

CHAPTER 2

Black Baseball in Cleveland During the Depression Years, 1930-1940

Despite the economic hardships that blacks experienced in Cleveland during the 1920s, in the main the decade was one of relative prosperity in the United States. However, the seemingly prosperous times of the 1920s came literally to a crashing end when on Tuesday, October 29, 1929, the New Stock Exchange experienced its single worst day in its history up to that point. Although so-called “Black Tuesday” was not the sole cause of the Great Depression, it was certainly a harbinger of events to come. In William Ganson Rose’s, *Cleveland the Making of a City*, he correctly wrote “few decades in American history have started with as discouraging a picture as the 1930s.”¹

The Great Depression was a period in American history that lasted the entire decade of the 1930s. It was a time when many people were unemployed and unable to buy the products necessary to survive. In hopes of finding a savior, the American people looked towards the federal government for assistance and elected the reform-minded Franklin Delano Roosevelt as their president in 1932. As president of the United States, Roosevelt and his advisers initiated a series of federally-funded reforms known as the New Deal in an attempt to get the economy back onto the road of economic prosperity. In spite of Roosevelt and the New Dealers attempt to assist the American people, the 1930s were difficult times to say the least. The economic hardships that accompanied the Great Depression affected the wealthy, the destitute, blacks, whites, women, and men. In short, the Great Depression reached every sector of society in one way or another.

The 1930 census showed that there were 72,000 blacks living in the city of Cleveland or eight percent of the total population (900,429). However, the economic

¹ Rose, *Cleveland: The Making of a City*, 870.

hardships that plagued the city, as well as the rest of the nation, put a temporary moratorium on the large influx of blacks that Cleveland experienced during the 1920s. In fact, only approximately 12,000 blacks came to Cleveland during the decade of the 1930s, giving Cleveland a black population in 1940 of 84,000 or 10 percent of the total population(878,336).

On the eve of the Great Depression, the majority of blacks that resided in Cleveland were still concentrated in the Central Avenue district. The black community of Cleveland was severely hurt by the depression. The higher paying jobs that blacks were able to obtain during the prosperous 1920s were no longer available to them. Blacks who had dependable jobs during the 1920s were more often than not the first ones to be released once the economy took a downward spiral. Christopher Wye's study on the impact of the New Deal on the black community of Cleveland, entitled, *The New Deal and the Negro Community*, describes the job market for black Clevelanders during the depression. According to Wye, "because Negroes were concentrated in jobs that were particularly vulnerable to dislocation in a contracting economy--primarily in unskilled and domestic labor service--the Depression hit Negroes with unusual severity."² For instance, although during the 1930s blacks made up only 10 percent of the available workers, they constituted 27 percent of the unemployed.³ The conditions of life of the typical black ghetto inhabitant were described by Charles Waddell Chesnutt (1858-1932), one of the first nationally recognized black novelist and short-story writers in the United States. Chesnutt wrote:

The majority live in drab, middle or low class houses, none too well kept up. . . while the poor live in dilapidated, rack-rented shacks, sometimes a whole family in one or two rooms, as a rule paying higher rent than white tenants for the same space.⁴

While the majority of blacks in Cleveland in the 1930s had a difficult time

² Wye, "The New Deal and the Negro Community," 258-9.

³ *Ibid*, 259.

⁴ Miller and Wheeler, *Cleveland A Concise History*, 135-36. Helen M. Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt, Pioneer of the Color Line*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 309-311. Charles W. Chesnutt, "The Negro in Cleveland," *The Cleveland*, November, 1930.

securing occupations that were considered more prestigious in nature, some were able to own and operate small businesses, such as food stores, restaurants, and small retail stores. These businesses tended to be concentrated in the ghetto area, thus they were geared toward the needs and wants of the black population. Despite the destitute conditions that ghetto life had to offer blacks during the 1930s, “the consolidation of the ghetto after World War I, produced a growing sense of black unity and a philosophy of self-help and race pride that would provide a basis for future struggle against racism in all its manifestations.”⁵

Even though the migration of blacks to the north gave them opportunities that otherwise would not have been available to them in the south, racial discrimination continued to exist for blacks in Cleveland, much like it did for them elsewhere in the country. One arena in which blacks continued to be victims of racial discrimination on a national level, as well as at the local level, was in professional baseball. During the 1920s, under the direction of “Rube” Foster, the Negro National League flourished in select northern industrial cities. Due to the large number of blacks living in Cleveland, the city was a natural site to host a black professional team. As previously mentioned, in all Cleveland had five representatives during the 1920s, but these teams enjoyed little success. The player/manager of Cleveland's first black team, the Tate Stars, Jim “Candy” Taylor, had this to say about the conditions of black professional baseball in 1930:

The clubowners fail to cooperate in the establishment of ball clubs in each city. Limiting the number of men a team can carry to fourteen is bad. Umpires who do not give fair decisions and who are paid by the club instead of the league; dirty parks and unclean players’ uniforms, and the failure of the clubs to give their teams good publicity, these are bad. The season of 1929 was the poorest from the standpoints of both playing and attendance, since the beginning of the National League in 1920, mainly because no club in the league was able to put a club on the field each day in condition to play.⁶

The story of black professional baseball did not improve during the initial years of the depression and in 1932 the Negro National League was dissolved.

