

From Fraternity to Fracture: Black Press Coverage of and Involvement in Negro League Baseball in the 1920s

By Brian Carroll

This examination of baseball coverage by the country's largest black weeklies during the 1920s reveals a close partnership between the black press and the black community's businessmen to found and sustain Negro league baseball. Themes revealed in an analysis of coverage include the significance of baseball as a way to create jobs and income within the black community; the moral obligation for blacks to support their own leagues; the symbolic importance of black baseball in terms of civic pride and solidarity; and the opportunity to demonstrate economic and athletic achievement to mainstream society. Implicit in each of these themes is an acceptance of or acquiescence to white-enforced segregation and the nether world for blacks it created. This article also explores what was absent in black press coverage. There was no discussion of major league baseball's color ban in evidence during the decade and, consequently, no coordinated plan to challenge or even protest professional baseball's racist policies. Also conspicuously absent is coverage of baseball players as personalities; the heroes during the period, at least to the writers, were the Negro league team owners.

So many black baseball fans jammed Detroit's Mack Park on a chilly Sunday afternoon in May 1920 that according to the *Chicago Defender* the very structural integrity of the stadium had quite possibly been compromised. There were not enough seats for the more than 15,000 fans who "did everything except riot in their quest for entrance."¹ Those who managed to get inside Mack, including those who elbowed past security guards and the "hundreds perched" on

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the park's fence like "rows of sparrows," watched the Detroit Stars beat the Havana's Cubans 7-2.² The future of black baseball looked bright.

For publishers of the leading black newspapers of the 1920s, the sport offered a community ravaged by the Depression much more than mere diversion. In the words of *Pittsburgh Courier* publisher Robert L. Vann, baseball promised blacks "an economic and civic institution" capable of enabling a shared sense of identity and purpose.³ It is little wonder that during the 1920s, more than a quarter-century after Jim Crow's legalization, the big black weeklies such as the *Courier* and *Defender* considered themselves important partners with black entrepreneurs in helping to make organized baseball a reality for what was a completely segregated community. Beginning with the founding of the first enduring black professional league, the Negro National League in 1920, these newspapers actively promoted baseball as a business with which the future of self-determination was inextricably linked.

An examination of sports coverage by the country's largest black weeklies during the 1920s makes it clear that writers saw black baseball as an important test case for entrepreneurship and Booker T. Washington-style bootstrapping and self-help. Despite the lofty ambitions, the close baseball-press partnership fractured in mid-decade mostly due to dissension among the team owners, whose many failures made the leagues' daunting fiscal challenges all the more difficult to overcome. This fracture resulted in the first of many shifts in black press coverage of the sport during the four-decade-long history of the Negro leagues.⁴ Themes revealed in an analysis of coverage include the significance of baseball as a way to create jobs and income within the black community; the moral obligation for blacks to support their own leagues; the symbolic importance of black baseball in terms of civic pride and solidarity; and the opportunity to demonstrate economic and athletic achievement to mainstream society. Implicit in each of these themes is an acceptance of or acquiescence to white-enforced segregation and the nether world for blacks it created.

This article also explores what was absent in black press coverage. There was no discussion of major league baseball's color ban in evidence during the decade. Consequently, no coordinated plan to challenge or even protest professional baseball's racist policies was yet articulated. Also conspicuously absent is coverage of baseball players as personalities; the heroes during the period, at least to the writers, were instead the team owners.

Review of the literature

Because black press writers and editors are prominent in the narrative of Negro league history, and since the mainstream press largely ignored the Negro leagues, black newspapers provide an important primary source for scholarship on Negro league baseball and the re-integration of professional baseball. They are essential primary sources in the many Negro league histories that have proliferated since publication of Robert Peterson's groundbreaking *Only The Ball Was White* in 1970, perhaps most exhaustively utilized in Neil Lanctot's *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* published in 2004.⁵ Rarely, however, has the black press itself been the subject of research in the context of its relationship with and intimate involvement in black baseball. This article is an effort to bring these newspapers into focus as participants and agents of change in the quarter-century-long effort to re-integrate the national pastime.

Almost no research has been done on black press coverage of and involvement in Negro league baseball during its formative stages, a period that began in 1920 and continued, albeit in fits and starts, through the mid-1930s. Research on the Negro leagues and the black press appearing in journalism and mass communication publications—what little there is—has focused almost exclusively on Jackie Robinson and the integration of major league baseball in the 1940s and 1950s. David Wiggins, Chris Lamb, Pat Washburn, and Glen Bleske are among those who have examined the mid-century activism of the black press during the sport's slow, incremental integration.⁶ By looking at the 1920s and the beginnings of black professional baseball, this article is an attempt to begin filling a void in the literature and at better understanding the protest and direct intervention that came later.

The sample for this study included every issue of the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* newspapers published from January 1920 through December 1929 or approximately 1,000 weekly issues.⁷ Of particular interest were the front page, op-ed pages, and sports pages of each weekly issue, which were read in their entirety. Included in the sample was every article on baseball appearing in either newspaper, wherever it appeared. The *Defender*, founded in 1905 by attorney Robert S. Abbott, was selected because it became the country's largest black weekly in terms of circulation during the period studied and by 1925 had a circulation of 250,000, a new standard for the black press.⁸ The *Courier*, which replaced the

Defender as the most widely read black weekly in the late 1930s, was already a national publication of influence in the 1920s, making it an important primary source, as well.⁹ Founded in 1910 by a group that included Robert L. Vann, the *Courier* reached a peak circulation of 330,000 in 1947.¹⁰ Negro league baseball's center of dominance in the 1920s was Chicago, anchored by Andrew "Rube" Foster's perennial champion Chicago American Giants. In the 1930s, the sport's power center shifted from the Windy City to the Steel City and to Gus Greenlee's Pittsburgh Crawfords.¹¹

Fraternity

Based on coverage, the baseball-press partnership of the 1920s can be described as passing through three phases: close coordination in the early and middle parts of the decade, mounting skepticism and criticism from the writers beginning in the mid-1920s, and rapprochement in the latter part of the decade as black baseball's prospects dimmed. The coverage reveals newspapermen more interested in promoting the interests and welfare of the black community than in twenty-first-century journalistic values such as objectivity and accuracy, and it underscores the newspapers' role as validators of the black experience.

Early in the decade, the *Defender* boasted of its participation in and support of the league, promising its readers a "correct version" of the comings and goings of the Negro National League. The *Defender* claimed in 1922 to be "the newspaper which has done more for baseball and sports among our people than any three papers published."¹² This self-congratulation explains in part how the *Defender* could choose during this phase not to criticize the league or its owners even though the owners routinely failed to solve or even address the sport's structural problems. At least through the decade's first half, the newspaper instead emphasized what it called the owners' "church-like harmony," a description that research proves farcical. The club owners rarely agreed on anything throughout the leagues' four-decade history, including where or even whether to hold annual meetings.¹³

The relationship of the newspapers with the league they helped start was complex. The many roles of writers at baseball's annual meetings in 1922 are emblematic. Ira F. Lewis, the *Pittsburgh Courier*'s managing editor, covered the meetings for the paper but also participated as league secretary, the second-most powerful position in the organization's governing elite and as the

representative for the Pittsburgh Keystones baseball club. Q.J. Gilmore, a contributing sportswriter both to the Kansas City *Call* and *Kansas City Sun*, simultaneously served as full-time secretary and business manager of the Kansas City Monarchs baseball team. At the request of Rube Foster and the owners, writers crafted the league's constitution and bylaws and they determined team rosters. By this level of participation it is clear the writers and their publishers saw black baseball as more than sport. Ira Lewis wrote in a 1920 issue of *The Competitor*, a monthly publication of the *Courier*, that the "workings of the league will be watched with more than passing interest by everyone, if it is successful, as we all hope, look for a further merging of colored business interests on a national scale."¹⁴ Lewis believed baseball provided a potential model for economic success throughout the black community.

