JACKIE ROBINSON'S

UNFORGETTABLE SUMMER OF BASEBALL IN MONTREAL

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75th Anniversary edition with a new preface

by

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PREFACE

It was in 1946 that Jackie Robinson played his extraordinary summer of baseball with the Triple A Montreal Royals affiliate of the Brooklyn Dodgers. It was the year prior to his 1947 breakthrough as America's first ever Black player in Major League Baseball. Robinson's achievement is a seminal event in the history of the sport that was described as America's favourite pastime. But breaking baseball's colour barrier was also a transformational event in the advancement of the civil rights movement in the United States. A decade before Rosa Parks went down in history for her heroic 1955 refusal to give up her seat and move to the back of a Montgomery city bus, Robinson refused to give up his seat and move to the back of a US Army bus when ordered to do so. Twentieth-century civil rights champion Martin Luther King Jr. described Jackie Robinson as an important contributor to his extraordinary achievements.

Some 25 years ago, in 1996, I had the privilege of writing about "Jackie Robinson's unforgettable summer of baseball in Montreal." As a proud Montrealer and Canadian, I was somewhat frustrated that our important contribution to this admittedly American existential story was not well known, a mere footnote of sorts in this major civil rights breakthrough that has been so widely hailed south of our border. In 1946 Jackie Robinson described the people of Montreal as "warm and wonderful" toward him and his wife. The Robinson's found Montrealers to be a friendly

people. Seventy years later that hasn't changed. But as I wrote twenty-five years ago, it would be a mistake to lose sight of the fact that racism remains far too pervasive in Montreal and elsewhere. Today in the city I proudly call home some one in seven citizens have never met a Black person and that percentage grows significantly elsewhere in Quebec. It remains a great irony that here and elsewhere, those who hold negative opinions about groups other than their own are the least qualified to do so. Indeed, it is among those who have never met a person of colour or a member of a minority religious group that we find the most prejudice toward them.

The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act put an end to the racist "Jim Crow" laws that since 1877 were in force to maintain racial segregation after the end of the Civil War. These laws initially required the separation of white people and people of colour on all forms of public transportation and in school. In the 21st century, it is very regrettable that similar prejudices to those underlying such laws remain far too pervasive in the United States, in Canada and around the world. The ignorance that informs such prejudices also remains too widespread. And sadly, too many elected officials and others are willing to exploit such prejudices to make political gains. There is also far too much denial of the presence of racism and its systemic character in our societies.

The 75th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breakthrough with the Montreal Royals in 1946 and with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 comes at a most critical time in our history. Much of the planet faces the immense challenge of fighting a pandemic that has cost millions of lives. The pandemic

has exposed the persistent and glaring inequalities in our societies with its uneven economic and social impacts on the most vulnerable amongst us in the United States and Canada. Many persons of colour (often referred to in Canada as visible minorities) have been on the front lines in the fight against the contagion.

In 2020, the world bore witness to a police officer kneeling on the neck of a Black man, George Floyd, while he was in police custody, handcuffed and saying he cannot breathe. The murder of George Floyd at the front of the pandemic served as a shocking reminder of the brutality of racism. And yet despite the global outcry to which Floyd's murder gave rise, there are too many people who still refuse to name racism as the problem.

Many will celebrate the Robinson anniversary as a great achievement, an expression of openness and tolerance. But some 75 years later, Robinson's story should serve as a critical contemporary reminder that there can be no easing up in the ongoing fight against prejudice and racism. To do so, we need to take stock of the progress achieved in the struggle for the respect of civil rights. However slow progress may sometimes appear and however challenging the fight may seem, there can be no letting up.

Equal opportunity and affirmative action programs are often held up as evidence of political commitments to fight discrimination and racism. Social justice requires that the success of these laudable gestures be evaluated against results in order for us to convincingly describe our

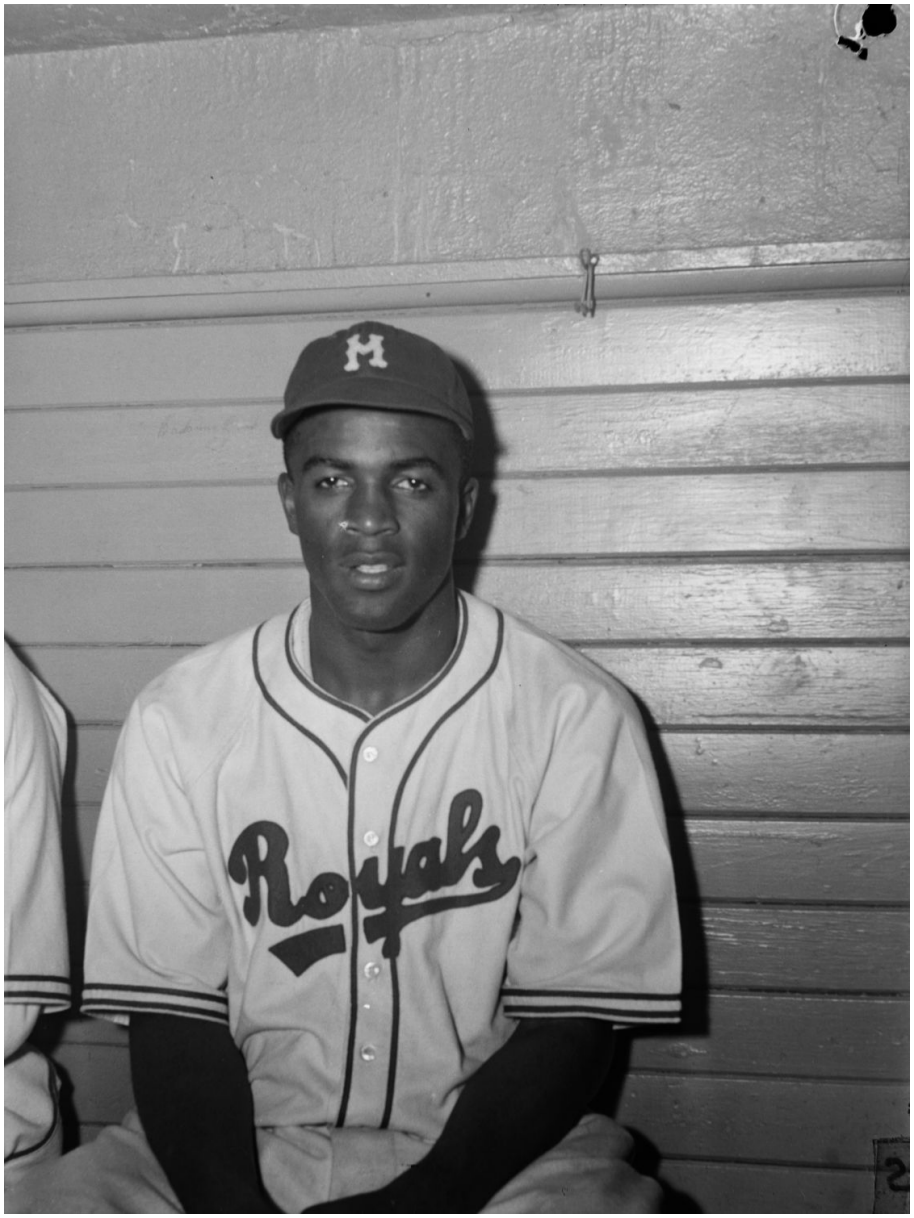
societies as inclusive. Despite decades of the existence of these programs, too few and too infrequently have they achieved the goals theyset out to attain. Where meaningful progress has not been achieved, we must identify the problem, name itand act accordingly rather than stubbornly denying its systemic character.

In 1996 my intention was for the short monograph about Robinson to be a relatively easy read with the objective of expanding knowledge. At that time, I served as director of the Quebec branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress, an organization committed to combating prejudice and discrimination and the respect for human rights. It was an era that frequently saw many communities and individuals cometogether to publicly denounce racism.

The original 1996 publication contained a number of quotes using what is increasingly referred to today as the N-word. I have adapted the quotes to leave only the first letter of this word that is now understood as an anti-Black pejorative but that was used in common parlance in Jackie Robinson's day. There is, however, one exception that readers will find involving a patently racist comment. In this instance, I felt that the softening of theword would let the racist in question off the proverbial hook. I take responsibility for that decision. Many readers will observe that since 1996 there has been a major shift in the language, reference points and framework used to discuss racism and prejudice. We have since evolved in our understanding of the ways in which our discourse can stigmatize the most vulnerable in our societies. The lived experience of many members of marginalized communities sheds light on the lack of meaningful progress in the pursuit

of social justice and the long road still ahead in ridding our societies of the scourge of racism.

As such, Robinson's unparalleled story of resilience is perhaps more relevant than ever in these challenging times. In 2021, it too often appears that the ever-necessary spirit of solidarity is lacking in the battle against racism and prejudice in all its forms. At times it feels that some have lost sight of the fact that fighting racism is a collective responsibility. It also calls upon us to show greater empathy for those of us who are most vulnerable. I want to close by thanking CIDIHCA and Frantz Voltaire for republishing the story in 2021.



