

# Jackie Robinson



Jack Roosevelt Robinson was born in Georgia in 1919. He was the youngest of five children, and when “Jackie,” as he was called, was only six months old, his mother moved the family to Pasadena, California, hoping to find a better life.

Jackie didn’t have much time for play while he was growing up. He was busy delivering newspapers, running errands, and cutting lawns to earn money. The Robinson family was poor, and Jackie had to

help out. On weekends, he sold hot dogs at a nearby baseball stadium, but what he noticed there bothered him. None of the teams had any black players.

In high school, Robinson played baseball, basketball, and football. He also ran track. He participated in the same sports in college, and at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), he became the first athlete ever to win awards in all four of them.

Robinson left UCLA in 1941 to take a job as the assistant athletic director for a government-sponsored youth program. Later that year, the attack on Pearl Harbor forced the United States into World War II, and in 1942, Robinson was drafted into the army. During his tour of duty, he wanted to join the army’s baseball and football teams, but because he was black, the army would not allow it. He did, however, serve for a short time as an army athletic coach.

After completing his military duty in 1944, Robinson briefly played football and coached basketball. Then, in 1945, he received an offer from the Kansas City Monarchs to play professional baseball in the Negro American League. Robinson was skilled enough to play major league baseball, but the major league teams hired only

white players. Fortunately for Robinson, a brave man named Branch Rickey was about to change all that. In 1946, Rickey, who was the president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, signed Robinson to play for the Dodgers' minor league team, the Montreal Royals. The very next year, Rickey signed Robinson to play second base for the Dodgers.

Being the first black player in major league baseball since the 1880s took a lot of courage. Many players and fans did not want Robinson on a major league team, but his determination and skill paid off. In 1947, he was named Rookie of the Year. In 1949, he was the MVP (Most Valuable Player). And in 1955, he helped the Brooklyn Dodgers win their first World Series.

Although Robinson retired from playing baseball in 1957, he was honored again in 1962, when he became the first black player to be voted into baseball's Hall of Fame. No one deserved this honor more. Robinson was a great athlete and one of the greatest baseball players of all time. He was also a great man who helped pave the way for other black players in the major leagues.

Even after baseball, Robinson did a lot to help other black Americans. As a successful businessman, he raised money for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served as a board member for that organization for many years. He also helped found Freedom National Bank, which was owned and operated by African Americans, and he established a construction company to build houses for low-income families. Just as he had distinguished himself in baseball, Robinson also distinguished himself in the business world. He was the first black person to become vice president of a major American corporation.

October 15, 1972, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of Jackie Robinson's first game as a major league baseball player. He was awarded a plaque in honor of the event and threw out the first pitch at the second game of the 1972 World Series. Less than two weeks later, on October 24, Robinson had a heart attack at his home and died. More

than two thousand people attended his funeral service, and tens of thousands stood along the route to the cemetery where he was buried.

A few months before Robinson died, the Brooklyn Dodgers retired his uniform number 42. On April 15, 1997, all of major league baseball retired the number 42, which means that no player on any major league baseball team can ever wear that number again. This kind of tribute was a first in American major league sports and another first for Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson.



## Questions About Jackie Robinson

1. How did Jackie Robinson spend a lot of his time while he was growing up?
2. Most of today's major league baseball players start their careers right out of college.

Why didn't Jackie Robinson's baseball career start right after college?

3. List three things that Jackie Robinson was the first to accomplish.
4. What are some ways that, as a businessman, Jackie Robinson helped other black Americans?
5. Why were October 15, 1972, and April 15, 1997, important days for Jackie Robinson?

## Vocabulary

*Match each word to its definition.*

1. recognized as different or outstanding
2. the state of being well-known or honored
3. of great worth or importance
4. the quality of sticking to a purpose
5. selected or called to perform military service
6. a special show of respect or recognition
7. had costs paid by an outside individual or organization
8. a flat piece of inscribed wood or metal that recognizes an event or an accomplishment

determination

tribute

fame

plaque

distinguished

drafted

valuable

sponsored

## Sports Word Search

*Find 12 sports-related words from the story in the word search puzzle below. Then write the words alphabetically on the lines to make a word list.*

b a s e b a l l b s e w  
a c k a t h l e t e m t  
n x s b k a m a k f c e  
s l t c b r j g w u c a  
y m s t a d i u m n o m  
b w o r l d s e r i e s  
t o i b u h l s o f s e  
f n u s c h u b o o t r  
a p m a t r a c k r u i  
n t o l m s a v i m h w  
s c n o p c h r e p s e

## What Does It Mean?

A. An **expression** is an unusual but commonly used way of saying something. Use your own words to explain the meanings of these expressions from the story.

1. tour of duty
2. pave the way

B. The word **retired** has two meanings in the story. Write both meanings below. Use a dictionary if you need help.

- 1.
- 2.

## Think About It

Explain why you think the author said that being the first black player in major league baseball took a lot of courage.

## Topics and Details

*Write details under each of these topics from the story. Write one detail next to each letter. The details do not have to be complete sentences.*

I. Childhood

A.

B.

C.

II. High School and College

A.

B.

III. Sports Career

A.

B.

C.

D.

IV. Business Career

A.

B.

C.

V. Awards and Honors

A.

B.

C.

D.