With an eye toward promoting the new league, sportswriters in attendance formed the National Sport Writers' Association, electing long-time *Defender* sports editor Frank Young to serve as its first president.¹⁵ The association's stated goals included fostering a "fraternal feeling" among the newspapers and making it possible "to work in complete harmony along sports lines."¹⁶ Though the group did provide some reporting of away games, the coverage suggests that these reports were neither frequent nor regular.¹⁷

Pulling together

Opportunistic, optimistic, participative journalism was common for black newspapers of the period. Robert Abbott wrote a column in September 1922 on the *Defender*'s front page urging blacks to "pull together" to "promote various causes and programs – college campaigns, health campaigns, and so forth."¹⁸ There is no indication that the newspapers' involvement in these campaigns was considered a conflict of interest. The black newspapers saw themselves as a "fighting press," and therefore committed themselves to the uplift of their readers, a goal shared by black businessmen in baseball and beyond.¹⁹ Such cooperation may have helped develop a sense of common understanding that mitigated against viewing such close ties as a source of conflicts of interest.

The writers' optimism was obvious at least through 1924 when the press-baseball alliance first showed cracks. Until then the writers glossed over baseball's problems and instead encouraged and in some cases demanded support for baseball from "the Race," for the good of the Race, on the basis of supporting a black-owned

business. The papers also allowed team owners seemingly unlimited access to its sports pages, giving them weekly columns in-season and out and publishing un-bylined articles almost certainly penned by the owners. Rube Foster, C.I. Taylor of the Indianapolis ABCs, and Cum Posey of Pittsburgh's Homestead Grays all wrote regular columns for either of the top two national weeklies, in Foster's case for both.

Foster used his column to gush about what he and his fellow black team owners were able to accomplish given the scant resources with which they had to work, particularly compared to their counterparts in the major leagues. Where big league owners had "wealth counted in millions," Foster and his fraternity had "only the faith in the weather man. . . . We are willing and know what can be done, but have nothing to do it with," Foster wrote.²⁰ He pooled resources with other Chicagoland businessmen, black and white, though, perhaps to avoid charges of hypocrisy, he mentioned in his columns only his and the Giants' black business partners.²¹

Symbolic of the close-knit business fraternities in baseball's cities were the many banquets, smokers, and celebrations baseball's owners threw for one another, events almost always attended also by newspapermen, business associates, and black politicians. At one such banquet in honor of Rube Foster in early 1923, those gathering at Cleveland's Coleman Restaurant included officials of the Cleveland Tate Stars baseball team; the editor of the Cleveland *Whip*; a director of the Empire Bank; a vice president of the Starlight Realty Co.; and other local businessmen.²²

The group that collaborated to organize YWCA Day at Chicago's Schorling Park that same year perhaps best illustrates the mutual ties and interests of Chicago's business and political elites. The event's organizing committee teamed *Defender* publisher Robert Abbott; Jesse Binga, owner of the Binga State Bank; Oscar DePriest, Chicago's first black city council member, successful real estate broker, and numbers king; Frank L. Gillespie, founder and president of the Liberty Life Insurance Co., which claimed to be the first "legal reserve company ever incorporated north of the Mason-Dixon line"; and Frank Young, the *Defender's* sports editor.²³ Both Binga State Bank and Liberty Life were major advertisers in the *Defender*, and Abbott served as a director on the Binga Bank board. Both were members and officers of the Appomattox Club, which united Chicago's black Republicans, and the Associated Business Club. Abbott was president of Associated Business; Binga was secretary. A. L. Jackson, associate editor of the *Defender*, served as

vice president of the Appomattox Club in 1924, when P. L. Prattis of the *Courier* acted as the association's corresponding secretary.²⁴

Rube Foster, Taylor of the ABCs, and Bolden of the Hilldales in Philadelphia were card-carrying members of these business coalitions; they were businessmen and community leaders first and baseball men second. Taylor, for example, was a member of and a deacon in the Bethel A.M.E. Church; a member of the Persian Temple of the Mystic Shrines, among other branches of the Masons; and owner of a billiards parlor and social club in Indianapolis, where some of Taylor's players worked in the off-season.²⁵ According to his obituary in the *Freeman*, Taylor was a man "active in all civic matters . . . and in all charitable drives."²⁶ Foster and Bolden had similar business and civic résumés.

As the guest lists for the various social functions suggest, the press-baseball relationship was reciprocal. Team owners bought advertising in the black newspapers, offered newspapermen seats on the teams' corporate boards, and made them partners in the founding and running of their leagues. There is little evidence, however, of direct financial investment in any of the baseball teams by newspaper publishers or the writers that covered the teams, although it is a possibility given their many associations in the various business fraternities. The only direct financial tie discovered went the other direction. A reference in Cum Posey's obituary describes him as a principal owner of Pittsburgh's Homestead Grays and a shareholder of the *Courier*. Posey's father was the *Courier*'s first president and a founding director. The extent of the younger Posey's investment in the *Courier* was not specified.²⁷

Because baseball's officials and members of the press enjoyed prestige and power through their affiliation, they made their ties very public. When the Chicago American Giants opened their 1917 campaign, black Chicago alderman Louie B. Anderson joined Abbott, the *Defender*'s publisher, to form the pitcher-catcher battery for that season's ceremonial first pitch.²⁸ Anderson, a World War I veteran and attorney, joined Abbott to watch the game from a special box reserved for them by Foster, a section that also included alderman Edward H. Wright, founder of the Appomattox Club and an attorney, and two other black businessmen.²⁹

Self-help philosophy

Part of the explanation for the fast partnership lies in the fact that the mentalities of Foster, Taylor, and Bolden, and those of *Defender*

publisher Robert S. Abbott, *Indianapolis Freeman* publisher George Knox, and *Pittsburgh Courier* publisher Robert Vann, were so similar.³⁰ Each subscribed at least in part to the views and methods of Booker T. Washington, who preached a gospel of self-help and accommodation with whites through achievement and hard work. When Bolden incorporated his Hilldale Baseball and Exhibition Company, for example, he employed his former players to run it. To get more of Hilldale's fan base in the Darby area of Philadelphia out to games, Bolden arranged with the local black-owned transit company to add Hilldale Park to its trolley lines and to run extra cars before and after the games.³¹

Foster's columns also echoed Washington's prescriptions. A common refrain posited that black baseball *had* to succeed if for no other reason than for the jobs it could create for blacks. Fans naturally were obliged to give the league their "healthy patronage and support," he wrote, because baseball helped "so many hundreds of our own in a material way."³² Baseball was unique in this respect. Other sports did not have the commercial impact within the black community that baseball provided, principally because of the large number of baseball games in any one season.³³ In a page-one *Courier* editorial, Vann contrasted baseball's fiscal importance with that of football, which he said could "not assume the economic proportions known to baseball."³⁴