THE BLACK CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE: NORTH AND SOUTH

At the start of the twentieth century, many white Americans continued to hold the racist view that Black persons constituted an inferior race and, as such, offered justification for the disregard for civil rights that was rampant in much of the United States during that era. With the support of the American Congress and the Supreme Court, the legislated disenfranchisement of Blacks was carried out in nearly all American States. In the Southern states, racist policies were extended to numerous institutions. Blacks and whites were to be born separately in hospitals and segregation was also the rule in many schools and public accommodations in the workplace and in recreational activities. As we can see, the segregationist policies also referred to as Jim Crow Laws, were many and varied throughout America and reached unimaginable proportions. For example, in Florida and in North Carolina, Blacks were not permitted to touch textbooks used by whites, while in Alabama, Blacks were forbidden to play checkers with whites. Whereas some liberal thinkers in the more northern American states may have felt uncomfortable with the Jim Crow Laws, they nonetheless advocated long-term change through education, and economic gains to eventually correct the situation. In the absence of significant support from the white population in the first third of the twentieth century despite important

efforts, Black community leaders often met with limited success in their battle against Jim Crow Laws.

In the midst of the depression, the issue of civil rights emerged as a major focus of attention for several American leaders**.** A growing number of civil rights advocates began to coalesce in pursuit of a stronger central government which would provide greater security and protection for minorities. With its emphasis on equality of treatment in relief programs, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal ushered in some important changes for Black persons in America. During the thirties, President Roosevelt appointed over one hundred Black persons to administrative posts and his administration began the desegregation of federal restrooms, cafeterias and secretarial pools. Still, despite a few key voices calling for the respect of civil rights, the basic conditions of life remained largely unchanged for most Black persons in the thirties and it was not until the period immediately following theSecond World War that some strides were made.[1]

The Second World War was considered by most Americans to be a struggle for freedom and liberty and there was considerable introspection amongst many Americans about the treatment of the country's Black population. In 1941, President Roosevelt adopted Executive Order 8802 which established a committee on Fair Employment Practices and prohibited discrimination by unions and companies with government contracts or engaged in military labour.

1 Harvard Sickoff. 1981. *The Struggle for Black Equalicy : 1954-1980.* New York: Hill and Wang. pp. 3 - 13.

During the Second World War, millions of Americans first recognized the threat of racism to national security. Both in the media and amongst many educators in the post-war era, racial equality emerged as a growing area of concern. But while the Black population grew increasingly optimistic about the prospects for change after the war, there remained numerous hurdles to overcome. The most difficult obstacle was that prejudice and racism were too widespread as was the support for segregation in many American States and particularly in the Southern parts of the country.

While the degree of economic discrimination experienced by many Black persons in Canada was only somewhat less than that which existed in some parts of the United States, the legal situation faced by Blacks and their demographic conditions were significantly different from that which prevailed in the United States.

According to historian Robin Winks, in Canada, Blacks were relatively few, ethnically rather than economically divided amongst themselves, and spread throughout a vast country without a massive concentration in one area. As a result of this situation Winks contends that:

> ...discrimination was not massively concentrated either: and since individual acts of discrimination – unsupported by a legislative framework or by widespread social sanctions – provided a small and moving target, those Canadian Blacks who did wish to pursue activist policies were forced into being individual grievance collectors...[2]

2 Robin Winks. 1971. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univers i ty Press . pp. 363-364 .

Although it is argued that overt discrimination presented no consistent configuration in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, there was nonetheless discrimination in immigration, employment, housing and hotel accommodation as well as certain discriminatory behaviour in some amateur and professional sports. Both during and after the war, the general increase in employment opportunities had a salient effect on the situation of Montreal's Black population. Living conditions for Montreal's Black population improved by community members in the war effort served to disarm a number of individuals who publicly expressed racist views. According to historian Dorothy Williams, the post-war progress of the union movement helped improve the lives of Blacks. Williams contends that "...unions throughout Canada were springboards for human rights activism and anti-discrimination movements. In Montreal, Black labour activists... struggled using the political and legal process to establish anti-discrimination legislation."[3]

The terms desegregation and integration were employed through the first half of the twentieth century to refer to the struggle to remove legal barriers against the entry of Blacks in numerous sectors of American society. The term integration was used in speaking of the objective of Blacks gaining admission into organized baseball in the twentieth century. There were numerous opponents of integration spread across the United States and they were disproportionately represented in the Southern part of the country. During the Second World War, as white and Black Americans fought

3 Dorothy "Williams. 1989. *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986: An Urban Demography*. Montréal: Les Éditions Yvon Blais, pp. 59-60.

abroad against the threat of Nazism and in defence of the free world, some Americans increasingly wondered if the many restrictions of the participation of Blacks in American society were defensible. Some began to seriously question whether it remained acceptable to prevent Blacks from playing a professional sport that regrettably was too widely viewed at that time as a white man's game. In the aftermath of the Second World War, there appeared an increasingly favourable shift in the attitude of some North Americans toward the Black population. While some American leaders called for greater openness to the Black population, there nonetheless remained many people who resisted change and were influenced by the pervasive expression of racist sentiments.

For the most part, the opinions of baseball owners and players were a microcosm of a fairly generalized sentiment which pervaded much of American society as regarded the opposition to full civil rights for the Black population. In the post-war period, one might say that baseball became one of the first major testing grounds for those who challenged the Jim Crow Laws. Under the chairmanship of Albert Benjamin ("Happy") Chandler, some owners and players thought an opening for Blacks might be possible in organized baseball. When asked his opinion on the matter, in April 1945, Chandler stated: "If a Black boy can make it on Okinawa and Guadalcanal, hell, he can make it in baseball!"[4] But the public pronouncements of Chandler did not necessarily reflect the views which he held privately on the issue of integration.

4 Geoffrey C. *Ward and al. 1994. Baseball: An Illustrated History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 284.

Furthermore, nearly all the owners of professional baseball clubs rejected the participation of Blacks in major league teams in the immediate aftermath of the war. Yet, as we shall observe in the "world of baseball" as it was then conceived, there was at least one very important exception amongst baseball owners to what was otherwise the rule.

THE MONTREAL ROYALS

Organized baseball had first appeared in Montreal in the year 1898. At that time, the Montreal Royals fielded a team in what was then referred to as the 'old Eastern League'. Indeed, the Royals were successful in taking the pennant in their inaugural year. But thereafter, the team met with mixed results both on and off the field. Moreover, over the first third of the twentieth century, the team's financial stability was frequently in question. At the height of the depression in the autumn of 1931, a triumvirate took control of the Montreal Royals which included the participation of such notables as J. Charles-Emile Trudeau (father of Canada's future Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

Eventually, the Royals formed a part of the International League which included clubs in Toronto, Syracuse, Jersey City, Newark, Rochester, Baltimore and Buffalo. In 1935, the Royals were successful in winning their first pennant since 1898. However, their good fortune was short-lived as they finished poorly in the years 1937, 1938 In 1939 a contract was signed with the management of the Royals, which made them the number one farm team of the major league Brooklyn Dodgers. Soon after the Royals became the most profitable club in all of minor league baseball.[5]

5 Lawrence S. Ritter. 1992. *Lost Ballparks: A Celebration of Baseball's Legendary Fields*. New York: Penguin Books, p. 123. and William Humber. 1995. *Diamonds of the North: A Concise History of Baseball in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, p. 115.

October 23 1945 (Courtesy of La presse)

Romeo Gauvreau VP of the Royals, Branch Rickey Jr., Hector Racine, President of the Royals and Jackie Robinson.

THE SIGNING

In the aftermath of the war for many Americans, it still seemed unimaginable that Blacks would be admitted into Major League Baseball. Indeed, according to at least two accounts in1946-47, a vote was taken by some 15 of 16 major league club owners who rejected integration of Blacks into professional baseball.[6] The lone exception was Branch Rickey, who in 1942 became president, part owner and general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. With equal fervour, Rickey believed in fairness as well as profits and was convinced that what was good for baseball was ultimately good for America. While some described Rickey as baseball's answer to American President Abe Lincoln, he was more commonly referred to by some as the "Brooklyn Mahatma" and by others as the "Deacon," Rickey once confided that "the greatest untapped reservoir of raw material in the history of the game is the Black race... the N*****s will make us winners for years to come, and for that I will happily bear being called a bleeding heart and a do-gooder and all that humanitarian rot."[7] Rickey was aware that his efforts to introduce Black players into the major leagues would generate deep resentment in some quarters. Some felt it might lead to racial violence.[8] Still, Rickey remained determined to reach his objective and he convinced the board of directors of

6 Geoffrey C. Ward and al. 1994. op. cit. p. 284.
7 Geoffrey C. V7ard and al. 1994. op. cit. p. 284.
8 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett). 1972. *I Never Had It Made*. New York: G.P Putnam's Sons. p. 39.

the Brooklyn Dodgers to support him. He then faced the monumental task of convincing baseball's establishment that his cause was just.