⁵ *Ibid*, 136.

⁶ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 91.

During the last full-year of the Negro National League (1931), Cleveland's sixth entry into the league, the Cleveland Cubs, became the first local representative to finish above .500. The Cubs' founding marked the end of a two season hiatus without a black professional team in Cleveland. The Cubs were owned by Thomas "Smiling Tom" Wilson who relocated his Nashville Elite Giants to Cleveland in 1931. Wilson began his association with baseball in 1909 in Nashville. Throughout his career, Wilson was a prominent sportsman, businessman, and numbers banker.⁷ Wilson more than likely moved his club from Nashville to Cleveland in an attempt to make a profit off of the black population in Cleveland by way of the numbers game(as will be seen later in the chapter). Wilson acquired Cleveland Hardware Field, located within the confines of the ghetto on East 79th Street and Kinsman, for the Cubs to play their home games in 1931. Although no final standings were published, incomplete records credit the Cubs with a 24-22 mark.

One of these Cleveland Cubs was Robert Leroy "Satchel" Paige. Paige was probably one of the best remembered players ever to play in the Negro leagues. He has been written about extensively by baseball historians and more recently has been the subject of a few feature films.⁸ From a physical standpoint, Satchel Paige was a tall, lanky, hard throwing, right-handed pitcher who was voted on by his peers as the second best pitcher ever to play in the Negro leagues (second only to Smoky Joe Williams).⁹ Hall of Famer Dizzy Dean had this to say about Paige:

A bunch of fellows get in a barber session the other day and they start to arguefy about the best pitcher they ever see. Some says Lefty Grove and Lefty Gomez and Walter Johnson and old Pete Alexander and Dazzy Vance. And they mention Lonnie Warneke and Van Mungo and Carl Hubbell, and Johnny Corriden tells us about Matty and he sure must of been great and some of the boys even say Old Diz is the best they ever see. But I see all them fellows but Matty and Johnson and I know who's the best pitcher I ever see and it's old

⁷ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 875.

⁸ For more on Paige's life and career see Leroy Paige and Lipman, David, *Maybe I'll Pitch Forever*, (New York: Doubleday, 1962). John B. Holway, *Josh and Satch*, Connecticut: Meckler Books, 1991. Ralph Edwards, *This Is Your Life: Leroy 'Satchel' Paige*, Edwards Productions, 1972. Ralph Edwards host(Documentary).

⁹ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 131.

Satchel Paige, that big lanky colored boy.¹⁰

While Paige may have been one of the greatest pitchers, black or white, ever to play, he did not display that excellence in his brief stint with the Cleveland Cubs in 1931. That year Paige appeared in seven games, starting six of them for the Cubs. In thirty-eight and two-third innings pitched, Paige managed to strike out only eight batters to go along with four base on balls. Of the six games that Paige started, he completed four of them and was credited with a record of 2-3.

Paige was out-shined on the mound by Jim “Cannonball” Willis, a right-hander who played on four clubs that were owned by Cubs owner Tom Wilson. Appearing in twelve contests, Willis pitched in sixty-two and one thirds innings. Of the eight games that he started, he completed six of them. Willis struck out a team-high twenty-five batters and allowed only nine walks. In addition, he led the team with five wins, against three defeats. Second to Willis on the Cubs’ pitching staff was long-time Cleveland player, Dempsey Miller who also played on the Elites, Hornets, and Tigers. In forty-two and one-third innings pitched, the left-hander struck out a team-leading twenty-six batters and posted a mark of four wins and three losses. The final member of the Cubs rotation worth mentioning was Clifford Bell, who pitched in forty-eight innings for the club and ended the season with a record of 3-3. Other members of the Cubs who appeared on the mound included A. Boone, R. Cannon(1-0), M. Laurent(1-0), R. Pipkins(2-3), Spencer, and H. Wright(1-2).¹¹

The leading slugger on the 1931 squad (based on 40 or more at bats) was Joe “Cheavier” Wiggins, who hit .327 in fifty-two plate appearances and played a solid third base for the Cubs. Left fielder, Orville “Red” Singer, a former player with the Cleveland Browns and Tigers, was second on the club in batting with an average of .314. Hitting from the lead-off spot and playing center field for the Cubs was Jack

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 129.

