

Josh Gibson -Legends of Baseball

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Joshua Gibson was born in Buena Vista, Georgia on December 21, 1911. He is remembered as the Negro League's all time greatest slugger.

The first African Americans to play professional baseball were the brothers Welday and Moses Walker in 1884. This acceptance was short lived, however. Segregated baseball was to last from 1885 until 1947 when Jackie Robinson finally broke the color barrier.

Between 1920 and the late 1940s there were four principal Negro Leagues. They were the Negro National League (1920 to 1931 and 1933 to 1948), the Eastern Colored League (1923 to 1928), the Negro American League (1937 to 1960) and the Negro Southern League (1932 to 1933).

Josh's professional career began in the summer of 1930 with the Homestead Grays of the Negro National League. The legend says that Josh Gibson hit 75 home runs the following season in 1931. He did not! His highest Home Run totals were 22 in 1933 and again in 1943. I noted that even the Encyclopedia Africana credits him with these inflated totals, (lifetime batting average of .379 and 823 homeruns). (His actual lifetime stats are much lower - 292 Home Runs - This figure does not include HRs against semi-pro teams.) It should be remembered, however that the Negro League schedule was much shorter than the White professional baseball schedule.

For instance: In 1943 he hit 19 homeruns with Washington. He accomplished that feat in only 29 games and 88 at-bats. If we average that out to a typical American or National league player's 550 at-bats per season, it comes to 106 home runs. There is no doubt in my mind that if Josh Gibson had been allowed to play in the white leagues, he would have broken Babe Ruth's record years before Roger Maris accomplished the feat. Given the opportunity, he might have set a home run record that even Mark McGuire couldn't break.

Josh played in the Mexican League in 1940 and 1941. He was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1943, but refused to have surgery. He died four years later on January 20, 1947 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Josh was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972.

Sources:

Encyclopedia Britannica

Encyclopedia Africana

National Baseball Hall of Fame