To facilitate his ultimate goal, in the spring of 1945 Rickey called a press conference at which he announced that the Brooklyn Dodgers were organizing the United States League which was then comprised of only Black teams. In response to this move, some Black players along with certain pro-integration whites, initially accused Rickey of upholding the existing system of segregation. They were at the very least skeptical when Rickey stated that his eventual purpose was to absorb that league and in particular its best players into the majors.[9]

In pursuit of what was described as 'the great experiment', Rickey needed to find the ideal Black player who would ultimately break into the majors, and in effect whose athletic abilities were matched by a great degree of courage. It was in August 1945 that the Royals' chief scout, Clyde Sukeforth approached Jack Roosevelt Robinson, who was then playing with the Kansas City Monarchs of the Black league. Born in Cairo, Georgia, the youngest of five children, Robinson was a "four-sport letterman in baseball, basketball, track and football.[10] Sukeforth asked whether Robinson wished to become a Brown Dodger of the United States League, when in fact the real intention was to determine whether Jackie wished to eventually join Brooklyn's major league club.

9 Ibid. p. 40.
10 Geoffrey C. Ward and al. 1994. op. cit. p.287.

Sukeforth recalled the historic first meeting between Rickey and Robinson on August 29, 1945, and stated that "I introduced Robinson and Mr. Rickey went right to work on him. He said Jack, I've been looking for a great coloured ballplayer for a great many years. I have some reason to believe you might be the man. But what I need is more than a great player. I need a man that will take abuse, insults, in other words, carry the flag for the race. Robinson, if some guy slides into you and calls you a Black so-and-so, you'd come up swinging. And you'd be justified but you'd set the cause back twenty years."

Rickey concluded that:

> They'll (opponents of integration) taunt you and goad you. They'll do anything to make you react. They'll try to provoke a race riot in the ballpark. This is the way to prove to the public that a N**** should not be allowed in the major leagues.[11]

At that initial meeting, Jackie Robinson was exposed to the worst things that might occur to the first Black player to enter this all-white professional sport. When Rickey asked Robinson whether he was interested in playing Major League Baseball, his initial reaction was a combination of thrill, fear and excitement. When asked whether he thought he could play in Montreal; without any hesitation Robinson responded favourably. Rickey had further words of warning which he expressed as follows:

11 Ibid.

We can't fight our way through this, Robinson. We've got no army. There's virtually nobody on our side. No owners no umpires, very few newspapermen. And I'm afraid that many fans will be hostile. We'll be in a tough position. We canwin only if we can convince the world that I'm doing this because you're a great ballplayer and a fine gentleman.[12]

When asked by Robinson whether Rickey wanted a ballplayer who was afraid to fight back, the latter replied that he wanted a ballplayer with guts enough not to fight back. After a long pause, Robinson finally declared that "if you (Rickey) wanted to take the gamble, I will promise you there will be no incident."[13]

October 23 1945 (Courtesy of La presse)

Hector Racine, President of the Royals, Branch Rickey Jr., Jackie Robinson and Romeo Gauvreau, VP of the Royals.

12 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. p. 47.
13 Geoffrey C. Ward and al. 1994. op. cit. p. 287.

BREAKING THE NEWS

At the press conference on October 23, 1945, the signing of Jackie Robinson was announced by Montreal Royals' President, Hector Racine, who expressed confidence that Montreal fans would judge Robinson on his ability to play. On the other hand, the son of Branch Rickey who was in charge of Brooklyn's farm clubs, said he anticipated opposition to the move from parts of the United States where racial prejudice was rampant. Branch Rickey Jr. added that some of the players in the Brooklyn organization, notably those from the South, might "steer away from a club with N**** players on its roster." But he felt confident that while "some of them who are with us now may even quit... they'll be back in baseball after they work a year or two in a cotton mill." This controversial declaration did not serve to ingratiate Rickey Jr. with a number of the Southern baseball players.[14]

Following Racine's announcement of the Robinson signing, Montreal's French language daily, La Presse, reported that what might otherwise be regarded as inconsequential is in fact one of the biggest stories in organized baseball. In a story entitled, "The Royals create a precedent in the history of organized baseball," the La Presse correspondent wondered why Montreal was chosen as the city where Robinson would play as opposed to some other place elsewhere in Canada or the United States. Based on Racine's answer, the

14 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. p. 47.

journalist contended that the population of the city was the most democratic and the least prejudiced on racial matters. Furthermore, it was suggested that in the United States Robinson could not yet be integrated without protest and the potential for a regrettable racist incident to occur. In the opinion of Racine, there was no good reason to prohibit Black players from participating in organized baseball." He stated that "they fought by our side during the War and they merit the opportunity to play baseball with us like they do all other sports."[15]

For his part, Branch Rickey believed that because there was no racial prejudice in Montreal, the fans would applaud the achievements of Robinson in much the same manner that they would any of their other favourites on the team. [16]

At the press conference announcing his signing, somewhat in jest, Robinson described himself as a "guinea pig" in this daring experiment. In his first encounter with journalists, Robinson admitted that he was "nervous as the devil" but stated that he was ready for any challenge that he might face from either white fans or white players. Robinson was cautious in making public statements but the one declaration which he repeated most frequently was his desire to be accepted as "just another ballplayer." In this regard, he maintained that "when members of my own race make a big demonstration for me in the stands over some perfectly ordinary play I've made... I just want to be judged on my merits as a ballplayer."[17]

15 La Presse. October 24, 1945.
16 La Presse. October 25, 1945.
17 Montreal Gazette. October 7, 1946.

As expected, reaction to the signing of Jackie Robinson was a source of tremendous controversy in the United States. In one of America's leading sports magazines of the period, a column entitled "Montreal Puts N**** Players on Spot" reported that Branch Rickey had "... touched off a powder keg in the South, unstinted praise in N**** circles; and a northern conviction that the racial problem in baseball is as far from a satisfactory solution as ever."[18] One columnist stressed that immediate reaction was not one of general approval in baseball noting that while the Southern interests protested, in the North not everyone was said to have cheered loudly.

At the time of the announcement, the President of the International League Frank Schaughnessy stated that:

> ...as long as any fellow's the right type and can make good and get along with the other players, he should be welcome in our league. There's no rule in baseball that says a N**** can't play."[19]

Regarded as "the baseball paper of the world." the *Sporting News* described the situation confronting Robinson as follows:

1) He is thrown into the post-war reconstruction of baseball and placed in competition with a vast number of younger, more skilled and more experienced players;

2) He is six years too old for a chance with a club two classifications below the double 'A' rating of Montreal;

18 The Sporting News. November 1, 1945.
19 Ibid.

3) He is confronted with the sweat and tears of toil, with the socialrebuffs and the competitive heartaches which are inevitable for a N**** trailblazer in organized baseball;

4) He is thrown into the spotlight, the one man of his race in any league under the jurisdiction of Commissioner Albert B. Chandler, and will be expected to demonstrate skills far beyond those he is reported to possess, or to be able to develop.[20]

Although it was generally conceded that Robinson could withstand the second and fourth situations, some felt that he would have problems competing with the post-war pool of athletic talent-seeking opportunities in the major leagues.

Rickey himself was initially cautious not to create expectations around either the talent or potential of Robinson as a baseball player. This was made abundantly clear in an interview which Rickey gave to a reporter from the *Sporting News*.

Q. "Branch, why didn't you sign Robinson for the Brooklyn Club?"

A. He is not Dodger quality. Not yet. Usually you send a player of his baseball rating to a Class B or Class C club. But Robinson is 26 and I did not want to throw him in with a lot of kids.

Q. Why did you sign a N** now?**

A. Why not now? I want to win.

20 Ibid.

Q. ...your interest in the N** player dates only from your connection with Brooklyn?**

A. Yes, that is correct. On my arrival in Brooklyn, I found N****clubs playing at Abbots Field. I watched them. I decided that something would have to be done about the N**** player in relationship to the major leagues in general and those in New York in particular. I signed Robinson despite the misguided labors of pressure groups.

Q. Won't Robinson be embarrassed? Won't he run into hotel, Pullman and restaurant troubles? Won't there be trouble with Southern players?[21]

Rickey acknowledged that there might be trouble from players from the South. Already, Texas-born Roger Hornsby said it wouldn't work. Pitcher Bob Feller and others felt it was okay so long as there were no Black players on their club. The legendary Connie Mark, then manager of the major league Philadelphia Athletics, expressed his disapproval at the action taken by the Dodgers' organization.[22]

Nearly two months after the signing of Robinson, Rickey announced the hiring of a new manager for the Royals in the person of Clay Hopper, who hailed from the state of Mississippi. Hopper was by no means immune to the racist attitudes that influenced many Mississippians of the period. He initially begged Rickey not to put him in charge of an "integrated team" and asked his boss if he really thought

21 The Sporting News. October 25, 1945.

22 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. p. 48. and La Presse, October 24, 1995.

that: "a *nigger* (was) a human being." [23] As we shall observe by season's end, Hopper appeared to dramatically change his point of view on Robinson. Still, in hiring Hopper, Rickey likely believed that his presence might defuse criticism notably that which might emanate from the South as regarded the integration of Robinson. After all, Hopper offered an example of a white Southerner then willing to have a Black player on the team.

