

Rick Swaine. *The Black Stars Who Made Baseball Whole*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. 296 pp. Paper, \$35.00.

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In 1947 Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier. *The Black Stars Who Made Baseball Whole* dismisses the idea that once the color barrier was breached black players were allowed unrestricted access to baseball after more than fifty years of institutionalized segregation. Rick Swaine spotlights the inaccuracy of this conception through a meticulous retelling of the tales of those black ballplayers who followed Robinson and were overshadowed by his towering legacy. Portions of the color barrier remained in place for years after integration, stifling the efforts of many talented black players who might have otherwise had more successful Major League careers. The most notable of these, of course, is the great Satchel Paige.

Robinson's remarkable social and baseball accomplishments remain among the most recognizable and historically significant achievements in sport; however, the many players who followed in Robinson's footsteps, both literally and figuratively, also experienced their share of staunch bigotry while simultaneously facing an incredible task where failure would certainly come at the expense of millions of black Americans. Swaine's purpose in this book is to propel the accomplishments of those black ballplayers that followed Robinson into a more prominent place in baseball's narrative about the breaking of the color barrier.

With great detail and precision, Swaine notes the incredible persistence and remarkable achievements of these black ballplayers, focusing on the challenges both on and off the field that paved the way for future generations of black players—among them the great Hank Aaron, the last Negro Leaguer to play in the Major Leagues.

Robinson dominates most discussions that detail the breaking of the color barrier; however, remaining consistent with the book's title and theme, Swaine devotes only one chapter to Robinson's biography and statistics. Although perhaps a bit too brief, the chapter nevertheless highlights the enormous impact Robinson had upon the game, prompting Swaine to describe Robinson as "the most historically significant baseball player ever" (13). To his credit, however, Swaine avoids rehashing an existent, albeit brilliant, narrative that has been told by a great many baseball historians.

Swaine refers to the most notable black ballplayers in the early years of integration—the first twenty black players whose Major League accomplishments were among the best and most significant according to the author—as the “first generation.” Although Swaine manages to briefly highlight the efforts of many black players who preceded Robinson, the central premise of the book concerns this “first generation.” Swaine manages to effectively weave their collective accomplishments into the dominant Robinson narrative but not before noting the incredible importance of Branch Rickey’s “great experiment” (i.e., signing Jackie Robinson) and later Bill Veeck’s “greatest publicity coup” (i.e., signing Satchel Paige), each of which established the groundwork for the Robinson narrative.

The subsequent success of the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Cleveland Indians prompts Swaine to highlight the significance of each Major League team’s eventual integration, spotlighting the black stars on each team whose remarkable feats accompanied this transition. Despite the success of the aforementioned two teams, the book does note that Major League Baseball was indeed slow to sign other Negro League marquee players.

As a stated goal of the book, Swaine brings the feats of black ballplayers to new generations of fans while reacquainting seasoned fans with the vast achievements of black ballplayers besides Robinson. In this respect the book certainly lives up to its goal. Swaine’s extremely thorough research even includes a very informative and detailed appendix chronicling, among other things, the complete roster of black Major League players from 1947–1959.

The book has a few shortcomings, the most notable of which is Swaine’s zeal to recognize the select few black ballplayers who “never had a chance” in a series of very brief vignettes. Although his intentions are good, these snippets seem in some way to trivialize the otherwise “legitimate” success these players might have had in the Major Leagues. Despite this minor drawback, *The Black Stars Who Made Baseball Whole* accomplishes an admirable task and is indeed a remarkable read.