¹¹ All pitching statistics for the 1931 Cleveland Cubs courtesy of Richard Clark, Chairman Negro Leagues Committee, SABR, 22 March 1990. For a complete description of the 1931 Cleveland Cubs available pitching statistics see Appendix B.

Ridley, who hit a respectable .306 in seventy-two plate appearances. Unfortunately for Ridley, his playing career was terminated the next season, when he lost his arm while it was hanging out an open automobile window when the driver passed a truck and cut back in the lane too soon.¹² From his shortstop position, Jesse “Hoss” Walker hit a reasonable .295, including a team-high five doubles in only his third season in professional ball. According to James Riley, Walker was “a pull hitter with little power, an average gloveman with good arm strength and accuracy, and he possessed moderate speed on the bases.”¹³ Utility player Hannibal Cox was fifth on the Cubs in hitting with an average of .279. Other players who had at least ten attempts at the plate for the Cubs included D. Miller(.200), B. Russell(.300), R. Smith(.333), E.C. Turner(.462), N. Williams(.263), and C. Zomphier(.222).¹⁴

The problems of the Negro National League that Taylor alluded to in 1930 were evident in a game played between the Cleveland Cubs and the St. Louis Stars on June 2, 1931. During the game, umpires called the game in the bottom-half of the fifth-inning and awarded a forfeit victory to the Cubs. They called the game because the catcher of the Stars, Thomas Jefferson Young, refused to leave the field after being ejected for swearing. According to an article that appeared in the *Cleveland Gazette* on June 13, 1931, a near riot occurred when

...fans then started a stampede on the box office, demanding their money back. Cleveland police were called to prevent serious trouble. Although the game was official, 5 1/2 innings having been played, the management of the Cleveland club redeemed rain checks with tickets good for any game played by the club. Poor grounds and demonstrations like this will soon put the “binger” on “race” baseball in the city. As if the “economic depression” or unemployment situation was not enough. Eh?¹⁵

Neither Paige, Wilson, nor the Cubs finished the season in Cleveland. Paige took a more

¹² Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 664.

¹³ *Ibid*, 809.

¹⁴ All batting statistics for the 1931 Cleveland Cubs courtesy of Richard Clark, Chairman Negro Leagues Committee, SABR, 22 March 1990. For a complete description of the 1931 Cleveland Cubs available batting statistics see Appendix B.

¹⁵ *Cleveland Gazette*, 13 June 1931.

lucrative offer (\$300 a month) with the Pittsburgh Crawfords; Wilson moved his team back to Nashville; and the Negro National League folded prior to the completion of the season.

During the 1930s, three additional black baseball leagues were formed. The charge at revitalizing organized black baseball was led by Cumberland Posey, Jr., a star basketball player at Penn State University and former ball player in the Negro leagues. In 1911, Posey joined the Homestead Grays, a semi-professional team comprised mainly of steel workers. For two decades, Posey was a player, manager, and booking agent with the Grays. In 1929, Posey ended his on the field career and became the owner of the club. In order to attract potential cities to support teams, unsigned articles dealing with the 1932 baseball situation were sent out of Pittsburgh in early 1932 to the leading out-of-town black newspapers. The articles, entitled “Cum Posey’s Pointed Paragraphs,” urged black communities to support a new black league. According to an article that appeared on January 2, 1932, in the *Gazette*:

A new league is necessary to benefit club owners, it is also the only way to save players’ jobs and keep them on salaries. A few clubs like Hilldale, Kansas City, and Homestead Grays can continue in baseball without a league and pay salaries without a deficit at the end of the season...Cities like Detroit and Cleveland are necessary to a league and can rest assured they will be recognized, but there must be responsible people in back of the clubs.¹⁶

In a meeting held January 20 and 21, 1932, in Cleveland, Cum Posey founded the East-West League with teams in Baltimore, Cleveland, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and Detroit. At the meeting, Posey named himself president of the league and he administered the league in the same autocratic style that Foster implemented during the 1920s. Although players’ salaries were reduced in the short-term and only a skeleton schedule was planned, expectations for the new league were high on a national level, as well as in Cleveland.

The Cleveland Stars, the city’s representative in the newly formed East-West League (1932) were owned and operated primarily by William P. Young. Mr. Young

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 2 January 1932.

was a well-known sports figure since the days when he was a student at Lincoln University. In addition, he was a close and personal friend of Posey. According to an article in the *Gazette*, Young was

a former catcher on the Homestead Grays' staff for nine consecutive seasons, leader of the once famous Loendi National basketball aggregation, and for 18 years head of the Negro Welfare department of one of Pittsburgh's oldest independent steel concerns. Mr. Young breaks into the ranks of baseball promoters, sworn to the policy of putting Cleveland over in a big way.¹⁷

W. Rollo Wilson, a sportswriter for the black newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, wrote these comments about William "Pimp" Young in an editorial in 1932:

The league will not suffer by the injection of Young into one of its arteries. We who associated with him in the past know that he is shrewd in a business way and able to protect whatever interests of his which may be involved in the loop. For thirteen years he has been in charge of the welfare work of a big steel plant and he knows men. He can teach them because he has the ability and the understanding.¹⁸

In addition, the club was administered by L.R. "Lem" Williams (general manager), Arthur Wynne (president), and Mr. Slaughter (financial backer). The Stars administered the club from an office on 2284 East 33rd Street, within the confines of the Central Avenue district. One *Gazette* article noted that Williams' office door was always open to qualified players.¹⁹ The front-office of the Stars were not local businessmen interested in creating a viable black baseball team in Cleveland. In fact, the Stars' management were front men for league President "Cum" Posey. Like Foster, Posey strategically placed mediocre ball clubs in areas where the majority of blacks lived. These teams would put on a good showing when Posey's teams came to town, but never seriously contended for the league title. According to Ribowsky, "with all traces of both Rube Foster and Terry Blount gone from Detroit, Posey created the Detroit Wolves, with a puppet front man and a number of transplanted Homestead players, just as Foster had done to put the Detroit Stars in business. Posey, in fact, merely remolded Foster's autocracy, practically commanding the enrollment of new, lower-level clubs like the

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 16 April 1932.

¹⁸ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 April 1932.

¹⁹ *Cleveland Gazette*, 27 February 1932.

Cleveland Stars, Newark Browns, and Washington Pilots.”²⁰

Although an article in the *Gazette* promised that the Stars would “definitely play” in the new three-million-dollar municipal stadium, they eventually played their games in Luna Park in hopes of attracting potential fans.²¹ Luna Park was much smaller than municipal stadium and it was located within walking distance of more than 15,000 black residents, and was accessible by three of the city’s main street car routes. The owners of the Stars also moved to Luna Park because John Carroll University moved the site of their home football games to municipal stadium, but the situation gave the owners a long option on Luna Park for league baseball.

Spring training for the Stars began on April 21, 1932, in Cleveland. The majority of the players that reported to Spring training were from the far south and west and had past experience in organized baseball. The spring roster promised to be one of the greatest teams Cleveland had ever assembled in the Negro leagues. Of the twenty or so names that appeared on the potential Spring training roster, only fifteen players appeared in the final statistics. Based on the incomplete statistics compiled by the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), the diminutive Anthony “Ant” Cooper was the club’s best hitter based of those players who played in at least ten ball games for the Stars. The 5'4” right-handed shortstop batted .304, including a team-high fourteen hits. But when the league folded during the middle of the season he finished the year with the Homestead Grays, playing third base and outfield as a part-time starter and batting last in the order when in the lineup.²² Second on the Stars at the plate was Carrol “Dink” Mothell, who hit safely thirteen times in forty-six attempts for a .283 batting average. The switch-hitting second baseman was a versatile player of remarkable ability who could play every position.²³ Playing catcher, a man whose name only appeared as Wilson batted third-best on the Stars with an average of .273. Others

²⁰ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 154.

²¹ *Ibid*, 27 February 1932.

²² Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 191.

²³ *Ibid*, 572.

who hit for the Stars included Davis(.385), N. Dean(.357), C. Harris(.208), G. Mitchell(.222), W. Redus(.250), B. Robinson(.204), O. Singer(.212), and J. Ware(.286).²⁴ Unfortunately, the statistics for the Cleveland Stars pitching staff were not compiled.

Despite the excitement about the newly formed Negro league, neither the Stars, nor the East-West League finished the season. The Stars' first contest of the 1932 season was an away game against the powerful Homestead Grays in Pittsburgh on May 7. By the middle of the season, the Stars dropped out of the league due to financial problems. The final standings show that the Stars had a 8-16 record when they folded, placing the them in sixth place out of seven teams.

Posey's ambition exceeded the economic realities in 1932, a year in which the nation's business and industrial life was near standstill, and the East-West League barely made it off the ground.²⁵ Ribowsky claimed that

Posey labored to beat the long odds of economic privation, underfinanced teams, and lack of quality competition. Chaining himself to his office as Foster had, Posey wrote schedules for the teams, hired umpires, put together a deal with black radio stations to broadcast game results, and even hired an outside agency to compile league statistics.²⁶

Simply stated, blacks living in the ghettos of industrial cities like Cleveland could not afford to support a professional team in the midst of the depression. Yet, entrepreneurs continued to establish professional black ball clubs on the back of Posey. The founders expected to prosper under Posey and from the idle time due to unemployment that many blacks had during the depression. However, as the depression bottomed, the leagues collapsed, with many of the teams reverting to independent status. Only a massive infusion of gangster capital revitalized the league structure beginning in 1933.²⁷

In 1933, the second phase of organized black baseball began to take shape.