23 Geoffrey C. Ward and al. 1994. op. cit. p.287.

A CHILLY RECEPTION IN FLORIDA

Otherwise known as 'Camp Royal' at the team's training camp in Daytona Beach, Florida, Jackie Robinson was not the only Black player to be given a tryout. Although his chances of making the Royals were not considered as good as those of Robinson, pitcher John Wright was also offered the opportunity to display his abilities. In fact, Wright too broke in with the Royals and thereafter equally succeeded in breaking through the colour barrier in organized baseball. As the two were about to arrive in the state of Florida for the exhibition season/spring training with the Brooklyn Dodgers, affiliate President, Branch Rickey spoke to the players about their behaviour toward Wright and Robinson. He asked the players to:

> ...be the gentlemen you have shown yourselves to be when N**** players, Jackie Robinson and John Wright arrive for their spring training... I want each of you to be yourselves in your association with Robinson and Wright. The Montreal team must regard them as two more baseball players and give them the same treatment accorded all other players.[24]

Royals' Manager, Clay Hopper, stressed that Robinson and Wright would get the same chance as all the players at camp. It was reported said that the Montreal team had accepted the two Black players in camp without friction. The two players publicly expressed that they were highly pleased with their

24 Montreal Gazette. March 1, 1946.

reception as Robinson remarked that "everyone had been helpful." There were reports that Jackie Robinson and John Wright were not as pleased as they might have appeared. In keeping with the Florida segregation laws, both Robinson and Wright were housed with Black families.

One of his teammates recalled that during spring training, Royals opponents frequently threw at him. One game he was thrown at three times and said nothing just walking to the base. "He answered all the shots with finesse. They'd throw at him, he'd take a big lead, draw a dozen throws to first, rattle the pitcher, then steal second. They would call him every name and he'd answer in that way."[25]

Jackie Robinson was both modest and prudent during training camp about his prospects for making it onto the Royals lineup by the beginning of the regular season. As he remarked when asked about his chances, "I don't know whether I can make it. I just hope I can." Moreover, he indicated that his exposure to Major League Baseball was, to say the least, at that point fairly limited. He noted that "...I've seen only five major league games in my life and I've never seen these fellows play... So, I don't know what the competition is."[26]

In mid-March, the Montreal Royals began the regularly scheduled season and Southern tradition and created a precedent in Florida, became the first Southern state where Blacks and whites would together participate in an organized baseball game. Local opinion was that Robinson

25 The Montreal Daily Star. October 25, 1972.
26 The New York Times. March 5, 1946.

and Wright were unlikely to hear anything negative from the many tourists arriving from the North in contrast to the unwelcome reception they might receive from "native Southerners." Still, most of the spectators applauded when Jackie Robinson appeared at the plate. On March 21, 1946, some four thousand fans attended the Royals' first exhibition game, an estimated 1,000 Blacks were present and the bleachers', the only section where they were allowed to sit, nearly burst at the seams.[27]

On the following Sunday, March 28th, George Robinson announced yet another cancellation of the Jersey City and Montreal Royals game, as it was learned that the Montreal Club planned to bring the two Black players to Jacksonville.

On yet a third occasion on April 7, 1946, in Sanford, Florida, at the end of the second inning, the chief of police of the city asked Jackie Robinson to leave the field during an exhibition game between St. Paul and the Montreal Club. But neither prohibition nor cancellation deterred Jackie Robinson as he was determined to play with the Royals prior to opening day. In response to the actions taken by officials in Daytona barring Jackie Robinson from playing, Florida journalists advised their Canadian counterparts that no Canadian could appreciate the racial feeling that gets stirred up in American cities over such things as putting coloured baseball players on the same playing field as whites.[28]

One Montreal sports writer described the hostility of many Floridians to the presence of Black players in organized

27 Montreal Gazette. March 18, 1946.
28 Montreal Gazette. April 8, 1946.

baseball as a "terrible thing" but added that having no similar problem in Montreal, it was difficult for Canadians to comprehend their feeling. The Montreal reporter commended the Royals management for making the right decision in Daytona and not playing in that "intolerant sector." The same sportswriter pointed out that in Montreal:

> We are used to colored people and when looking over the Jacksonville situation, we think of Westmount Park for instance, where Jimmy McCormick presides and where a likable colored lad runs a hockey team. The kids like to play for this boy and, in fact, our youngster played for his team...[29]

News from Montreal was that it would be all right for the fans if Jackie Robinson started the season with the team. "All Jackie needs to do to rate a warm welcome at Royal Stadium is 'make' the club" suggested one observer. Montrealers were generally pleased to learn that Robinson had been properly received at training camp without resentment or repercussion. But there was apparently a significant difference of opinion amongst Montreal baseball fans over whether Wright or Robinson would be with the team when it began its official season.[30]

29 The Montreal Daily Star. October 25, 1972
30 Ibid.

A ROYALS' WELCOME

On Thursday, April 18, 1946, Jackie Robinson made his official debut in organized baseball in a Montreal Royals uniform. On that day, the club faced the Jersey City Little Giants at Roosevelt Stadium. An estimated 25,000 to 35,000 fans were in the stadium although paid attendance was announced at 51,872. It goes without saying that this was no ordinary opening day and that those who went to the stadium were witnesses to a historic event.

Jackie Robinson did not disappoint his supporters. He rapped out four hits, including a three-run 335-foot homer in five trips at bat, he drove in four runs, scored four runs and stole two bases. He also performed sensationally in the field. That day, America watched Jackie Robinson very closely. When he committed an error with a wild throw in the fifth inning, for many it was a demonstration that he was only human. As the *New York Times* Joseph M. Sheehan reported: "This would have been a big day for any man. Under the special circumstances that prevailed, it was a tremendous feat."[31] Sheehan added that, "Robinson had fully justified Dodger President Rickey's precedent-setting break with what was described as baseball tradition." Undoubtedly, Rickey was pleased with the outcome of his prospect. Needless to say, the Royals won a score of 14 to 1 over the Jersey City team.

31 Montreal Gazette. April 20, 1946.

On Friday, April 19, Jackie Robinson's explosive debut with the Montreal Royals was still the talk of the baseball world. As one Montreal columnist noted, nobody could blame Robinson for being nervous on that day, given all that was at stake, adding that:

> ... Robinson seems to have the same sense of the dramatic that characterized such great athletes as Babe Ruth, Red Grange, Jack Dempsey, Bobby Jones, and others of that stamp. The bigger the occasion, the more they rise to it... Make no mistake: the man can play ball.[32]

Clearly not everyone in the stadium was behind Jackie. He angered many a bigot at the game as well as some fans who were merely biased toward the Little Giants when he hit his three-run homer on opening day. But supporters of Jackie outnumbered his detractors in that first game at Roosevelt Stadium. There were about three times more members of the Black community in the stadium than was usually the case, and they were especially vocal that day. The majority of the journalists appeared tosupport Jackie. One New York sportswriter was brimming with enthusiasm at everything Jackie did. Referring to Jackie's speed on the bases, he gleefully chanted: "Ho, ho, ho, who said you couldn't steal first base!" and when Jackie went on to steal second, "Ho, ho, ho. What suckers he's making of those guys out there!"[33]

As he delivered his first home run in organized baseball in Jersey City, Jackie's thoughts went out to his wife as he

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.

imagined the joy she must have felt. According to Jackie: "…this was the day the dam burst between me and my teammates. Northerners and Southerners alike, they let me know how much they appreciated the way I came through." It was in Jersey City that Jackie first heard the "ear-shattering" roar of the crowd in support of his efforts. It was at that point that he began to believe Mr. Rickey's contention that colour didn't matter as much to fans if a Black player was a winner. The euphoria he felt in Jersey City, however, was short-lived when in the Royals' next series against Baltimore, racist epithets were being hurled by fans from all parts of the stands.[34]

After the opener at Jersey City, Robinson and the Royals headed on to Newark where a Bears outfielder, named Leon Treadway, quit the club coinciding with the visit of Montreal's baseball team. As Treadway moved down to the segregated South Atlantic Baseball League, some regarded his decision as a protest against the presence of Robinson. But none of this prevented Jackie from having an outstanding performance during the first two weeks on the road. Perhaps the biggest initial test of Jackie's ability to resist racist provocation at that juncture was during a game in Syracuse, New York, where it was not so much the fans, but rather the members of the opposing team who taunted Jackie. One of the Syracuse players went so far as to throw a Black cat onto the field and yell out, "Hey Jackie, there's your cousin." Following that incident, Jackie doubled and soon scored, and as he passed the Syracuse dugout, he shouted, "I guess my cousin's pretty

34 ibid.

happy now." [35] Jackie simply would not allow the bigots a victory as he bravely stood up to the insults.

