

Negro Professional Baseball Players in the Upper South in the Gilded Age

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Three black men — Fleet Walker, Dick Johnson, and Sol White — attempted to play professional baseball in the upper South in the 1880's. Although each of them would demonstrate their ability to play, racial prejudice would end their careers virtually before they started. Increasing segregation both in the South and in professional baseball would be responsible for this result.

Walker was the first black major leaguer and was the catcher for Toledo of the American Association in 1884. In Walker's first game in Louisville, Kentucky, the hostile political and racial atmosphere nearly led to a violent attack on the black player. Walker's poor performance in the early part of the season can be traced to this incident. A series of injuries also reduced his effectiveness and Walker was released by Toledo at the end of the 1884 season.

Johnson and White both played in the Tri-State League in 1887. White played third base for Wheeling, West Virginia, and found a much more congenial atmosphere in that upper South city. Johnson was a catcher and outfielder for Zanesville, Ohio, and he also encountered little difficulty in playing in Wheeling. During the winter of 1888-1889, however, the Tri-State League tried to ban all black players. The Wheeling team apparently accepted this ruling and White was dropped from the team. Johnson continued to play and found the situation quite galling. He played well despite the prejudice and move up to a more advanced league the next year. White turned to playing in all-black leagues in Pittsburgh.



Convention Manager, Bob Barney, gives last minute information.