This emphasis on baseball as a business meant that what happened at the gate and in the front office overshadowed what occurred on the field, at least as reflected in newspaper coverage. In a January 1922 column in the *Defender*, for example, sportswriter Dave Wyatt supported Foster's stated desire to weed out the league's lesser businessmen and to find "those who are fit," a common cry in the *Defender* and in the *Courier* during the 1920s.³⁵ The owners less adept at business matters than Foster would have to go, Wyatt argued, "in order to make the game more profitable to those who are fit." For emphasis, Wyatt used a barnyard phrase repeated by sportswriters throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, prematurely calling black baseball "the goose that has laid the golden eggs."³⁶

Wyatt's zealotry in supporting Foster perhaps blinded him to the Chicago magnate's obvious preference not merely for top businessmen, an elite that included rivals J.L. Wilkinson in Kansas City and Ed Bolden in Philadelphia, but for those willing to yield to his wishes and ways. The mercuric baseball career of Detroit's John "Tenny" Blount is evidence. Foster controlled the roster of Blount's Detroit Stars, as well as the lease on the Stars' venue, Mack

Park. As long as he cooperated with Foster, Blount was described in the press as “an example for all managers to follow,” Foster’s “most trustworthy lieutenant,” and “one of the best known and most popular owners that the game has produced.”³⁷ When Blount’s support wavered, however, the *Defender* and *Courier* joined Foster in casting Blount out of baseball and censuring him “for not playing league games and because players claimed he had stopped paying their salaries.”³⁸

Owners as heroes

Wyatt’s zeal for and blind loyalty to Foster was not an anomaly. Though difficult to envision in a modern era populated by the likes of team owners Peter Angelos, George Steinbrenner, and Bud Selig, black baseball owners were *the* heroes in the sports pages of the 1920s, not ball players. The owners were often referred to as magnates or captains of business. The most frequently praised magnate was Rube Foster, though it was often Foster himself penning the praise. To the *Defender*, no one “worked more faithful (*sic*) than the Chicago ‘chief’ to make the meeting possible,” a reference to Foster’s involvement organizing the league.³⁹ Anticipating the inaugural season beginning in April 1920, Wyatt hailed Foster as having “made more sacrifices for the good of the game than all the managers together” and as “the rock against which many a wave of adversity has been dashed to nothingness.”⁴⁰

A controversy in 1923 about scheduling shows the lengths the black press was willing to go to burnish the image of its heroes. Since ballpark ownership was rare in the Negro leagues, team schedules were dependent on the pleasure of other, usually white teams, including major league, minor league, and even white semi-professional teams. Most black clubs had to lease parks when the home teams of those venues were either on the road or idle, and they usually had to pay steep rental fees that eroded already thin operating margins. Rube Foster, who composed the schedules, claimed that since only four of the league’s teams controlled their venues, he was forced to schedule a disproportionate number of weekend dates in the parks black teams controlled, most notably his own.

Foster used his weekly *Defender* column to explain why the Negro National schedule so favored his own Chicago American Giants, but he omitted in his explanation the five percent cut he claimed as a booking fee, a fiscal fact the *Defender* conveniently overlooked, as well. Frank Young had to have known about the fees

since in February 1920 he helped draft the league's constitution and bylaws that gave Foster the authority. Under the byline "Mister Fan," Young argued that there was "no possible way to arrange schedules other than they have been arranged." Young even threatened unsupportive fans with the loss of baseball: "If President Foster withdraws his financial support from the league or the association—up in the air it goes."⁴¹

The five percent take was perhaps to be admired since the owners were above all lauded for their business acumen, or for what the writers credited to them as business acumen. When Cleveland's George Hooper bought a baseball park for the Tate Stars, he was celebrated for "saving" the team, according to the *Defender*, which described him as "one of the really remarkable men of the Race." Hooper invested in the game not to make money, but rather "from a purely unselfish motive—from a desire to be of service to an enterprise dedicated to the good of the members of his Race," according to the newspaper.⁴² Only a passing mention was made a month later when the Stars failed to come up with the \$1,000 league deposit.

The owners' presence in and commitment to their urban communities offered a sharp contrast to the complete lack of such activity by the white bookmakers at the helm of the Negro National League's primary competition, the Eastern Colored League, which was organized in December 1922. This black-white contrast was picked up as a theme in coverage in the newspapers covering Negro National teams, publications that routinely described the upstart ECL and its white-owned members as "outlaws."⁴³ The comparisons could only add to the luster of the Negro National's "Race men." The target of much of the writers' ire was the ECL's principal owner, New York bookmaker Nat Strong. As owner of the black Royal Giants, the white Brooklyn Bushwicks, and Dexter Park in Brooklyn, Strong chose not to establish links with black businessmen in Harlem, where his Royal Giants played.⁴⁴ Strong did not seek favor or coverage from the black newspapers *New York Age* or *Amsterdam News*. He hired only white ticket-takers and white umpires, and he worked collusively within the ECL and with stadium owners to virtually lock Negro National teams out of New York, the city with the nation's largest black population at that time.⁴⁵ Another white ECL team owner reviled in the black newspapers, Charles Spedden of the Baltimore Black Sox, also spurned the local black business community by refusing to hire stadium workers of color. Spedden added insult to his injuring of Baltimore's black working class by describing its members as less than satisfactory "in the rapid

handling of change . . . [and] short when the count up is made.”⁴⁶

Colored World Series

The newspapers’ emphasis of commercial achievement was most conspicuous during the first Colored World Series in 1924.⁴⁷ Coverage stressed gate receipts and the financial impact of the games, not the performances on the field or the outcomes of the games. Detailed accounts of revenues and disbursements were published in the *Defender* and the *Courier*, both of which sided with owners and against players in a controversy about whether the Series’ participants could have made more money barnstorming.⁴⁸ Even holding the Series was hailed mainly for its potential financial windfall for the black community. The *Courier*’s Philadelphia-based correspondent, W. Rollo Wilson, wrote during that first Colored World Series that, “like the white man, the ‘brother’ is beginning to see the folly of falling out of things that concern his financial well-being.”⁴⁹ Another story in the *Courier* anticipating the Series is remarkable in the detail it provides of the financial arrangements, including which parties were entitled to a share of the revenues, how expenses would be assigned, and even who should receive complimentary game tickets.⁵⁰ The story appeared on the *Courier*’s front page.

For the black press, the Series became a symbol of progress. The *Kansas City Call* celebrated it as a “long step forward” for baseball among blacks, while the *Philadelphia Tribune* championed Taylor and Foster for organizing the sport and, therefore, making possible such a “symbol of race progress.”⁵¹ The *Defender* and *Courier* trumpeted the Series on their front pages in the only instances during the early 1920s that baseball made page one, and they provided blanket coverage of the games in the sports sections.