Although it might be hard to imagine, things became much uglier as the team got to Baltimore, the league's southernmost spot. The International League President, Frank Shaughnessy, reiterated an earlier plea to Rickey that he not let Robinson play in Baltimore where the possibility of rioting was ever-present. For his part, Rickey had always regarded the threat as exaggerated and believed that by withdrawing Robinson he would merely encourage further action by racist agitators.[36]

Rickey appeared vindicated when a threatened fan boycott in Baltimore never materialized. Indeed, on Sunday, April 28, 1946, some 25,000 fans crowded into the Baltimore Stadium, an estimated 10,000 of whom were black. Jackie greatly appreciated the extraordinary turnout in both Florida during the exhibition season and Jersey City on opening day of Black fans who often overcame difficult conditions to see Jackie play ball and offer him their full support. No spectators were more interested in seeing Robinson play than his fellow Black Americans and in significant numbers they flocked to the ball parks to watch him in action. In the cities of Buffalo and Baltimore, somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of attendance was consistently comprised of Blacks. Some travelled hundreds of miles from Syracuse and Buffalo to see their hero play in either Toronto or Montreal. Robinson

35 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. p. 59. and Jules Tygiel. 1983. Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 120-121.

36 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. p. 02.

was someone who many young American Blacks wished to emulate and he quickly became regarded as something of a living legend. There were about 10,000 Blacks in Montreal in the year 1946 and there is no doubt that Jackie had a great many supporters in the community. Some estimated that certain Royals' home games were attended by over a thousand Blacks which would have been greater than 10 percent of the entire community!

The opening game for the Montreal Royals at Delormier Stadium drew record crowds. On May 1, 1946, over 16,000 persons filed into the stadium. Montreal Mayor, CamilienHoude, threw out the first ball and although he was widely unnoticed, Montreal Canadian hockey great, Maurice Richard, attended the game. For some, the large number of spectators was attributable to Jackie Robinson's presence with the Royals. Others, including the *Gazette*'s sports columnist Dink Carroll, did not believe Jackie Robinson was the main reason for the crowd, although he acknowledged that: "The fan's curiosity was whetted and they were anxious to get a peek at him..." After the game, Robinson was overwhelmed by young admirers and it took an hour for him to escape through a side door.[37]

Montreal sportswriters well understood that history was being made in their city with the admission of Jackie Robinson to the Royals. On opening day at Roosevelt Stadium, the sports commentator for the Montreal Star called the game another "Emancipation Day for his N**** race. "A day that

37 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 121.

Abe Lincoln would like" said the Star's Baz O'Meara who added that:

> Robinson had his troubles down south. Bigotry, race prejudice and downright ignorance reared its ugly heads to harass him but so far he has carried the torch for his race with magnificent dignity.[38]

In the Montreal Herald columnist Elmer Ferguson noted that "Modern baseball history will be made this afternoon, when for the first time ...N**** players will take part in a game of organized baseball." Ferguson expected that Black players would be judged primarily on their athletic ability. To do otherwise, he remarked, would suggest that the "...war was fought for nothing, so far as its democratic implications are concerned."[39]

The Royals won their home opener 12-9 over the Little Giants and went on to win 16 of their first 20 games at Delormier Stadium. During the month of May, the Royals' drew crowds comparable to the best attendance the club had drawn in its history. After all, Montreal as much then as now, had a reputation for supporting winners. But few would deny that the outstanding play of Jackie Robinson was drawing significant numbers to the stadium.

By the end of the month, the confidence exhibited by Montreal fans in Jackie Robinson had been firmly established. The grandstand chant for Jackie Robinson amongst Montreal Royal fans was "Glad to have you with us." Teammate Al

38 Montreal Gazette. May 3. 1946.
39 The Montreal Daily Star. April 18, 1946.

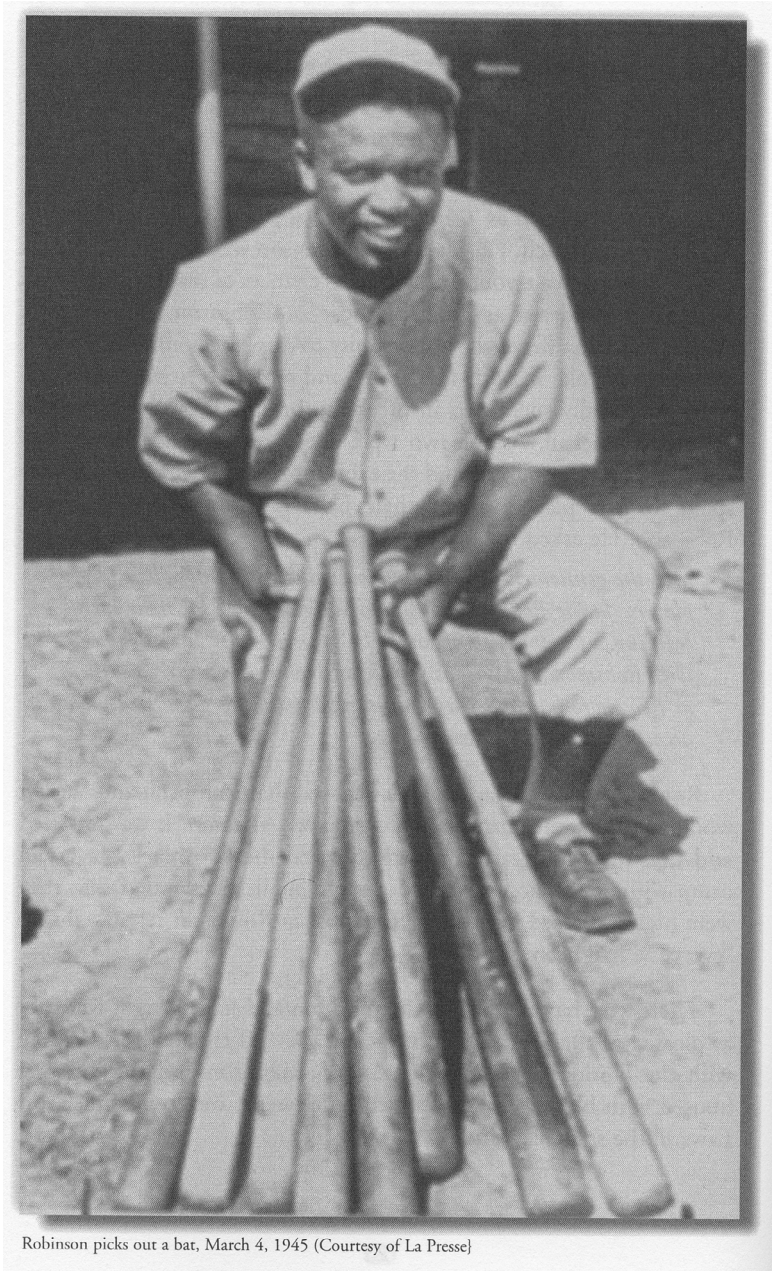
Campanis stated that, "The Canadian people loved him." Robinson would often prepare a show for the fans. When he reached first base, he would hear supporters yell, ' Allez! Steal that base!"[40] To that point, Robinson had played in all of the teams' first 37 games and was second overall in the league in stolen bases. By the beginning of June 1946, Robinson emerged as the International League's leading hitter. He had 47 hits in 132 at bats and had jumped from sixth place to the lead with a .356 average. At that time, Robinson also dominated the league in hits and runs scored.[41]

After having the opportunity to hear the reports on Jackie's success at Roosevelt Stadium, Baz O'Meara reported that "Sentiment in Montreal is all favourable to the coloured player and veteran ball fans were very much excited over his performance."[42]

Not only were the Royals drawing record crowds at home, they were also attracting significant numbers of fans on the road. Indeed, when playing on the road, no other club in the league had a higher overall attendance than did the Montreal Royals. There were at least two reasons cited for this situation. First, the Royals possessed the best record in the International League, but it was increasingly recognized that the more important consideration was indeed Jackie Robinson's being with the squad. As one authority on the Montreal baseball scene wrote, "Everybody wants to see him after reading so much about him. Right now, he is something to see too. There doesn't seem to be a thing he can't do."

40 The Montreal Herald. April 18, 1946.
41 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 125.
42 Ibid.

[43] Opposing pitchers experienced increasing difficulty in getting him out and his base-running was described as highly spectacular.



Robinson picks out a bat, March 4, 1945 (Courtesy of La Presse)

TEAMMATES

At spring training, Jackie recalled the friendliness of one teammate during the early days in Montreal. Himself a second baseman, Lou Rochelli spent considerable time helping Robinson with his fielding and teaching him several tricks at the second base position. Jackie was eternally grateful for the assistance he received from Rochelli in his early days as a Royal. Others, with whom Robinson competed for infield positions, appeared to offer the most assistance. The popular French-Canadian shortstop of the Royals, Stan Bréard, offered reassurance to Robinson as he slowly improved his fielding abilities.[44]

Throughout the season, Robinson endured without complaint, separate and unequal facilities, pretended neither to hear the taunts of his opponents nor to mind the initial coolness of his teammates. He was, by nature, both a proud and volatile man; several of his teammates from the old Kansas City Monarchs worried privately that he was too quick-tempered not to retaliate to racist attacks directed at him. Almost without exception Jackie Robinson's Royals' teammates generally kept their prejudices to themselves and accepted his presence with the ball club.