²⁴ Rosters and positions courtesy of Richard Clark, Negro Leagues Committee Chairman, SABR. Statistics compiled by Al Munro Elias Bureau according to N.Y. Age. Statistics are not final but latest available on file. Statistics are courtesy of Paul Doherty, Negro Leagues Committee, SABR, 25 February 1990. For a complete description of the 1932 Cleveland Stars available batting statistics see Appendix B.

²⁵ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 91.

²⁶ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 155.

²⁷ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 14.

However, the leaders of black baseball during the 1930s were much different from the meticulous and square “Rube” Foster of the first Negro league. Men such as William Augustus. “Gus” Greenlee, who dominated black baseball during the depression years, tended to be the “small-time, and not-so-small-time, gangsters of the black ghettos, and they were almost the only blacks with the money and inclination necessary to subsidize black baseball.”²⁸ For example, Greenlee, Pittsburgh’s most prominent black racketeer (one of the most prominent white numbers man was Greenlee’s confidant Art Rooney, founder of the Pittsburgh Steelers), made his fortune on the pennies of Pittsburgh’s black laborers through the “numbers” game. Numbers, also known as Policy, was a form of illegal gambling, popular in poor communities. According to Rogosin, “for as little as a penny, an individual picked any three digit number and if those digits turned out to be the last numbers of the volume on the stock exchange, or the last numbers of the race-track handle, they paid off--usually at odds of 600 to 1.”²⁹ William Brashler, author of three books on the Negro leagues claimed that

numbers was much like today’s state lotteries: a large can held seventy-eight numbered chips and pebbles. Three were drawn out. Those three were the winning numbers. Players could put as little as a penny or a nickel on three numbers. The winner got back much, much, more.³⁰

Walter “Buck” Leonard, voted the best first baseman in the Negro leagues by his fellow players and member of the Homestead Grays, 1934 to 1950, remembered said this about Greenlee’s illegal operation:

The banks used to stay open an extra hour or two every evening to get that numbers money. And everybody knew what was going on--the chief of police, the burgess, everybody. When the county was going to come for a raid, Greenlee would get noticed, and everybody would close down. There would be no business that day or night. The police would come in and search, look and look, then they’d go away, and it would be a month or so before they’d come back again. Of course, you know that kind of protection, you were payin’ something. The chief of police was in with them.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid*, 117.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 14.

³⁰ William Brashler, *The Story of the Negro Leagues*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1994), 47. Brashler’s other works on the Negro leagues include: a novel, *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (on which a movie was based); and two nonfiction titles, *Josh Gibson: A Life in the Negro Leagues*.

³¹ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 157.

Ribowsky also noted that the local authorities tried to keep the appearance of law and order by fining Greenlee \$100 every so often for gambling, however few city tax officers dared question his daily intake, from the “numbers” game, of around \$25,000.³²

In 1930, Greenlee purchased the Pittsburgh Crawfords to act as a respectable shelter for his numbers money. As king of the numbers game in Pittsburgh, Greenlee was able to give his players luxuries that other teams could not afford. In 1932, Greenlee built the first black-owned stadium with \$100,000 of his own money. That same year, Greenlee purchased his club a \$10,000 Mack bus with a top cruising speed of sixty miles per hour. On its side, hand-painted in dark green letters, was PITTSBURGH CRAWFORDS BASEBALL CLUB.³³

Rather than spend their money on baseball games, blacks chose to take a chance to turn what little disposable income they had into a profit through the “numbers” game. Tom Wilson, owner of the Cleveland Cubs (1931) tried to use baseball as a ploy to institute the “numbers” game in Cleveland. Prior to coming to Cleveland, Wilson was a well-known numbers man in Nashville and friend of Greenlee.³⁴ Once he made his money in Nashville, he moved to Cleveland to make a profit off of the desperate black community of Cleveland. Wilson must not have been all that successful in Cleveland because before the end of the season he moved the club back to Nashville. In 1935, Wilson moved his club to Columbus for a short while in hopes of cashing in there. In 1936, Wilson once again moved his club to Washington, D.C., and again in 1938 to Baltimore where he remained until 1947.

In 1933, Greenlee was able to unify the leading gangsters in the northern industrial cities in rejuvenating the Negro National League. At one league meeting, Greenlee named Wilson vice president of the league. The resuscitated league began the season with teams in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Nashville, Detroit, and Columbus. Similar to Foster and Posey, Greenlee ruled the league with an iron fist. As league

³² *Ibid*, 161.

³³ Brashler, *The Story of Negro League Baseball*, 46.

