

# Jackie Robinson's Lasting Impact on the World and HT

By Linda Y. Jackson

Those unfamiliar with Huston-Tillotson's history are skeptical when they discover that baseball great Jackie Robinson was so closely connected to the institution. The fact that he was employed as the basketball coach is even more perplexing.

The love for baseball in 1945 among boys and men, whether played in a neighborhood backyard with one shared bat and baseball among families, or in a hot, dusty stadium made the sport America's game and America's shame.

Thanks to players like Andrew "Rube" Foster (another Huston-Tillotson unknown) who started the Negro National League, African American baseball players had a place to live out their dreams even if there was no formal contract or guaranteed salary.

Robinson, born in Cairo, Georgia, but raised in Pasadena, California, excelled in football, basketball, baseball, and track at Muir Technical High School. No one

noticed his talents and no scholarships to college were offered. He enrolled at Pasadena Junior College where his quarterback abilities and his most valuable junior college baseball player

honor caught the eye of college scouts who lined up scholarships. The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) was Robinson's choice, and, again his comfort with four sports gained him letters in each and attention. He played professional football for the Los Angeles Bulldogs, was an athletic director for a local youth program, and taught Sunday School where the Reverend Karl Downs had served as pastor.

Robinson served his time in the military, was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, and was honorable discharged in 1944 after refusing to move to the back of a military bus. Austin became Robinson's home away from home with Downs, who was president of Samuel Huston College, and



*Jackie Robinson played his entire baseball career with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He hit 137 homeruns during his nine year career.*

his wife ensuring that home cooked meals and spiritual guidance awaited the soldier. Downs needed a men's basketball coach, and Robinson was sitting across the dinner table. Little did Downs know that the invitation would be short lived and historic.

Samuel Huston's basketball team under Robinson was undefeated while playing long, tough road schedules as part of the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC). Upon returning from one of



*Karl Downs (left) president of Samuel Huston College, 1943-1948, was the officiant at the Jackie Robinson wedding to Rachel. The Robinson's had one son, David, who currently lives in Tanzania, Africa.*

those road stretches, Robinson noticed a letter in his pile of mail from the Kansas City Monarchs. He couldn't turn down the opportunity to play for the most successful baseball team in the Negro league. His stay at Samuel Huston and in Austin was over. In 1945 he integrated major league baseball-broke the color line-when he signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers by way of their farm team, the Montreal Royals. He endured racial comments, bigotry, death threats, and physical harm while earning Rookie of the Year honors in 1947 for the national league, major league records, and capturing six World Series titles. Most importantly, he paved the way for other African American players in the minors and majors. ▶

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