Just as the black press ignored the major leagues, the Negro leagues normally were invisible to the white dailies. The Series changed this, if only for a few weeks. Frank Young, who in addition to covering the games for the *Defender* served as one of the Series’ two official scorers, credited white dailies in Philadelphia and Kansas City “for giving front-page space and carrying the scores play-by-play. “The [Kansas City] Journal-Post went so far as to use the pictures of [Nip] Winters and [Bullet] Rogan in the Sunday morning edition, the first time in history of the papers that a Colored man’s picture . . . found its way into print unless he had committed a crime,” Young wrote.⁵²

Through coverage in the dailies, white baseball fans were awakened to the existence of two fully functioning black leagues, organizations that at least in some ways resembled major league baseball. As the *Defender* noted, the Series did “more to gain the fans’ attention in the national pastime as regards to our group, than anything that has been done in recent years.”⁵³ The *Kansas City Call* was even more enthusiastic, arguing that “Negro sport has done what Negro churches, Negro lodges, Negro business could not do.” The Series had “shown that a Negro can get attention for a good deed well done, and that publicity is no longer the exclusive mark of our criminals.”⁵⁴ The Colored World Series could not overcome its own unwieldiness, however. Too many games, poor weather, and gate receipts insufficient to reward players for giving up lucrative post-season barnstorming schedules doomed the event after four editions; the last was held in 1927. Series players each received less than \$100, which was far less than barnstorming could have paid them.⁵⁵

Umpire controversy

The one exception to otherwise universally supportive coverage by the black weeklies of the Negro National League concerned an evidence of hypocrisy perhaps too glaring to overlook, particularly given the stated objectives of the league and the journalists’ very public involvement in the league’s affairs. The league’s umpires all were white. In spite of their own rhetoric about building a black business by and for the black community, Rube Foster resisted hiring black officials and, therefore, erected a color barrier of his own.

Young picked the issue as an important one as early as 1920, the year of the Negro National’s founding, and he increased pressure on black baseball as the decade progressed. In a 1922 column, for instance, he called on the league to begin hiring black umpires, specifically “Jamison in Baltimore” and “two in New Orleans.” In response, Foster foreshadowed a rationale used by major league owners to bar black players from the big leagues. He claimed there were no qualified black umpires. “Train them, I say. Train them,” Young chided. “If you can train a chimpanzee to do things then you can train men.”⁵⁶

Foster eventually hired eight black officials in April 1923, enough to handle most of the league’s games, and the *Defender*’s response indicates that newspaper’s readiness to forgive. The newspaper published a column by one of the umpires hired, Tom Johnson, a former player for the St. Louis Stars. Johnson attempted

to recast history in favor of Foster by describing him as having “long been determined to install an umpire system,” despite protest and resistance. Johnson did not identify the protesters and no evidence of resistance is found in the black newspapers other than that from Foster. In fact, the magnate’s “courageous” stand made him no less than “the Race’s greatest leader . . . the ‘father’ of a movement which is destined to be the Race’s greatest achievement of all time,” Johnson wrote.⁵⁷ The *Defender* also published a column by another of the umpires hired, Billy Donaldson, who wrote a similarly glowing tribute.⁵⁸

Portrayal of players

In contrast to the frequent and favorable coverage on owners, the players were largely ignored. Most player mentions in the newspapers during the decade included only last names, even on first reference. Stories about players often criticized their behavior, both on and off the field, in sharp contrast to the treatment of the owners. A former player himself, the *Defender*’s Dave Wyatt nonetheless was a frequent critic of the players. Echoing Foster’s own critiques, Wyatt described them as greedy and self-serving. In a February 1922 article, Young refers to outfielder Clarence Smith as “property of Detroit Stars,” an ironic choice of words given slavery’s long-fingered legacy.⁵⁹ When players groused over pay in 1923, the *Defender* called them “Monshine [*sic*] drinkers” slated to be either cut or traded.⁶⁰ Later in the decade, Young criticized the Chicago’s black players for not being in shape and for being too easily enamored with “whiskey, white mule, synthetic gin, and “riotous living. . . . If the players can’t be handled, baseball is doomed.”⁶¹ To Young the lack of dedication on the part of the players trumped mismanagement by the owners as the chief threat to the game.

Players existed in newspaper coverage largely as chits or pawns and rarely as individuals with a vested interest in the fate of the leagues themselves or as human beings with families and futures. This treatment would continue throughout the period under study and change only in the 1930s with the arrival of pitching great Satchel Paige and hard-hitting catcher Josh Gibson, both of whom are enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

The newspapers’ approach in regular game coverage was boosteristic, at least through the first half of the decade. The *Defender* reported many stories under the byline “Mister Fan” to offer a fan’s perspective. Almost certainly written by Frank Young, the stories

used colorful colloquialisms and hyperbole to effuse unbridled and unabashed enthusiasm for the games. Before the 1923 season, for instance, Mister Fan predicted it would be “one of the greatest in the history of the league,” despite heavy financial losses suffered by owners in the 1922 campaign.⁶² The Mister Fan column repeated the rosy prediction in 1924, describing the American Giants as training “as no club that has ever left Chicago has ever trained.” The Giants were working to become “a smooth working combination, the best that has ever represented the South side lot,” according to the *Defender*.⁶³

Trumpeting large crowds was a hallmark of week-to-week season coverage, with attendance figures often appearing in a story’s headline. In fact, it was not uncommon for the turnstile total to appear in a game story’s headline but for the score and even the game’s winner to be excluded. In May 1923, eleven thousand people “jammed into every available space” to see the Kansas City Monarchs beat the Chicago American Giants, according to the *Defender*.⁶⁴ A week later the newspaper ran the headline, “Ten Thousand See Detroit Opener at Mack Park,” and in June, “17,000 See Foster Win.”⁶⁵

Game statistics, rankings, and even league standings, however, were problematic. Only a few teams regularly sent in results, especially when they lost. Fans often complained, as did the writers, and with increasing volume during the decade. The *Courier*’s Wilson lamented the void in June 1925, pointing out that the newspapers could not distinguish which games counted as official league games and, therefore, could not generate accurate statistics themselves.⁶⁶ The lead story in the *Defender*’s sports page in a January 1926 issue acknowledged that the newspapers had been accused by fans of withholding results out of bias against the league. The truth, according to the *Defender*, was that “there never has been a record kept of results,” and no fines levied for this breach by the league.⁶⁷ This negligence probably contributed to the partnership’s fracture later in the decade and, presumably, for waning interest on the part of fans unsure of the league’s standings.

Journalist participation as gauge

Sportswriters’ participation in the annual business meetings provides a convenient indicator of the health of the baseball-press partnership during the decade. At least through 1924, the writers were full participants, granted unrestricted access to the owners and

even seats at the table during proceedings. From the 1924 meetings Young reported that he, Gilmore, and the *Indianapolis Ledger's* A.D. Williams, who would replace Lewis as league secretary in 1926, were the three newspaper men “who were really qualified to speak their opinion” on the Negro National because they “sit in the league meetings . . . know all the workings, the plans, the trials of the league.”⁶⁸

By late 1924, however, the league’s messy state of affairs was such that the owners required secrecy for the first time. End-of-the-year meetings, which assembled officials from both the NNL and ECL for the first time, were described by Young as “closed – really closed – even to the newspaper men and the publicity man of the league having to sit out in the anteroom” of the Appomattox Club.⁶⁹ The press-baseball partnership began to splinter as the league’s problems proved stubborn and as an internecine blame game among the owners forced all owners and writers to pick sides. The sportswriters would never again enjoy the full access to and participation in league affairs that characterized the early 1920s.

