was frustrated with the experience. He had grown used to a structured playing environment in college, and the Negro leagues' disorganization and embrace of gambling interests appalled him. The hectic travel schedule also placed a burden on his relationship with Isom, with whom he could now communicate only by letter. In all, Robinson played 47 games at shortstop for the Monarchs, hitting .387 with five home runs, and registering 13 stolen bases. He also appeared in the 1945 East-West All-Star game, going hitless in five at-bats. During the season, Robinson pursued potential major league interests. No black man had played in the major leagues since Moses Fleetwood Walker in 1884, but the Boston Red Sox nevertheless held a tryout at Fenway Park for Robinson and other black players on April 16. The tryout, however, was a farce chiefly designed to assuage the desegregationist sensibilities of powerful Boston City Councilman Isadore H. Y. Muchnick.