

BANKES, JIM. *The Pittsburgh Crawfords*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, Inc., Publishers, 2001. Pp. v+170. Appendices, bibliography and index. \$24.95 pb.

Author Jim Bankes chronicles the story of one of the greatest teams to ever play the game of baseball, the Pittsburgh Crawfords. Bankes follows the story through the careers of some of the team's greatest players such as Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and Judy Johnson. In addition to these players achievements Bankes also includes an appendices with the records of the Negro National League (NNL), the Pittsburgh Crawfords themselves and an interesting comparison with the 1927 New York Yankees "Murderer's Row."

Bankes begins his story before the creation of the Negro Leagues. His early focus centers on the contributions of Andrew "Rube" Foster, the father of the Negro Leagues. Foster helped make the leagues a reality in 1920, providing a place for the "kings of the hill" to play regularly. The Pittsburgh Crawfords originated in the Hill district of that city and represented the mix of people and businesses there. Two teams came together in 1926 to call themselves the Crawfords and play in the city's recreational league. When Ammon field opened to play in the late 1920s the Crawfords were on their way though their crosstown rivals, the Homestead Grays, did not view them as any serious competition until the 1930s.

The Crawfords greatness developed under the leadership of William "Gus" Greenlee, a numbers king. Bankes devotes an entire chapter to the influence and role of the black mafia on the Negro Leagues and particularly the Crawfords. Greenlee owned a number of businesses but the jewel among them all was the Crawford Grille. The Grille was one of the hot spots for the black community and attracted the likes of Count Basie, Lena Home and Fats Waller. To help his image in the community Greenlee began bankrolling the Crawfords in 1930. From this point author Jim Bankes begins to tell the story through the eyes and exploits of the players.

Bankes begins his journey with Satchel Paige and finishes with Judy Johnson. The stories of these prominent players make up the bulk of the history. After talking about their achievements on and off the field Bankes moves on talk about their 1933 season led by Oscar Charleston.

Then the story shifts to look at the benefits and advantages black baseball brought to the communities and the players. The players became role models in the black community and worked hard to live up to those expectations. "Cool Papa" Bell seemed to be the shining example for all to follow, according to the other players. At the same time other entertainers became interested in the teams and players, working with them, entertaining them and the fans at some of the games.

Many of the Crawford players had an opportunity to play in the annual East-West classic. Bell, Charleston, Johnson, and Gibson all found themselves playing in the first such game. Over the years others earned the admiration of the fans and the chance to play at Comiskey Park. It was here that fans of all races got to see the best talent in the game assembled on one field.

In addition to playing here in the states many of the players made their way south of the border. Paige, Gibson and others found themselves the stars of teams from Puerto Rico to the Dominican Republic. At the same time they often found themselves at odds with the league because they left mid-season or did not return after a winter down south. The leagues tried to enforce their contracts and at times threatened to ban the players but this never happened. When the stars returned they were welcomed back, and the fans continued to come out and watch.

The end of the Negro Leagues and the Pittsburgh Crawfords came with the integration of Major League Baseball. When Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a contract in 1945 the beginning of the end was in sight. Bankes finishes his story with this episode and then looks at what happened to some of the players after their playing days were over. The story ends with a series of short reminiscences of the glory days of the Crawfords.

This book is a general history of the Crawfords as well as an overview of the highlights of the Negro Leagues. It serves as a good starting point for the general fan and someone just beginning to research the Negro Leagues. The appendices and bibliography introduce the reader to some of the players' statistics and other books where they can continue their research.

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