

Bruce, Janet. *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985. Pp. x, 176. Illustrations, notes, index.

The black baseball leagues have received a great deal of attention from scholars over the last fifteen years. Such books as Robert Peterson's *Only the Ball was White*, Donn Rogosin's *Invisible Men: Life in Baseball's Negro Leagues*, and John Holway's *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* have all contributed to our understanding of one of black America's most important cultural institutions. The latest book to deal with the history of black baseball is Janet Bruce's *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*.

Unlike the previous monographs, Bruce's book is the first to deal specifically with the history of one particular team and, thus, furnishes an ideal opportunity to gain insights into the local workings of black baseball. Unfortunately, the book is disappointing in that it gives only a cursory examination of black baseball's most famous team and fails to adequately show the relationship between the Monarchs and Kansas City's black community. Bruce, Director of Kansas City's historic Wornell House Museum and President of the Heritage League of Greater Kansas City, provides only enough information about the Monarchs to justify, in my opinion, perhaps a very long journal article.

Only three of the book's seven chapters are actually devoted to the Monarchs, the remaining chapters dealing essentially with previously examined aspects of black baseball. Bruce briefly discusses, for instance, the numerous attempts to organize black baseball prior to 1920 and the ultimate success of Rube Foster and others in establishing the first recognized black league, the Negro National League. She devotes a number of pages to the black leagues' annual World Series and All-Star games, describing in a general way the significance of these two black cultural events. Bruce also writes about the exhibition games fre-

quently played between black clubs and barnstorming major leaguers led by such stars as Dizzy Dean and Bob Feller. She spends an inordinate amount of time, moreover, discussing such things as the campaign to include blacks in organized baseball waged by many of the nation's leading sportswriters and the role played by Branch Rickey in baseball integration. Newsworthy events such as these deserve to be mentioned, but only in passing and only if they contribute to the book's thesis. Unfortunately, like so many places in the text, Bruce included this material without any apparent regard for what it could tell us about the Kansas City Monarchs or, worse, whether it was even germane to the thesis of the book.

The information that Bruce does provide on the Monarchs is very descriptive and not particularly insightful. While there is some worthwhile data furnished on the organizational structure of the club, only the most rudimentary analysis is provided on the inner-workings of the team, how the composition of the team changed over time, and what role the team played in the urban experience of blacks in Kansas City. Part of the problem stems, no doubt, from Bruce's failure to describe what life was like in the black leagues for Monarch players. Notwithstanding some engaging anecdotes, Bruce does not give a clear understanding of the meaning baseball had for such veteran Kansas City performers as Satchel Page, Hilton Smith, and Joe Greene. As a result, we learn very little about the image these players had of themselves, and conversely, the image Kansas Citizens had about them.

Perhaps even more limiting to Bruce's analysis, however, is the fact that she does not take into account the external and structural forces that shaped the black historical experience in Kansas City's urban community during the first half of the twentieth century. The story of the Monarchs would have been better served, for example, if Bruce had been more cognizant of white hostility towards blacks, the limits which the white population set to acceptable social contact, and the existence or lack of violence directed against blacks in Kansas City's urban setting. Bruce's history of one of black baseball's most renowned teams would also have been strengthened if she had taken more seriously the type and quality of housing accommodations, the kind of transportation and communication systems available in Kansas City, and numerous other aspects of urban society that might have impinged, at any given time, upon the sporting life of the Monarchs. The investigation lacks a certain perspective, moreover, because of Bruce's apparent reluctance to compare the pattern of sport characteristic of the Monarchs with those of native whites and other ethnic groups in the Kansas City area. The story of the Monarchs would have been better illuminated if Bruce had attempted to sort out, in a very general way, causes for black/white differences in adaptation to Kansas City's urban life and the effect it had on the role of sport.

In summary, Bruce's book does not furnish much insight into the Monarchs or black baseball, and can probably best be classified as "coffee table" history. Aside from the pleasing anecdotes and some ninety illustrations, the book simply does not approach the standards of many of the previous works on black

baseball. It suffers from a lack of analysis and any interpretive framework. This is unfortunate since a thorough study of one of black baseball's most influential teams could perhaps clarify our understanding of sport in both the black urban community and the larger American society.

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