It is difficult to determine exactly how all the members of the Montreal Royals felt about Robinson. As in the case of other clubs, several Royals players were from the Southern

44 Montreal Gazette. August 12, 1946.

United States and were raised to believe that Black persons were inferior to Whites. If they did not like the idea of Jackie's being on the team, they kept it to themselves as much as possible. As baseball was their livelihood, they were unlikely to do anything that would displease Branch Rickey.[45]

At the start of the regular season, one prominent observer of the Montreal baseball scene concluded: "Some time will have to pass before they will accept his presence on the field as a matter of fact in their weekday lives." During the season, very few intimate relationships were developed between Jackie Robinson and his teammates. One of his main biographers contends that "it would be a mistake to romanticize Robinson's relationships with his teammates. Robinson's friendships on the Royals remained within the confines of the playing field and the clubhouse."[46]

One teammate recalled that Robinson never forced himself on the other Royals ballplayers. "He was very quiet, never said much," remarked John "Spider" Jorgenson. Given the frequent movement of players, friendships were rarely formed in the minor leagues. Royals shortstop Al Campanis noted that:

> It was a kind of funny club. We all lived together once we got to the ball field, but then we went apart. We lived in different areas and other than once in a while, we didn't socialize.[47]

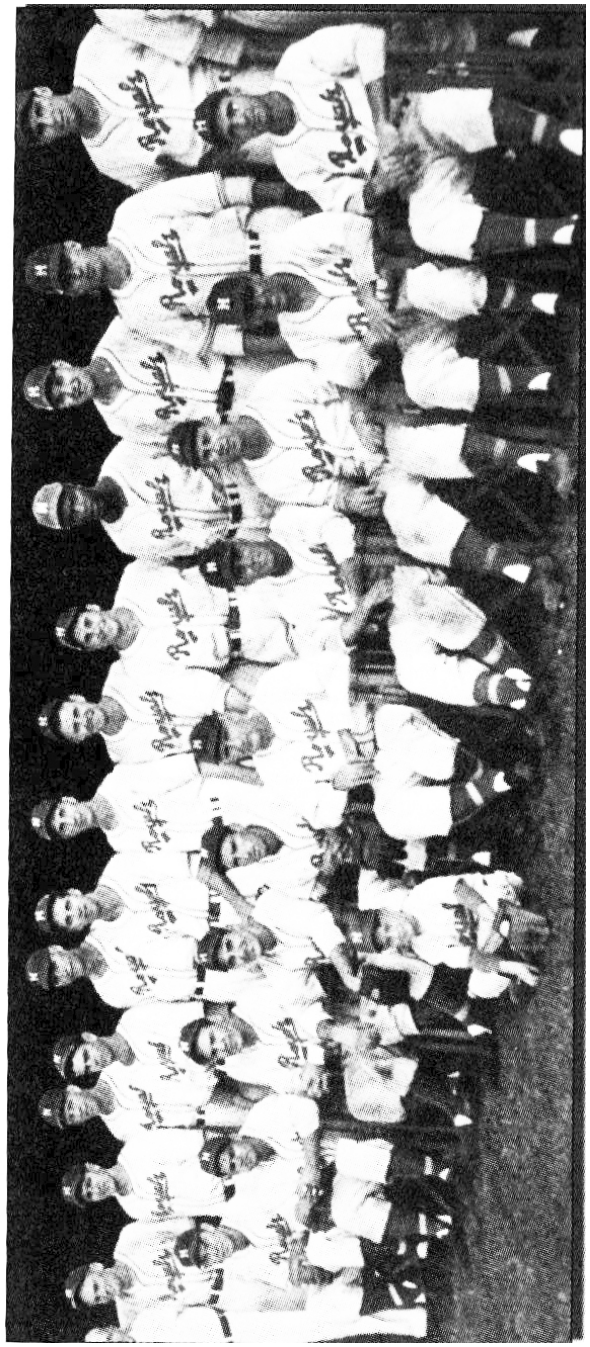
45 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. pp. 36-57 and Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 116.
46 Geoffrey C. Ward and al. op. cit. p. 289.
47 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 136.

The 1946 edition of the Montreal Royals boasted several excellent players, some of whom were bound for the big leagues. They provided solid support around Robinson's performance and relieved him of considerable pressure to singularly carry the team to victory. This said, it is clear that Robinson's performance often made the difference in several of the Royals' wins. On August 9, 1946, a *Gazette* sports story subtitled, "Jackie Again Hitting Hero of Locals Belting Three for Five - Also Shines Afield." In an extra inning Royals victory over the Jersey Little Giants, Jackie Robinson was said to have taken personal charge of the ball game.[48]

Certainly, his performance helped generate the highly successful season of the Royals. Over the season, the other members of the club grew to admire Robinson. Popular Royals' pitcher, Jean-Pierre Roy, remembered Jackie as a humble and courageous individual. "He had become part of our team the day we began throwing at those who threw at him," added Roy.[49]

The players on a number of other clubs were not so restrained about their feelings and openly expressed their unhappiness to Jackie Robinson directly as well as to other members of the Royals team.

48 The Montreal Daily Star. October 25, 1972.
49 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 136.



Les Royaux de Montréal. Robinson apporte du sang neuf à cette équipe. (*Mémorial du Québec*, tome VII, p. 171).

WON'T YOU STAY, JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER

By the end of May 1946, there was little question that Jackie Robinson would eventually be bound for Brooklyn. In fact, Robinson was regarded as the team's strongest infielder and Royal manager Clay Hopper insisted that Jackie was the International League's best second baseman. By the end of August, with the Royals playoff bound, the issue increasingly arose as to whether the parent club in Brooklyn, itself locked in a pennant race, would call upon Jackie Robinson's services. The very prospect of such a move was cause for great concern amongst the growing number of local Robinson supporters and Royals' fans. Their loyal supporters were fearful of the Brooklyn Dodgers' head office, whose often voracious appetite saw them call for help from the Royals when they deemed it necessary. As Montreal writer Mordechai Richler put it: "Our parents feared Hitler and his Panzers, but Ziggy, Yossel and I were in terror of Branch Rickey and his scouts."[50]

Royals' general manager Mel Jones denied the rumour and maintained that the possibility of Robinson being called up by the Dodgers was never considered. Since he had clearly passed the test in the International League, Jones was aware that there was growing talk amongst many observers about Jackie being brought up to the big club. But to prematurely call him up to the Dodgers would put unbearable pressure

50 Ibid.

on Robinson because of the tightness of the National League race. If he failed at that juncture, everything that had been accomplished to that point might be placed in jeopardy.

So, Jackie Robinson was to finish the season with the Montreal Royals and ultimately lead them into the playoffs. Hitting over .370 by August 1946, Jackie was described as the "ace" of the runaway Montreal Royals. One of the Royals coaches observed that:

> He can run faster than 75 percent of the players in the majors today. He can bunt better than 90 percent of them. He has good hands, a trigger quick instinctive mind and an accurate and ample arm."[51]

As the *Sporting News* noted on August 21, 1946, "Robinson, Topping 'International' Hitters Rated Ready for Dodgers in 47."

51 Montreal Gazette. August 9, 1946.

JACKIE MAKES THE COLONELS EAT "CROW"

The first challenge faced by the Royals in the playoffs was against the Syracuse Chiefs. The Royals disposed of their opponents relatively easily and by September 26th, the front page of *the Montreal Gazette*reported that the Royals won four games to one in the best of seven series to win the Governor's Cup. As a consequence, the Royals would go on to Louisville to face the Colonels in the Little World Series. In their 7 to 4 victory over Syracuse, once again Jackie was the star leading Montreal hitters with four hits in five at bats.[52]

In fact, it was perhaps there that emerged Jackie's biggest test in coping with abuse from racist agitators. Louisville was as segregationist as any American city in the deep South. To prevent racist activity amongst the fans, Louisville owners set a quota against Black attendance. Since it was the first interracial competition in that city, the number of Blacks who wished to see the game surpassed the quota and yet white fans poured undaunted into the stadium, whereas many Black spectators were forced to stand outside the gates.

