

Satchel Paige - Legends of Baseball

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Leroy Robert Paige was born in Mobile, Alabama on July 7, 1906. (There is some controversy over the Satchel's actual birth date, with some historians placing it as early as 1899.) He was the sixth of twelve children born to John Paige and Lula Coleman. Not much is known of his early life, however it is known that he spent some time in reform school for truancy and shoplifting. He earned his nickname, Satchel when he worked as a baggage porter in Mobile, Alabama.

Satchel Paige was the most famous and best known of all the baseball players that played in the old Negro Leagues during the Jim Crow years. Satchel stood 6 foot 3 inches tall and has been described as a Right-Handed, Loose Jointed, Beanpole. He was a master of the slow breaking pitch and a strikeout artist without peer. There are very few pitchers in the history of the game that could throw the slow breaking ball as well as Satchel.

Satchel started his professional baseball career in 1924 in the old Semi-Pro Southern League, with the Chattanooga Black Lookouts, Birmingham Black Barons, Nashville elite Giants, and the Mobile Tigers.

Satchel pitched for the Crawfords of the Negro National League from 1932 to 1937. His pitching record for his first two years was 32 wins, 7 losses in 1932 and 31 wins, 4 losses in 1933. In 1933, he also pitched for 21 straight wins and had 62 consecutive scoreless innings.

In the off season Satchel played in exhibition games and fielded his own team, The Satchel Paige All Stars. Satchel was the ultimate showman. He barnstormed the country, even playing for the bearded House of David team while wearing a false red beard. His annual salary at the height of his fame in the Negro leagues was \$40,000.

In 1937 and 1938 Satchel played in the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Satchel signed with the Kansas City Monarchs in 1938. He won four consecutive league pennants for the Monarchs from 1939 to 1942 and won 3 out of the 4 games in the 1942 series sweep against the Homestead Grays. He won his fifth pennant with the Monarchs in 1946.

Satchel finally broke into the major leagues when Bill Veeck signed him with the Cleveland Indians in 1948. He helped the Indians win the World series that year. He joined the St. Louis Browns in 1951 and was their most effective relief pitcher for three years.

Satchel is reported to have pitched in over 2,500 games during his thirty year career, winning over 2000 of those games. Although Satchel didn't enter the major leagues until late in life, he faced many of the best white major league players during exhibition games. He once struck out Rogers Hornsby five times in a single game. In 1934 Paige pitched 13 innings against Dizzy Dean and won the game 1-0. (Dizzy won 30 games that year.)

When Satchel was 59 years old, he pitched an exhibition game against the Boston Red Sox, becoming the oldest player to pitch in the major leagues. He threw for three scoreless innings and allowed only one hit. In 1969, Satchel worked as a coach for the Atlanta Braves and in 1971 he was elected to Baseball's Hall of Fame.

Satchel died from complications of emphysema in Kansas City, Missouri on June 8, 1982.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana

National Baseball Hall of Fame