

# Jackie Robinson greatest athlete of 20th century

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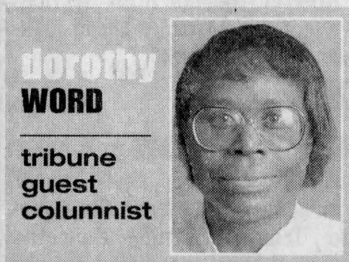
■ Robinson's sociological impact is immeasurable.

I was glad to hear author-sports writer John Feinstein say he considers Jackie Robinson the greatest athlete of the 20th century not just for his athletic ability but equally for his overall influence on sports. I totally agree with Feinstein's choice of Robinson and his assessment of the changes in sports due to Robinson's influence.

The sociological impact that Robinson made on sports in particular and on society in general is immeasurable but unsung. Gerald Early, a writer and a loyal Dodger fan, suggested that 20th century American history can be divided into "Before Jackie Robinson" and "After Jackie Robinson!"

Mallie Robinson, the daughter of a slave, was Jackie Robinson's mother. She had a true pioneer spirit that she passed on to her son. A pioneer is "a person who goes first, or does something first, and so prepares a way for others." Jackie Robinson became a man of many "firsts."

Before that first day of playing for the Dodgers at Ebbets Field on April 15, 1947, as the first black baseball player in the Major Leagues in the 20th century - there was another "first." On Oct. 23, 1945, Branch Rickey announced that Jackie Robinson would play for the Montreal Royals in Canada, Rickey's top farm team. If Robinson did well there, he



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would be moved up to the Dodgers.

It has been reported that Rickey believed in fair play and big profits; that he loved challenges, and that he had a sweeping conviction that integration would be good for America, baseball and his bank account.

Rickey saw black baseball players as an untapped source of revenue. He attended Negro Baseball League games. Eventually, he had his chief scout, Clyde Sukeforth scout the Kansas City Monarchs and "pay particular attention" to Jackie Robinson.

Robinson's widow, Rachel Robinson, believed Rickey picked "Jack because he showed an

other players, owners, managers or hostile fans. He was not to lose his temper or show anger even when pitchers threw at his head or when players spiked him. Robinson faithfully fulfilled his contract.

Mrs. Robinson said that during those terrible three years of non-stop, relentless racial hostilities, "I never once heard Jack say out loud, 'I want to give up. I don't think I can take it anymore.'" He got frustrated, discouraged and angry but he had a mission, a goal and he thought he could transcend the provocation, she recalled.

I did not know that Rachel Robinson was under the same restraints as her husband until she spoke about it a few years ago.

Robinson was plagued with stomach pains and frayed nerves from carrying the burden of integrating the Major Leagues. It seemed to make him play harder and better. But, finally, it took its toll. Robinson died, Oct. 24, 1972. He was 53 years old. Had he lived, he would have been 81 years old, Jan. 31, 2000.

Rev. Jesse Jackson gave the eulogy: "Jackie, as a figure in history, was a rock in the water creating concentric circles and ripples of new possi-

bilities..."

The "ripples of new possibilities" and Robinson's pioneering efforts to open "a way for others" came to fruition in every major sport in America in the latter part of the 20th century.

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assertive side of himself which he would need. He showed a kind of strength to go through things." And "go through things" he did!

The terms of Robinson's cruel contract required: For three years he could not respond or react to any abuse from his teammates,