The Jim Crow Law was half in effect in the city. Blacks were confined to their own theatres but were permitted to ride on the same street cars as the white population. At the stadium in Louisville, there was one small section reserved

52 Mordecai Richler. "Up From the Minors in Montreal," in Daniel Okrent and Harris Levine. 1979. *The Ultimate Baseball Book*. Boston: Mifflin Company, p. 312.

for Blacks along the right-field line. Both Blacks and whites sat in the bleachers.[53]

It was clear that some Louisville supporters would have liked to see Jackie Robinson prevented from playing in that city during the finals. It appeared that some were prepared to go as far as invoke the Jim Crow Law to achieve that objective. But the Colonels management realized that as long as Robinson was admitted into organized baseball, he must be permitted to play. Every time he was up to bat in Louisville, Jackie was met with boos from one half of the crowd and cheers from the other. Jackie was unhappy with his performance in Louisville where in three games he couldn't manage more than one hit in eleven trips to the plate. Jackie recalled that:

> The more I played, the more vicious that howling mob in the stands became. I had been booed pretty soundly before, but nothing like this. A torrent of mass hatred burst from the stands with virtually every move I made.[54]

During one of the games, one Louisville fan yelled, "Hey Black boy, go on back to Canada and stay."[55]

During the championship series in Louisville, Jackie Robinson was the object of increased booing by the fans as he came to the plate at Parkway Field. In fact, the booing was so intense that according to some observers, few ball

53 The Sporting News. August 21, 1946.
54 Montreal Gazette. September 27, 1946.
55 Montreal Gazette. September .30, 1946. and Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p.63.

players would have been able to sustain it. As one of the Colonels players remarked: "If I were in his place, I would have thrown my glove on the ground and left the field and baseball altogether. Robinson is truly extraordinary."[56]

As one Montreal sportswriter stated:

> Jackie did not take off his glove, the reason being that he had seen so many clouds since the first time he put on a Montreal uniform in Florida last Spring. As always, he was able to rise above and obtain the admiration of all and with everyone's appreciation adding yet more to his great personality. (Our transl.)[57]

The Royals lost two of the three games in Louisville and needed to win three of the final four games in Montreal to win the championship. When Robinson returned to Montreal, he discovered that the Canadians were visibly upset about the way he had been treated. In retaliation, Royals fans greeted the Louisville players with massive booing throughout the first game in Montreal. By contrast, when the Royals appeared on the field, the fans did "everything but break the stands down."[58]

56 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. pp. 63.
57 Ibid.
58 The Montreal Daily Star. October 25, 1972.

Jackie Robinson in action, april 1946.
(Mémorial du Québec, tome VI, p. 169)

ROBINSON DELIVERS THE CROWN TO THE ROYALS

While Jackie had mixed feelings about the vengeful reaction of Montreal fans to the Louisville Club, he nonetheless felt tremendous appreciation for the way in which Canadians made their feelings known about the treatment he received at the hands of Louisville supporters. As Jackie stated "when fans go to bat for you like that, you feel it would be easy to play for them forever."[59] During the games in Montreal, the "confidence and love" of the fans served as a catalyst for the Royals as they rallied against Louisville in game four of the championship series. On October 5, 1946, the Montreal Royals won their first Junior World Series title with a 20 victory over the American Association Pennant Champion Louisville, the Championship Game Colonels. Montreal fans enjoyed the greatest season of baseball in the first half of the century as their team captured the top prize of the International League in 1946. Montreal paid tribute to their champions, highlighted after the final victory by chants from the crowd, "We want Robinson, we want Robinson."[60] Much of the crowd of over 19,000 refused to leave the stadium until their star returned onto the field. French Canadian fans loudly sang "Il a gagné ses épaulettes (he won his epaulettes)." The ovation for Robinson was described by one observer as riotous. To the delight of the fans, coach Hopper was the

59 La Presse. October 3, 1946.
60 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. pp. 64.

first to return to the field followed by veteran Royals' pitcher Curt Davis, who was treated to a parade on the shoulders of the fans. Then after continued chants from the crowd, Jackie Robinson appeared on the field and pandemonium set in. As one writer described it, he was carried around the field in a scene so moving that: "It was probably the only day in history that a Black man ran from a white mob with love instead of lynching on the mind." When the fans finally caught up with him, they kissed and hugged him in a scene that moved Robinson to tears.[61]

Clay Hopper and Jackie Robinson, April 1947 (Courtesy of La presse)

61 Ibid.

HAPPY HOPPER

With the championship secured, Manager Clay Hopper publicly expressed his great admiration for Jackie Robinson. "He has all the qualifications of a great ball player," Hopper declared. When asked whether Jackie was going up to the majors next year, Hopper stated cautiously that: "if he was a white boy he'd be a cinch to go anywhere. He's not only a good ball player, but he conducts himself properly and keeps his head."[62] There was no doubt that in addition to his spectacular plays on the field, Jackie Robinson successfully resisted many efforts to provoke him through the course of the year.

Reporters asked Hopper about the performance of Jackie Robinson with the Royals and about the prospects of other Black players to reach the big leagues. The Mississippi-born manager rapidly replied, "There's only one Jackie Robinson."[63]

Ultimately, Hopper reaped some of the rewards from the success of Robinson. On the occasion of his 45th birthday the Montreal Royals won the fifth game of the championship series against the Louisville Colonels: La Presse noted that:

> Hopper who was born in the heart of Mississippi where Black people were once slaves, certainly merited alot of credit, not only for having introduced a coloured player into organized

62 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 143.
63 Ibid.

baseball, but also for having given him all the opportunities to prove himself during the entire season. (Our transl.)[64]

Robinson was not ungrateful and expressed his appreciation to Hopper by helping to deliver games four and five of the championship series to the Royals.

64 Montreal Gazette. October 5, 1946.

NORTHERN HOSPITALITY

After the experience in American cities, Jackie regarded coming to Montreal as a wonderful experience. He called his relationship with the city of Montreal as "love at first sight." After the rejection, unpleasantness and uncertainty that Jackie confronted south of the Canadian border, he was pleased upon his return to encounter an atmosphere of "... complete acceptance and something approaching adulation."[65]

Jackie Robinson described the people of Montreal as "warm and wonderful" toward him and his wife. The Robinsons rented an apartment in a predominantly French-Canadian neighbourhood living on de Gaspé Street near Mount Royal. A close friend of the Robinsons recalled that the first word Rachel learned in French was 'noir'. Many of the kids in the neighbourhood had never seen a Black person. In the aftermath of the war, butter and sugar were only obtainable with ration coupons and the neighbours were always bringing them to the Robinsons' door. [66]

Given the difficulties of getting accommodation in America's white neighbourhoods, Rachel Robinson did not know what to expect in Montreal. When seeking an apartment, she was pleasantly surprised that there was absolutely no problem obtaining a room and she was treated

65 Ibid.
66 La Presse. October 4, 1946.

graciously by her landlady. To the extent that the Montreal Royals fans adopted Jackie Robinson, so too did many of the neighbours in the De Gaspé street area. Certainly, in part, the star status of the Robinsons contributed to the splendid way they were received, a welcome not comparable to what they experienced in many parts of the United States during that period. Indeed, it is likely that Mr. Racine and Rickey knew the Robinsons would be warmly greeted by the neighbours thus alleviating a potentially important burden upon Jackie and his pregnant wife. Neighbours and nearly everyone the Robinsons encountered were responsive to their needs. Since most people in the neighbourhood didn't speak English, the couple was a kind of curiosity. Mrs. Robinson added that "...when they finally found out who we were, it was beautiful." Jackie noted that while the Robinsons were stared at on the streets, the stares were friendly. Kids stared along behind us, an adoring retinue."[67] The Robinsons and their French-Canadian neighbours were relatively successful in overcoming the important language barriers that existed between them. Despite the "northern hospitality" of their French Canadian neighbours, the Robinsons were in an unfamiliar environment far removed from friends and relatives. Not living near de Lormier Stadium, as noted earlier, the Robinsons rarely interacted with the other players off the field. When Jackie was on the road, Mrs. Robinson often felt isolated.

