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The Giants are Coming, the Giants are Coming! Barnstorming Black Baseball Teams in a Rural Pennsylvania Community, 1901-1927

For more than 30 years now, since the publication of *Only the Ball was White* by Robert Peterson, there has been a great deal of interest in researching the history of African-American baseball teams in the United States. Most of this research, however, has centered on the period of the Negro Leagues between 1920 and the integration of the major leagues in 1947. Black baseball teams had competed since the 1860s, and over the first twenty-seven years of the twentieth century a number of them came to the small community of Bloomsburg in east central Pennsylvania. Exciting and entertaining contests were waged there against the local normal school, a company team, and in exhibitions.

Serious athletic competition at the Bloomsburg State Normal School began with the hiring of Albert Aldinger in 1893, and in 1901 the Cuban X Giants became the first black professional baseball team to play the Normal School. Black teams, primarily the Cuban Giants, became a regular part of the schedule through 1908. These games were highly popular and drew large crowds from the town and surrounding communities.

More teams came to the town of Bloomsburg during the 1920s. In 1922 the local carpet mill played four games with three different teams, and the Harrisburg Giants even brought along a small jazz band to provide further entertainment. The last black baseball contests were exhibitions played at the Bloomsburg Fair in 1926 and 1927. Three games were staged the first year between the Hilldale Giants of Philadelphia and an American League All-Star team, and in 1927 Hilldale came back to play the Harrisburg team.

The paper presented several factors that supported the argument as to why a town in this area of Pennsylvania accepted black players and appreciated their skills and abilities enough to bring them back year after year. For the first quarter of the twentieth century, Bloomsburg's residents thrilled to the exploits of extraordinary athletes denied the opportunity to play major league

baseball by the color line. The townspeople loved the game in an era when it was the national pastime and they wanted to see the best. The normal school, carpet mill, and fair brought black teams to play because they were proven revenue producers and were good teams. The black teams also had to provide entertainment along with their baseball skills. This varied over the years from comedy routines to precision infield fielding drills to a jazz band.

The Bloomsburg State Normal School was unique in Pennsylvania and beyond, for an institution of its type to compete with numerous black professional baseball teams. These opposing teams were excellent in the level of talent they possessed, and the fact that the players were black seems to have had nothing to do with the decision to schedule them. The normal school, led by Coach Albert Aldinger, strove to be the best and play against the best. The initial success hosting black teams continued on into the 1920s as the people in town turned out for these athletic contests just as they had before.