³⁴ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 875.

president, Foster was not concerned with building parity in the league. Instead, his primary concern was making a profit for himself. Ribowsky considered clubs such as the Columbus Blue Birds and Detroit Stars as lightweight clubs.³⁵ Ribowsky goes on to claim that from the start, it was clear that the Columbus Blue Birds could not survive.³⁶

Cleveland did not have a representative in the 1933 league until late in the season. In August, the Cleveland Giants formed from a merger of the Columbus Blue Birds and a team from Akron not associated with the Negro National League. As league president, Foster moved the Columbus ball club to Cleveland in hopes of making a profit. One might hypothesize that the merger resulted from the economic hardships the Columbus and Akron teams faced in the midst of the depression. Probably a more accurate explanation was that Greenlee was losing a great deal of money in Columbus and moved the club in hopes of tapping the wallets of blacks in Cleveland.

Due to the mid-season merger of the team, for the purpose of this study, only those players that came to Cleveland will be examined. The star of the 1933 Giants teams was the switch-hitting Leroy Morney, a bowlegged versatile infielder who batted .419 and won the National Negro League batting crown. James A. Riley wrote the following about Morney:

In 1933 he played with three different teams during the course of the season and batted a combined .419 earning a trip to the inaugural East-West All-Star game. With superstar Willie Wells entrenched at shortstop, he was selected as the starting second baseman, and the duo turned the first All-Star double play. He also cracked a base hit for the victorious West squad in the first of three All-Star appearances he would make during a 14-year career.³⁷

Although Wilson Redus had only batted .250 for the Cleveland Stars the previous season, he improved his average to .319 for the Giants. In seventy-two plate appearances, the outfielder also belted five home runs. Smacking nineteen hits in sixty-five attempts for a .292 batting average was Dewey Creacy. Creacy hit second in the

³⁵ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro League*, 171.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 175.

³⁷ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 569.

Giants' line-up and played third base.³⁸ Although the pitching statistics were compiled for those players who played in Columbus and Akron, they were not recorded when the team was in Cleveland. Therefore, no statistics will be offered here.³⁹

The final statistics published by SABR show that the Cleveland Giants finished the season with a record of 11-24. Although the second half of the schedule was not completed, the Chicago American Giants claimed the championship with a record of 21-7. However, several months later, Gus Greenlee, league president, awarded the pennant to his club, the Pittsburgh Crawfords.⁴⁰ Greenlee's actions symbolized the authoritative control that he had over the Negro National League. According to an article in the *Cleveland Call and Post*, a black newspaper, "the LEAGUE HEADS can THREATEN Baltimore, Newark, CLEVELAND, Bacharachs into doing anything they wish."⁴¹

In the main, the initial years of the depression decimated the Negro leagues. However, in 1933, an event known as the East-West Game was initiated by Greenlee, Tom Wilson, and Robert A. Cole of the Chicago American Giants. The East-West Game was an all-star game that was launched in order to help finance the clubs with insecure financing. As Jules Tygiel notes, "the revenues divided among the teams often spelled the difference between profit and loss at season's end."⁴² What Tygiel failed to mention was that Greenlee, Wilson, and Cole received \$3,000 each or about one-third of the gate receipts, while the players only received travel money.⁴³ Moreover, the East-West Game was a "showcase for black talent, the one occasion when the white press took notice of the players of major-league talent who were destined to obscurity."⁴⁴

The game was played each year at Comiskey Park in Chicago and it always

³⁸ All batting statistics for the 1933 Cleveland Giants courtesy of Richard Clark, Negro Leagues Committee Chairmen, SABR, 8 April 1990. For a complete description of the 1933 Cleveland Giants, Columbus Blue Birds, and Akron Ball Club available batting statistics see Appendix B.

³⁹ For a complete description of the Columbus Blue Birds and Akron Ball Club available pitching statistics see Appendix B.

⁴⁰ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 232.

⁴¹ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 8 September 1934.

⁴² Tygiel, "Black Ball," 556.

⁴³ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 177.

⁴⁴ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 100.

attracted more than 20,000 paying fans. The teams were selected through write-in ballots in all the major black newspapers. However, the nation's two largest black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, had a regional and even national following that other cities such as Cleveland did not. Due to the stranglehold that the *Defender* and the *Courier* had, the majority of the players who played in the game were from Chicago and Pittsburgh. According to Ribowsky:

Greenlee did not restrict fan voting to players in the Negro National League, but rather to "East" and "West" players. All major black newspapers carried write-in ballots. Yet because the *Courier* and *Defender* were by far the most widely read, the ballots favored players of the heavily covered Crawfords and American Giants.⁴⁵

Despite having one of the largest black populations in the country during the 1930s, the black newspapers in Cleveland must not have had a large enough circulation in Greenlee's opinion to support the annual contest. Having reviewed the *Cleveland Gazette* and *Cleveland Call and Post* through the 1930s, there did not exist one write-in ballot so that black Clevelanders could vote for their favorite players. Regardless of Greenlee's unfair selection strategy, three players from Cleveland were good enough to make the all-star team during the 1930s. Leroy Morney of the Stars in 1933, the switch-hitting, utility infielder, Pat Patterson of the Red Sox in 1934, and Parnell Woods, a weak armed, yet excellent hitting third baseman for the Cleveland Bears in 1939.⁴⁶