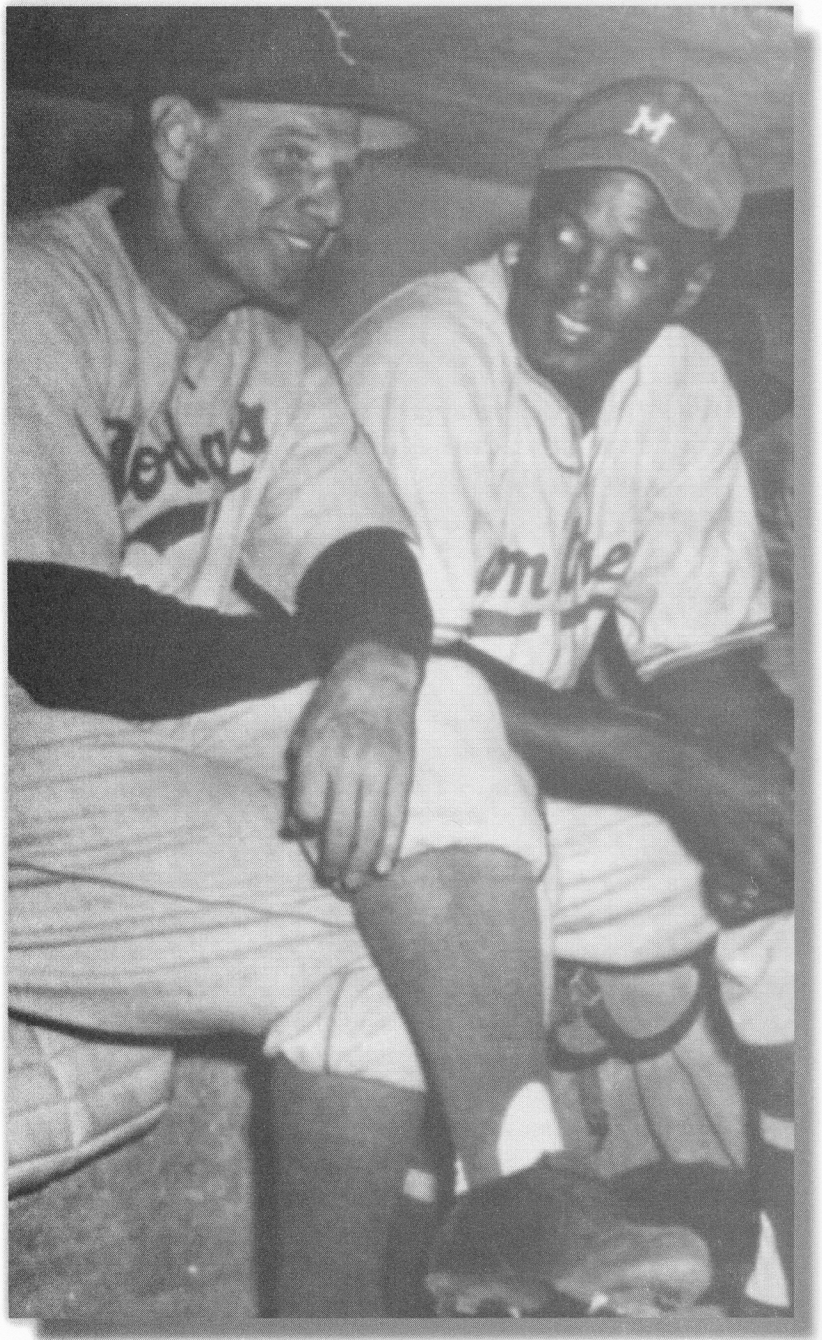
In appreciation of the way he had been received by fans and neighbours alike, Jackie often showed his gratitude to

67 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. pp. 60.

the Montreal fans rarely refusing requests for autographs. He occasionally spoke at youth gatherings and he was the star when in mid-June he joined the Montreal Canadians in a visit to ailing servicemen. As one of Robinson's biographers observed, "Even among the heroes of Canada's own national pastime, Robinson remained the prime attraction."[68]

According to Jean-Pierre Roy, "Jackie always believed the Montreal fans would be behind him and he often said he would never have made it without the inspiration he got here. He loved the city." Robinson himself attributed the reception he received in Montreal to the fact that "... people there were proud of the team that bore their city's name." With the championship won, Jackie asked the journalists to thank the supporters of the Montreal club for all they had done for him during the season. For Jackie Robinson and the supporters of the Montreal Royals there was a strong sense of mutual appreciation. It was a sort of mutual admiration club. The circumstances proved to be rife for both player and fans during the summer of 1946. As a long-time popular sports commentator, "... it might have happened anywhere else and Montreal is fortunate to have been the historic venue."[69] One sportswriter claimed that "...the historic import of Robinson's role and play that season lifted a minor league title into the realm of the mythic. A solitary human being and a city confronted society's worst demons and for a brief moment slew them."[70]

68 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 124.
69 Jackie Robinson (as told to Alfred Duckett), op. cit. pp. 60.
70 Jules Tygiel. op. cit. p. 126.



Leo Durocher, manager of the Brooklyns Dodgers, and Jackie Robinson, March 28, 1947
Courtesy of La Presse

CONCLUSION

It is not entirely clear that in 1946 most Montrealers understood the historic role their city played in what was hailed as the great experiment. It is more likely that Robinson's admission to the Royals was viewed by most Montrealers as more a sports story than a civil rights issue. Whereas, on the other hand, in the United States, it was seen almost as much as a civil rights breakthrough as it was a sports story. For the Montreal media, many die-hard fans of the Royals and many members of Montreal's Black community, there was likely a greater awareness of the magnitude of Robinson's summer of baseball in Montreal and its implications for the sport South of the border. Clearly, the Royals' president Hector Racine understood this when he made what he described as a historic announcement, the signing of Robinson. Paradoxically, the Robinson announcement was considered anti-climactic by many Montreal baseball fans who were expecting their team President to announce that the city was on the verge of breaking into the major leagues. (The city had to wait another twenty-four years for this to be attained.)

Whereas opponents of integration in the United States well understand the impact of Robinson's entry into the Montreal Royals, in the city of Montreal there was no equivalent mobilization against such integration. At that time, in Quebec and in the city of Montreal, conversations about segregation and integration were more closely tied to one's religion than to one's racial background.

Branch Rickey doubtless knew what he was doing when he sent his future star to the Montreal farm club in the summer of 1946. He believed Jackie Robinson could better develop his immense talents relatively unfettered by the racial prejudices that continued to sweep much of the United States in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Rickey knew that Americans could either watch or hear reports on Jackie's progress at home and on the road as they slowly grew accustomed to the idea of him playing in the major leagues. Rickey sensed an important degree of empathy amongst Montrealers. While there was no guarantee of acceptance of Robinson in Montreal, Rickey believed that there was considerably less intolerance toward Blacks in the city than in most U.S. cities of that period. Robinson believed that in general Canadians viewed him, "as a United States citizen who happened to have a coloured skin." The tendency to understate the degree of prejudice in Montreal at that time is likely a function of the United States being the basis of comparison for evaluating the phenomenon. This said, Montreal baseball fans had much to be proud of in 1946 in the exemplary response they offered to Robinson in that summer. In Montreal, the great experiment was successful.

For one of Jackie Robinson's principal biographers, his presence in Canada constituted an "unmistakable irony" that being, "...the integration of baseball, the national pastime of the United States, would be enacted largely outside that country's borders."

Just a few days prior to the opening game at Roosevelt Stadium, one Chicago editorialist observed that: "It is ironical that America supposedly the cradle of democracy, is forced

to send the first two N****es in baseball to Canada in order for him to be accepted."

Many baseball fans across North America would be watching Robinson in the Summer of '46 and in turn paying close attention to the Royals players and fans. By their tremendous outpouring of support for Jackie Robinson and the team during that season, Montrealers did not disappoint. Indeed, during that summer, they set an example for many North Americans to follow.

Jackie Robinson and his wife Rachel Isum.
(*Mémorial du Québec*, tome VI, p. 166)

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Montreal Gazette. 1945 and 1946.

The Montreal Daily Star. 1945, 1946 and 1972.

The Montreal Herald. 1946.

The New York Times. 1946.

The Sporting News. 1945.

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I can imagine the shock and awe in the stands when Jackie Robinson entered his first major league game in 1947, at a time when for 60 years baseball club owners, relying on U.S. Supreme Court rulings, had prohibited any drafting of black players. Robinson's mere presence shook the walls of the temple of racist ignominy and, needless to say, with each of his historic home runs, he was more than aware of it. Jackie Robinson armed with his talent, his courage, his coolness, his determination, quickly became one of the catalysts of the movement against systemic racial discrimination and an iconic figure in the "Civil Rights Revolution." I thank Jack Jedwab for keeping this episode of valor alive in our memories. For the fight is far from over, and we need more than ever today for all these episodes of resistance to come out of the wings of history. For unfortunately oblivion very quickly fills the void.

Michaëlle Jean, 27th Governor General of Canada

As we focus on diversity and inclusion the Jackie Robinson story is a great source of inspiration for today's context. His integrity, resilience and ground-breaking achievements have served and still serves as a role model for what can be accomplished. Gratitude to Jack Jedwab for keeping Jackie Robinson's story of overcoming adversity and breaking the colour bar alive."

Hon. Dr. Jean Augustine, P.C., C.M., O.Ont., C.B.E.

Jackie Robinson was at the forefront of the battle against systemic racism that continues to this day. His story reminds us, in various ways, of both how far we have come, and how far we still have to go. Jack Jedwab, who has devoted much of his life to issues around diversity and inclusion, is an eloquent and appropriate chronicler of his story.

Anthony Wilson-Smith, President & CEO, HIstorica Canada

Jack Jedwab has written an important book on the outstanding accomplishments of Jackie Robinson and the real barriers he faced throughout his career. He also chronicles the loving embrace Jackie and Rachel felt during their time here in my beloved city, Montreal. Montrealers were so accepting of his presence and so proud of his exploits on the field and as loving of his family off the field. This is really the tale of a remarkable man and his family and the city that paved the way for Robinson's extraordinary breakthrough.

Linton Garner,
Executive Director of the Regional Association of West Quebecers

Jackie Robinson destroyed the minor league baseball color barrier in 1946 with a four-hit, four-run, four-RBI, two-stolen base performance in his debut and a magical season for him and the Montreal Royals. While there is a wealth of scholarship on Robinson's 1947, few have devoted more than scant attention to his '46. Jack Jedwab is an exception, recounting evocative, significant details of Robinson's time with Montreal, an important springboard for his seismic impact in the years that followed.

William Weinbaum, ESPN

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