The exit of sportswriters from the league’s organizational meetings did not immediately turn positive coverage into criticism, however. The league’s survival and success were paramount, explaining in part what can only be described as distorted reporting on the league’s affairs. The writers continued to describe attending games as a civic obligation and to characterize the league’s business in unflinchingly positive terms. Though the December 1924 meetings pitted Foster and Blount against each other for control of the Detroit Stars, a thoroughly one-sided fight that left Blount out of the league, the *Courier* nonetheless described the meetings as enjoying a “praiseworthy spirit” and displaying “a wide range of good feeling and satisfaction.” The meetings, according to the newspaper, ensured that the 1925 season would “go down in history . . . as the league’s greatest.”⁷⁰ The 1925 season was not the greatest. The league made less money than in 1924 and attendance for the second Colored World Series sagged well below that of the first year.⁷¹ The 1926 campaign proved no better and by late season Frank Young could no longer abide the internal dissension among the owners and that disunity’s undercutting of what the Negro leagues were founded to do.

In September Young lashed out, challenging the owners to “lay their petty ambition and jealousy aside and get down to business.” Because of the ceaseless bickering among the “magnates,” Young wrote that the time had come to negotiate territorial boundaries

similar to those used by big league baseball.⁷² The *New York Age* and the *Afro-American*, too, began criticizing the ECL's leadership, accusing it of operating primarily in its own best interests and, therefore, of being "not interested in the welfare of the entire league."⁷³ The criticism marked a significant shift in coverage and a break from the boosterism that had characterized most of the first seven seasons of Negro league play. The 1926 Colored World Series provided no relief. After what was an eleven-game marathon, the *Courier's* Rollo Wilson wrote that in business terms the Series was "not worth a nickel," while Young called the games "a joke" in light of their paltry payouts.⁷⁴ The entire ECL shut down in mid-1928 while in the west, the Negro National struggled to hold together. Rube Foster suffered a nervous breakdown in 1926, in part the result of the stresses of governing such a fractious group. He never fully recovered.

A column by Young in late 1928 marked another turning point in the *Defender's* support for the leagues and a change in the paper's impulse to blame fans and players when things went wrong. In the November 3 issue, finally, for the first time, the lack of support among fans pointed to the problem and no longer represented the problem itself. "The fans aren't getting what they want and we know it and the interest is lagging in the league," Young wrote. If the owners did not change their ways, "there won't be a league and one bright morning they will wake up to find that they have killed the goose that laid the golden egg." Threats to the goose's life came for the first time from owners, not the fans, "who must be satisfied or they will go somewhere else," Young wrote.⁷⁵ In July 1929, when he observed more black baseball fans filing in to see the White Sox than the number attending the American Giants game that same day, Young pointed to the poor product on the field offered by the then white-owned American Giants, an assignment of blame difficult to imagine during the decade's first half.

Beginning of the end

The stresses and struggles of running the league were in large part why Foster broke down in exhaustion, ruining him. From the shining hope in February 1920 of forcing professional baseball's integration by competing in terms of quality of play, the Negro leagues had become burlesque. An afternoon in August 1930 at Schorling Park, once the crown jewel of the league's ballparks, represented the league's ills in microcosm. The only fans in the stands for a

double-header between the American Giants and the Birmingham Black Barons were family of the players. Rowdiness had chased away most all others. The Giants held up the game for ten minutes to protest an official's call, and the Black Barons threatened to walk off the field. During the second game, three fights among players gave those few fans who had remained cause to leave.⁷⁶ Fights were common. Arguments with umpires, slow pitching, and the lazy fashion in which teams took the field and switched sides contributed to delays, as well, as did players who were not in shape.

Conditions were no less grim off the playing fields. The first signs of recession appeared for the black community in the middle of the decade and, according to one labor historian, the black community already was in the throes of the Depression by the end of 1926.⁷⁷ Young blamed the 1927's season of disappointment on bad weather and "the lack of employment among our folks."⁷⁸ When the stock market crashed in October 1929, thousands of blacks had already lost their jobs as the structural problem for baseball worsened. At a time when the national economy was weakening, player salaries, park rentals, and travel expenses all were rising.

Fiscal challenges and the absence of Foster necessitated the involvement of white businessmen, which alarmed the black writers. The pitch to fans all along had been to support the Race and the baseball businesses it controls and from which it benefits. Young gave voice to the fear that the Negro National was ceding control to non-black interests. After Foster's commitment to an insane asylum, the American Giants went to a white businessman, William Trimble. The Monarchs, St. Louis Stars, and Detroit Stars, too, were owned by white men, making the league, in Young's terms, a "50-50 proposition," racially.⁷⁹ (After collapsing in 1930, the league would re-organize as an almost all-black-owned, black-run enterprise in 1932.)

What was missing

Game reports, columns, analysis – all coverage was devoted to the Negro National League to the exclusion of the rest of professional baseball. Except when being described as an adversary of the>NNL and, therefore, as being against the best interests of black baseball, the ECL was rarely referred to and its games were not covered by black newspapers in Negro National League cities. This changed in late 1924 when the two leagues reached an armistice for the purposes of staging the first Colored World Series. During the year of the

ECL's founding, for example, the *Defender* mentioned that league only twice, and in both instances the paper celebrated Ed Bolden's defiance of its leadership.⁸⁰ In 1923, during the ECL's first season of play, the *Defender* again referenced the ECL but twice, once to criticize the "Eastern association raid" on NNL players and a second time to call the new league's limited schedule a "real laugh."⁸¹ Even major league action failed to get a mention in the *Defender* during the 1922 season until Frank Young's season-ending roundup column.⁸² The only other references to "organized baseball" were stories in October anticipating exhibition games between major league and Negro league teams.⁸³

Also absent in coverage throughout the period is any discussion of integration. It was not an issue for blacks or whites, at least not as it related to professional baseball. The pendulum of race had swung so dramatically toward separation that the black press and baseball's "magnates" busied themselves with building up the sport as a business and not directly challenging, in historian Donn Rogosin's words, "the inherent irrationality of American segregation."⁸⁴ The newspapers, too, were focused on promoting the interests and welfare of the black community as a discreetly separate world within a world, socially, culturally, and economically segregated from the mainstream.

Because the priority during this time was to establish baseball's businesses on stable terms and, therefore, to retain control of the sport within the black community, discussion about the major leagues' color ban was non-existent. Baseball's segregation was hardly protested or challenged.⁸⁵ Even on the many occasions when Negro league teams and squads of major leaguers played against each other in exhibition games, the hypocrisy that black players were prohibited from playing in the country's "National Game" drew little mention, much less debate or protest.⁸⁶ These exhibition games for the black press were instead reasons to celebrate since getting the two colors on the same field was more important in the 1920s. Discussing the fact that the two were forcibly separate would become the priority in the 1930s, when the Negro leagues could be used more to subvert segregation than to support it.

Conclusions

Sportswriters in the 1930s would not only call for change but would launch initiatives designed to challenge the status quo and to get major league baseball's leaders to the negotiating table.