The East-West game also had a profound influence on the black community. Elite as well as middle-class blacks ventured to Chicago in the middle of the summer in order to watch the game. Following the first game in 1933, reporter William Nunn noted: "We saw a baseball epic unfold itself on this historic field this afternoon. No diamond masterpiece was this game! No baseball classic! Those words are relegated into the limbo of forgotten things. The event was symbolic of the titanic struggle for freedom."⁴⁷ The East-West All Star game became an annual event for blacks in the midwest to take

⁴⁵ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 177.

⁴⁶ Merl Kleinknecht, "Cleveland in the Black Major Leagues," *Cleveland in Baseball*, (Cleveland: SABR, 1990), 17. For more on the Clevelanders that made the East-West All-Star game see Appendix B.

⁴⁷ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 177.

their summer vacations to the “windy city” to catch a glimpse of some of the greatest baseball players ever to play the game. Rogosin indicated that “Chicago was the mecca for blacks from Arkansas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Missouri anyway, and this was another event to reinforce the cultural importance to all black communities in the middle part of the nation.”⁴⁸

During the second year of the rejuvenated National Negro League, Cleveland had a representative under a new name. In 1934, the Red Sox called Cleveland home, becoming the city’s ninth team in the ranks of black professional baseball. The Red Sox were primarily owned and operated by Prentice Byrd and Dr. E. L. Langrum. There was no indication that Byrd and Dr. Langrum had any connections with the “numbers” game. However, it seemed that the two were somehow connected with Greenlee. In April of 1934, after a two weeks of deliberation, the two principal stockholders named Bobby Williams as skipper of the Red Sox. The 5’5” Williams was a veteran of the Negro leagues. He began his career under the tutelage of “Rube” Foster’s American Giants as a player and also was a player/coach for Greenlee’s Pittsburgh Crawfords in the early 1930s. According to a Cleveland black newspaper, Williams was given full authority over the team by Byrd and Dr. Langrum “to weed out and bring the team up to professional strength.”⁴⁹ Although it was not documented, Williams connection with Greenlee suggests that he was a front man for the league president. Moreover, an editorial in the *Gazette* wrote this about the city’s new manager:

We welcome this veteran of the old school. This once peerless shortfielder should make a fine field leader for the Red Sox. Our one regret is that Booby can’t be out there as was once his wont. He is faced with the problem of building a new combine. This seems a monstrously large order. . . Given every needed cooperation by the owners of the club we are sure that Bobby can build a ball team here. One can’t look for world beaters this season. It may require two or three years to develop a topnotcher.⁵⁰

In order to convince potential fans that a team would remain in the city for more than

⁴⁸ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 26.

⁴⁹ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 14 April 1934.

⁵⁰ *Cleveland Gazette*, 21 April 1934.

one-year, the sportswriter concluded the article by making it sound as if the new owners were determined to institute all their possible resources to bring the city a championship caliber club. In effect, he wanted the black community to be patient while the team rebuilt. However, the writers' confidence in Byrds', Dr. Langrums' and Williams' ability to deliver a contender was never realized.

The Red Sox embarked on their inaugural season on April 10, 1934, and headed down south for spring training. They trained initially in Nashville, Tennessee, and following a short workout, they packed their bags to "take on Memphis, April 14 and 15, Monroe, La., April 21 and 22 and New Orleans, April 28, 29, and 30. Following the trial of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, they show in East Texas after the New Orleans series."⁵¹ During the course of the spring training tour, the Sox were rerouted to Atlanta so that baseball fans there would be guaranteed a high class attraction. However, after traveling 466 miles from Memphis to Atlanta, much to team's surprise, the series was canceled. In fact, the team from Atlanta was not even present; instead, it was in Florida playing a series against another opponent.⁵²

The 1934 regular season for the Red Sox began on the road on May 12 in Chicago. Following a two-week road trip, which was the norm in the Negro leagues, the Red Sox finally returned home to play their home opener on June 2 against the Nashville Elite Giants. In a rare occurrence, the first-half schedule of the 1934 season was actually published in the local black newspaper. The following was the actual schedule as it appeared in the *Cleveland Call and Post*:

May 12--Crawfords at Chicago; Newark at Phila.. Stars; Cleveland at Homestead Grays.

May 13--Crawfords at Chicago; Phila. Stars at Newark; Homestead Grays at Cleveland.

May 14--Crawfords at Chicago; Grays at Cleveland.

May 15--Newark at Phila. Stars (night game)

Open--Bacharachs, Nashville, N.Y. Black Yankees.

