

Holway, John B. *Blackball Stars: Negro League Pioneers*. Westport, CT: Me&let-, 1988. Pp. 400. Photos, statistical appendix, index. \$22.50.

In 1887, Cap Anson, then the biggest star in the National League, refused to bat against George Stovey, a Canadian black, and allegedly exclaimed, "Get that nigger off the field." Anson's action helped pave the way for a system of apartheid which would dominate baseball until the arrival of Jackie Robinson in 1946. And while blacks have continued to make significant contributions on the playing field since the signing of Robinson, only in recent years have more doors been opened for blacks in management and front office positions. However, the emphasis upon the integration of blacks into the baseball establishment should not be allowed to obscure the accomplishments of black athletes in the Negro leagues. A number of fine volumes in recent years have called our attention to these black baseball pioneers. From Robert Peterson's pioneering study *Only the Ball Was White* to Janet Bruce's examination of the Kansas City Monarchs, the historical record of black baseball is growing.

But not fast enough for John B. Holway, a sports journalist who has conducted extensive interviews with Negro league players. In *Blackball Stars*,

Holway argues that baseball has paid little more than token attention to the accomplishments of the athletes who toiled out of the mainstream of the National and American leagues. Holway contends that more than tokenism is needed as his research into newspaper files from 1900 to 1950 has uncovered 436 interracial games between representatives of the Negro leagues and players from the white major leagues. Of these games, the blacks won 268. Yet, of the 160 men active before 1950 who have been elected to the Hall of Fame, only eleven are black. And the veterans committee, which has fifteen white and three black members, has in its nine years of existence selected seventeen whites and only two blacks. Thus, Holway concludes that blacks were playing "major league baseball" long before 1946 and that the so-called Jackie Robinson revolution was really part of a conspiracy to get black owners out of the game. And in the process of removing black ownership, black fans have been ignored, leading to their desertion of the game.

In the interest of righting these wrongs, Holway suggests that every record set before 1950 should bear an asterisk, stating, "Set before the American and National Leagues became the major leagues." To support his contention, Holway has produced thumbnail biographical sketches of twenty-six Negro league players. After reading these accounts, it is difficult to argue with Holway's thesis that the achievements of black baseball pioneers have been overshadowed in Cooperstown and baseball lore. Using newspaper accounts, colorful interviews with former players, and statistical analysis, Holway and fellow researchers from the Society for American Baseball Research make an impressive case. However, the criterion for the selection of the twenty-six athletes under consideration is not very clear, although Holway does observe that players who have received considerable attention, such as Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, and Satchell Paige, were not included. Thus, the reader is introduced to a cast of characters, such as Judy Johnson, Dick Redding, and Dobie Moore, who are not exactly household names, even to those who fashion themselves baseball aficionados. Indeed, this is exactly Holway's point. Our preoccupation with the established white major leagues before 1950 has relegated these outstanding performers to the dustbins of baseball history, from which Holway hopes to rescue them.

Yet, while not negating the persuasive argument put forth by Holway, the volume is disappointing in some ways. The focus is almost extensively on the baseball field accomplishments of these individuals, and insights into their personal lives are few, leaving the reader with a somewhat detached perspective of some characters about whom one would like to know more. Of course, this is in part due to the nature of available sources, but Holway's style does tend to be a little pedestrian. For example, the historical context of racial segregation is alluded to, but seldom developed. In discussing Rube Foster and the Chicago Giants, Holway maintains that in the Chicago 1919 race riot thirty-eight people were killed, and National Guardsmen had to place their tents in the Giants park, but he fails to follow this up with any consideration of how these events may have influenced Foster and the Giants. Also, there is a little too much hyperbole.

It is not always necessary to foreshadow the arrival of Jackie Robinson, and Holway sometimes gets a little carried away praising his subjects. Not everyone can be the greatest, and their chronicled accomplishments speak for themselves.

Nevertheless, Holway has made a contribution to baseball and black history by citing the neglected athletic accomplishments of twenty-six black men. He also challenges the conventional wisdom by getting us to alter our perspectives. Thus, Holway asks the question whether Ty Cobb was the white Oscar Charleston? While this analogy might get Cobb spinning in his grave, it remains to be seen whether Holway's research will have any impact on conservative Cooperstown which some traditionalists believe is already overcrowded.

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