In the 1920s, however, since there was no formal ban on players of color in writing and, therefore, nothing that could be litigated or protested, the black press first had to win from organized baseball even the admission that there indeed was such a policy. The publishers, editors, and writers of the *Defender* and *Courier*, among other newspapers, saw in the Negro leagues, therefore, a great opportunity. The sheer number of games promised significant economic gains for a hardscrabble community. Build it and the fans would come, the journalists believed, and they would come in such numbers as to make mainstream society take notice and, ultimately, begin discussing integration.

The black businessmen funding this great hope encouraged this agenda and often supplied its rhetoric. This served the owners' own purposes, which were largely about making a profit and acquiring power and prestige. They, too, articulated their enterprise in moralist terms and, with the help of obliging newspapers, used bylined weekly columns to cast themselves as humanitarians. They were fulfilling Booker T. Washington's philosophy of self-help and uplift and, therefore, accepted white society's belief that with a little work, a people could escape poverty and better itself. The Negro leagues' very name attests to this tacit acceptance.

First seen as agents of change, the owners were gradually seen as obstacles to it. The newspapermen would have to wait for another generation of businessmen to turn black baseball into a profit-making enterprise and, therefore, a black institution viable enough to force recognition of the hypocrisy of segregation in athletics and, by extension, throughout American society. But never again would black team owners be allowed to so freely and frequently use the black newspapers as their own personal soapboxes from which to lash out at adversaries and rivals or to demand fan attendance. Young in Chicago and Lewis and Wilson in Pittsburgh would from this point cheer far less and increasingly make demands that black baseball do better at organizing and in providing a good product. The intimacy shared in smoke-filled banquet rooms and in black-only hotels during the Negro National League's founding meetings was gone for good, shattered by the owners' malpractice, avarice, and inability to see beyond their own selfish interests. This fracture would produce reporting less wedded to the individual agendas of businessmen within the black community and more trained on winning civil rights and ending segregation. It would also shift emphasis from the baseball's back rooms to its playing fields, setting the stage for players to become the heroes of the 1930s and 1940s.⁸⁷

Endnotes

¹ Dave Wyatt, "Big Crowd Sees Stars Battle," *Chicago Defender*, 20 May 1920, 9.

² *Ibid.*

³ Robert L. Vann, "Football As A Vehicle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 December 1923, 1.

⁴ The terms "Negro leagues" and "Negro league baseball" refer collectively to the various black professional leagues that existed between 1920 and 1957, when Negro American League, the last of the black leagues, simply faded away. These leagues include the Negro National, Negro American, Negro Southern, and Eastern Colored League. Not referred to by this term are the many semi-professional and industrial leagues.

⁵ *Only The Ball Was White* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); *Negro League Baseball: The Rise and Ruin of a Black Institution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁶ Chris Lamb and Glen Bleske, "Covering the integration of baseball – a look back," *Editor & Publisher* 130, no. 4 (27 January 1996): 48-50; David Wiggins, "Wendell Smith, the *Pittsburgh Courier-Journal* and the Campaign to Include Blacks in Organized Baseball, 1933-1945," *Journal of Sport History* 10, no. 2 (1989): 5-29; Bill L. Weaver, "The Black Press and the Assault of Professional Baseball's Color Line, October 1945-August 1947," *Phylon* XL, no. 4 (1979): 303-317; Chris Lamb and Glen Bleske, "Democracy on the Field," *Journalism History* 24, no. 2 (1998): 51-59; Pat Washburn, "New York Newspapers and Robinson's First Season," *Journalism Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1981): 640-644.

⁷ For more on the *Defender's* founding and about Abbott, see Roi Ottley, *The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1955). Abbott was a member of the Leland Giant Booster Club, a financial and promotional support organization for the black-owned Leland Giants baseball team, and the Appomattox Club, which united many of South Side Chicago's businessmen and politicians.

⁸ Armistead Scott Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The Negro National League and Eastern Colored League had teams exclusively in Northeastern and Midwestern cities. During the period examined, there were no black professional teams in the West or in the South.

¹² "Magnates To Meet Here Last of January," *Chicago Defender*, 7 January 1922, 10. Present at the meeting were Ira F. Lewis of the *Courier*, Elwood Knox of the *Freeman*, and several *Defender* writers. Which "three papers" are meant by the *Defender* statement is not known.

¹³ “Baseball Men and Scribes Gather For League Meetings” *Chicago Defender*, 28 January 1922, 10.

¹⁴ “National Baseball League Formed,” March 1920, 67.

¹⁵ Young probably got the nod because of the *Defender*’s size and reach. In a 6 May 1922 issue (page 20), the paper claimed 1.1 million weekly readers and 58.1 million readers for the year, or more than half the black population in the country at the time.

¹⁶ “Sports Writers Organize,” *Chicago Defender*, 18 February 1922, 10. Lewis was named vice president; A.D. Williams secretary; and Wyatt, Q.J. Gilmore, Elwood Knox, and Earl Hord charter members.

¹⁷ The only instance in the *Defender* during the 1922 season, for example, of coverage from the association was a 5 August 1922 story on the Giants versus the ABCs under the byline “National Sport Writers’ Association Service.” The short story was probably written by Knox.

¹⁸ “Christians Are Urged To Pull Together in Church Worship,” *Chicago Defender*, 23 September 1922, 1.

¹⁹ Charlotte G. O’Kelly, “Black Newspapers and the Black Protest Movement: Their Historical Relationship,” *Phylon* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 13.

²⁰ Andrew Rube Foster, “Rube Foster Has A Word To Say To The Baseball Fans,” *Chicago Defender*, 5 January 1924, 3, section 2.

²¹ Foster’s co-owners of the Chicago Leland Giants and Chicago American Giants were black. The owner of the park in which Foster’s teams played, Schorling Park, was white.

²² “Rube Foster Banqueted By Cleveland Business Men,” *Chicago Defender*, 17 February 1923, 10. The *Whip*’s editor was Wilbur Cooper. At the banquet, the Stars’ treasurer, J.E. Reed, gave a talk on “baseball from a business standpoint.”

²³ “Y.W.C.A. Day Sunday, June 24,” *Chicago Defender*, 16 June 1923, 9. DePriest, Abbott, and Binga also were all members of the Appomattox Club, an elite club for black Republicans founded in 1900 by Chicago attorney Ed Wright. For Gillespie’s claim, See Nathan Thompson, *Kings: The True Story of Chicago’s Policy Kings and Numbers Racketeers, An Informal History* (Chicago: Bronzeville Press, 1994), 185.

²⁴ “Appomattox Club Nominate Officers,” *Chicago Defender*, 22 October 1924, 8, section 2; and “Associated Business Club Holds Meeting,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 26 September 1925, 10.

²⁵ For more on Taylor’s memberships, see Michael E. Lomax, “Black Baseball, Black Entrepreneurs, Black Community,” Ph.D. dissertation (Ohio State University, 1996), 294. For descriptions of Taylor’s pool hall and emporium, see “C. I. Taylor And His A.B.C. Base Ball Club,” *Indianapolis Freeman*, 23 December 1916, 7.

²⁶ Arthur Williams, “C. I. Taylor, Veteran Manager and Baseball Club Owner, Dead,” reprinted in the *Chicago Defender*, 4 March 1922, 10. According to Williams’ account, thousands of people “of both races” surged up and down Indiana Avenue in Indianapolis to visit Taylor’s home, while a “swelling throng” overwhelmed Bethel for the funeral service.

²⁷ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 April 1947, 17.

²⁸ Anderson succeeded as 2nd Ward alderman Major R. R. Jackson, who had succeeded Oscar DePriest. Anderson served 1923-1933.

²⁹ Mister Fan, "American Giants Beat City Champions," *Chicago Defender*, 21 April 1917, 7. It is not known for certain which *Defender* writer used the eponymous Mister Fan byline, or whether it was used by a *Defender* writer at all. It probably was a device used by Fay Young, the paper's sports editor and primary baseball writer, to provide a fan's perspective of the games. The other two local businessmen in Foster's box were George Holt and Harry Basken.

³⁰ Use of the term "mentality" is to suggest, as historian Joel Williamson put it in his seminal book, that the publishers and owners had certain discrete ideas in common, but that those ideas were not necessarily knit into a smoothly finished, comprehensive way of thinking. They did share more than mere opinions or attitudes, however (*The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], 4).

³¹ Hilldale Successful in Securing Improved Trolley Service," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 29 June 1918, 7.

³² Andrew Rube Foster, "Rube Foster Reviews The World Series And Tells A Little Baseball History," *Chicago Defender*, 15 November 1924, 12. Foster's prominence and influence in the community is reflected in the article's headline. Foster's team, the American Giants, did not even appear in the Colored World Series.

³³ Postwar enthusiasm for the sport surprised everyone; national interest in the World Series soared. Baseball had become "a mass consumer product," according to Grantland Rice's biographer, William Harper (*How You Played the Game, The Life of Grantland Rice* [Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1999], 246).

³⁴ Robert L. Vann, "Football As A Vehicle," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 December 1923, 1.

³⁵ Dave Wyatt, "Players Developed, Need Trained Officials Now," *Chicago Defender*, 7 January 1922, 10.

³⁶ Tracking who the press feels is responsible for safe-guarding the golden egg-laying goose is a convenient way to spot shifts in coverage. This responsibility begins on the shoulders of fans, who need to support what the owners are doing to build up the sport, then shifts to the owners when they cannot overcome their own greed and acrimony, next to the players for fighting and for not consistently playing hard enough, then back to the fans to support an entity that produced Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Monte Irvin.

³⁷ "A Case of Good Judgment," *Chicago Defender*, 12 February 1920, 6 ("example") and "Detroit Stars Start Playing Ball," *Chicago Defender*, 12 April 1924, 10 ("lieutenant" and "best known"). Also in April 1924, in the *Courier*, Blount was described in a headline as "One of Diamond's Most Picturesque Figures" (12 April 1924, 10).

³⁸ Blount asked sportswriters to intervene, daring anyone to find anything inaccurate in his accounts. Foster offered to resign, knowing his offer would

be rejected. Blount subsequently was voted out of the league. See “Baseball On A Sane Basis Is Plan Of Magnates,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 December 1924, 7; “Tenny Blount Quits Baseball; Mack Park For Rent,” *Chicago Defender*, 20 December 1924, 8, section 2; “Players Insist That Blount Is Holding Salary,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 December 1924, 6, section 2; “No More Baseball For Me,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 December 1924, 12; and “Foster Elected League Head,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 3 January 1925, 5.

³⁹ “Call for National League Issued,” *Chicago Defender*, 7 February 1920, 11.

⁴⁰ “Success of the League Is Up to the Fans,” *Chicago Defender*, 3 April 1920, 9.

⁴¹ Mister Fan, *Chicago Defender*, 30 January 1923. No headline or page number; only fragments of the paper survive.

⁴² “Cleveland Business Man Buys Tate’s Baseball Park,” *Chicago Defender*, 14 July 1923, 9.

⁴³ “National League News,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 March 1922, 10. In this instance, the outlaws were the Lincoln Giants of New York City.

⁴⁴ Indicative of Strong’s views, the Bushwicks played home games at Dexter Park while the Royal Giants had no home field and were relegated to securing fields whenever and wherever they could.

⁴⁵ Lomax, 312.

⁴⁶ “Black Sox Incorporate,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 29 July 1921, 2.

⁴⁷ The first Colored World Series preceded the inaugural Major League Baseball World Series by two months.

⁴⁸ “World Series Report,” *Chicago Defender*, 1 November 1924, 12. The numbers show the players indeed would have made more barnstorming. Foster argued after the Series, however, that without the league teams they played for, there would not have been any team with which to barnstorm (see Andrew Rube Foster, “Rube Foster Reviews The World Series And Tells A Little Baseball History,” *Chicago Defender*, 15 November 1924, 12). Barnstorming refers to the practice of taking a team on the road and playing whatever competition that could be found. The Harlem Globetrotters use this method in the twenty-first century, albeit with far more organization in terms of scheduling, arranging venues, marketing, and selling tickets than Negro league teams could muster. The barnstorming lifestyle of ballplayers was a focus in the 1976 motion picture, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings*.

⁴⁹ “The Sportive Realm,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 September 1924, 1, section 3. In addition to being the *Courier*’s principal baseball writer in the 1920s, Wilson was Pennsylvania’s deputy state athletic commissioner. In the 1930s he would briefly serve as commissioner of the Negro National League.

⁵⁰ “Arrangements Complete For Big Series,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 September 1924, 1. The story outlined that share-winners were to: “1. Deduct the cost of park from gross receipts. 2. Deduct cost of 18 round trip tickets from Philadelphia to Kansas City and return, berth, room and board,” and so on. Profits would be disbursed only after assigning advertising expenses, commissions, and costs for umpires and newspapermen, who would get

tickets and provide “necessary help” and promotion.

⁵¹ “Two World Series Teams Compared,” *Kansas City Call*, 31 October 1924, 6; Charles A Starks, “Baseball and Race Progress,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 16 October 1924, 8.

⁵² Frank A. Young, “Kansas City Monarchs Win World Series,” *Chicago Defender*, 25 October 1924, 8, section 2. Winters pitched for Hilldale; Rogan for Kansas City. The other official scorer was Lloyd Thompson, former player and secretary for Hilldale, press agent for the ECL, and a free-lance sportswriter and cartoonist for the *Philadelphia Tribune* (Frank Young, “Eastern Nine Enters Series Favorites Over Westerners As Fandom Awaits Outcome,” *Chicago Defender*, 3 October 1924, 6, section 2).

⁵³ *Ibid.* It is an interesting stance by the Young since later, in 1926, he would attack Gilmore for arguing that NNL teams should seek publicity from the white papers, implying, according to Young, that they could do the teams more good than the black newspapers. Young defiantly proclaimed that “Without the Race newspapers the league would blow up” (“Gilmore Seeks To Be Head Of National League; Takes Rap At Weekly Newspapers,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 September 1926, 8).

⁵⁴ Quote from a story in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 October 1924, as cited in Lanctot, 121.

⁵⁵ “Hilldale Meets Winner Of Kansas City-St. Louis Series; New York Gets 1 Game,” *Chicago Defender*, 19 September 1925, 7, section 2; and “World Series Dope,” *Chicago Defender*, 26 September 1925, 5, section 2. For more on barnstorming baseball clubs, see Bill Heward and Dimitri V. Gat, *Some Are Called Clowns* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974).

⁵⁶ Fay Young, “Change The Umpires,” *Chicago Defender*, 19 August 1922, 10. The reference was to Caesar Jamison of New York, who umpired throughout the East and South.

⁵⁷ Tom Johnson, “Baseball: Spectators-Players-Umpires,” *Chicago Defender*, 25 August 1923, 12. This story also ran in the *Courier* (“Baseball: Spectators-Players-Umpires,” 25 August 1923, 7).

⁵⁸ Billy Donaldson, “Big League Stories,” *Chicago Defender*, 17 November 1923, 12.

⁵⁹ Frank A. Young, “Lloyd Goes to Connors,” *Chicago Defender*, 4 February 1922, 10. See also “Pitchers Brown And Rile Jump To The Outlaws,” *Chicago Defender*, 17 February 1923, 10. Lincoln Giant pitcher Dave Brown was described as leaving “organized ball” to play for “the outlaws,” the ECL, while remaining “the property” of the Negro National League.

⁶⁰ “Foster’s Ire Aroused Over Ball Player’s Charges,” *Chicago Defender*, 24 November 1923, 9.

⁶¹ “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 7 January 1927, 11.

⁶² Mister Fan, “National League Season Opens Saturday, April 28,” *Chicago Defender*, 21 April 1923, 10.

⁶³ “National League Season Opens April 28,” *Chicago Defender*, 5 April 1924, 11; and “Pitching Staff of Foster to Be Drawn From 10 Men,”

Chicago Defender, 19 January 1924, 10. The fifth season “promises to give fans a greater season than any previous, with competition more keen than at any time during the history of the league,” according to the eponymous Fan. Young (2 October 1884 – 27 October 1957) is considered the first full-time black sportswriter in the country and the first to report on black college athletics. He supervised the nation’s first full page of black sports. He wrote news stories under the bylines, “Frank Young” or “Frank A. Young,” and columns under the byline, “Fay Young.” Fay was created using the initials of his full name.

⁶⁴ Frank A. Young, “Eleven Thousand See The Monarchs Beaten, 15-13, By The American Giants,” *Chicago Defender*, 5 May 1923, 9.

⁶⁵ *Chicago Defender*, 12 May 1923, 9; and “17,000 See Foster Win,” *Chicago Defender*, 2 June 1923, 9. The *Courier* also emphasized crowd sizes, at least when they were large. “18,000 Choke Park When American Giants Win,” is one example, appearing in the 16 May 1925 *Courier*, page 12.

⁶⁶ Rollo Wilson, “Eastern Snapshots,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 June 1925, 13.

⁶⁷ “Why National League Seeks Business Brains to Run Baseball Clubs,” *Chicago Defender*, 30 January 1926, 5, section 2. The article includes detailed financials on all NNL teams, showing Chicago making more than twice any other team and in some cases more than four times the revenues of other clubs.

⁶⁸ “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 23 February 1924, 10. Williams also worked at different times for the ABCs and the Detroit Stars. He was named NNL secretary in May 1926.

⁶⁹ “East and West Leagues End Session,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 December 1924, 7, section 2. The *Courier* described the meetings as “so heated . . . that even newspaper men were barred for the first day” (“Big Leagues Hold Annual Meetings,” 12 December 1924, 7). For the *Defender*, Blount had gone from “one of the most popular” league owners to a pariah in less than one season. This article referred to players as “the property of clubs they finished the 1924 season with.”

⁷⁰ “Club Owners In West To Back ‘Rube’ Foster,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 February 1925, 7.

⁷¹ Frank Young, “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 24 October 1925, 6, section 2. Less than 4,000 attended the decided game; as few as 1,500 attended earlier games.

⁷² “Frank A. Young, “Directors of National League Hold Future of Our Baseball in Their Hands,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 September 1926, 9.

⁷³ William E. Clark, “Resentment Felt Over Domination of Eastern and Western Leagues By Rube Foster and Nat Strong,” *New York Age*, 23 January 1926, 6; and (quote) Bill Gibson, “Eastern League Needs New Head,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 August 1926, 8.

⁷⁴ Rollo Wilson, “Sports Shots,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 November 1926, 12; Frank A. Young, “World Series Games Just A Joke,” *Chicago Defender*, 23 October 1926, 7, section 2.

⁷⁵ “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 3 November 1928, 6, section 2.

⁷⁶ “Few Faces To Be Seen In American Giants Lineup As Result of Drastic Shake-Up,” *Chicago Defender*, 23 August 1930, 10.

⁷⁷ Philip Foner and Ronald Lewis, *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979): 2. The late-October 1929 stock market crash was not even reported on by the *Defender*.

⁷⁸ “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 22 October 1927, 6, section 2; and “Fay Says,” *Chicago Defender*, 22 January 1927, 8, section 2.

⁷⁹ Old-Timer, “Chicago May Not Have Ball Club When League Season Gets Under Way,” *Chicago Defender*, 5 February 1927, 4, section 2.

⁸⁰ Bolden resisted joining the ECL but ultimately did become a founding member.

⁸¹ “Pitchers Brown And Rile Jump To The Outlaws,” 10; and “Eastern League Schedule Gives Fans Real Laugh,” *Chicago Defender*, 28 April 1923, 10. The source of amusement was the schedule’s brevity – just 31 games, which compared to 105 games for the NNL. Even this sparse schedule was not followed.

⁸² Fay Young, “Fay Speaks,” *Chicago Defender*, 14 October 1922, 10. Young briefly explained the New York Giants’ surprising four-game sweep of the cross-town Yankees.

⁸³ “Am. Giants To Play Tigers 2 Game Series,” *Chicago Defender*, 14 October 1922, 10. Foster’s Giants were to play the Detroit Tigers, minus Detroit’s best and most racist player, Ty Cobb, but saw its set scrubbed by the Cubs and White Sox, which controlled the venue. Chicago’s big league teams, which refused to play Foster’s Giants, had their own inter-city games planned. The Philadelphia Athletics did play the Bacharach Giants, while the St. Louis Cardinals beat the St. Louis Stars. And the World Series champs, the New York Giants, beat the Lincoln Giants with a less-than-complete roster.

⁸⁴ Rogosin, “Black Baseball: The Life in the Negro Leagues,” v.

⁸⁵ One of the only references to the exclusion of blacks from “organized baseball” was made by the *Courier*’s Ira F. Lewis in Vann’s short-lived monthly *Competitor* magazine. Lewis observed that major league baseball seemed to approve of Cubans, “provided they do not come too black,” Chinese, Indians, “and everyone else under the sun . . . except the black man.” He mused that “Perhaps, some day, a Regular American baseball man will establish a precedent – maybe.” See “Who’ll Be The Next,” *Competitor*, October/November 1920, 221.

⁸⁶ Frank A. Young, “The American Giants-Detroit Tigers Games,” *Chicago Defender*, 27 October 1923, 12, as one example. “Chicago fans saw something that they have waited a long time to see. Many bet it couldn’t be done,” Young wrote, celebrating the achievement of getting the two races on the field rather than discussing the fact that the two were forcibly separated in the first place.

⁸⁷ As Susan Drucker has argued, sports heroes are more about the illusion of heroism than the embodiment of truly heroic values. The ways that playing

fields, photography, publicity, and media coverage construct myths of heroes and heroism point to a celebrification process that turns athletes into “pseudo-heroes” (Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, eds., *American Heroes in a Media Age*, Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press [1994], vii.)