May 19, 20, 21--Nashville at Chicago; Phila. Stars at Crawfords; Bachs at Newark--May 20; Open--Cleveland, Grays, Black Yanks.

⁵¹ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 14 April 1934.

⁵² *Ibid*, 14 April 1934.

May 25--Grays at Phila Stars.
 May 26--Grays at Phila. Stars; Bachs at Crawfords; Cleve. at Nashville.⁶¹
 May 27--Grays at Newark; Bachs at Crawfords; Cleveland at Nashville.
 May 28--Bachs at Crawfords; Chicago; Cleveland at Nashville.
 May 30--Chicago at Grays; Crawfords at Phila. Stars; Cleveland at Nashville;
 Open--Newark, Bachs; Black Yanks.
 June 2, 3, 4--Nashville at Cleveland; Newark at Crawfords.
 June 2, 3, 5--Chicago at Phila. Stars.
 June 9--Grays at Chicago; Nashville at Phila. Stars; Cleveland at Crawfords.
 June 10--Nashville at Newark; Grays at Chicago; Cleveland at Crawfords.
 June 11--Grays at Chicago; Cleveland at Crawfords; Nashville at Bachs.
 June 16--Crawfords at Chicago; Phila. Stars at Grays; Bachs at Newark.
 June 17--Crawfords at Chicago; Phila. Stars at Cleveland; Bachs at Newark;
 Open--Grays, Black Yanks, Nashville.
 June 18--Crawfords at Chicago; Phila. Stars at Cleveland; Bachs at Newark.
 June 23--Chicago at Nashville; Bachs at Phila. Stars; Open--Grays, Black Yanks,
 Nashville.
 June 24--Chicago at Nashville; Phila. Stars at Newark.
 June 25--Chicago at Nashville; Phila. Stars at Bacharachs.
 June 30, July 1, 2--Nashville at Crawfords; Cleveland at Chicago; Grays at Phila.
 Stars(July 1, 2 tentative); Open--Bachs and Yanks.
 July 4--Homestead Grays at Crawfords; Nashville at Phila. Stars;
 Open--Cleveland, Chicago, Newark, Bacharachs.⁵³

No schedule for the second-half of the split season appeared.

The Red Sox played their home contests at League Park. League Park was completed in 1891 to provide a home field for the Cleveland Spiders of the white major leagues. League Park was located at East 66th Street and Lexington Avenue and it seated approximately 27,000 fans. Those who watched games in League Park claimed that there was not a bad seat in the house: “The fans sat on wooden benches so close to the field that they could watch the players sweat and hear them cuss.”⁵⁴ Although the much larger municipal stadium was completed in 1931, the local white professional team, the Cleveland Indians, returned in 1934 to League Park to play their games. It was common practice for Negro league teams to play in major league stadiums because major league owners commanded ten to twenty percent of the gate. Rogosin notes that every single major league stadium was utilized by various Negro league teams.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Ibid*, 7 April 1934.

⁵⁴ Peter Jedick, “League Park,” *The Cleveland Sports Legacy, 1900-1945*, (Cleveland: Cleveland Landmark Press, 1992), 1-2.

⁵⁵ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 24.

Playing in a major league stadium did nothing to improve the caliber of black baseball in Cleveland. At the end of the first half of the split season, the Red Sox finished with a record of 2-22, placing them last out of six teams. During the second half of the season, the Red Sox played only five games, winning two and losing three. Thus, the team's record at the end of the season was a combined 4-25. While no attendance statistics were kept, one might speculate that the games were not well attended due to the team's poor showing. An article that appeared in the *Call and Post* at the end of the 1934 season sheds light on the poor teams that existed in Cleveland up to that point:

Locally Cleveland seasonally saw ventures come and go rarely ever finishing the season. There were years when this burg had no ball club. From the days of our youth even til now it seems that a well rounded program was lacking in the promotion of the game hereabouts. Season after season we paid our way to see mediocre local clubs lose, hoping that somehow they might win. Just what is meant by a well rounded program? Here it is. A ballyard and club existed during the first years around here. Daily papers carried the accounts of games played at home, for when traveling the scores were never sent into them. The team was in the embryo stage. Mostly youngsters with a veteran or so to add balance. The town was simply wild about the game. Pious people just out of the Southland who had never gone to a Sunday ballgame in their life went to see the games. But the locals couldn't match the artistry of such real teams as the A.B.C's, Foster's American Giants, Detroit Stars et al. Naturally this continued state of things caused a cooling of fan fervor.⁵⁶

Bill Finger of the *Call and Post* offered some specific insights on the administrative and economic tribulations of the 1934 team in an editorial on June 6, 1934:

Here in Cleveland we have a local franchise operated by the Red Sox Baseball Club. Since the beginning of the season it has been necessary to chase down officials in order to gain news of their team, so that the public who support them would know something about the players, etc. As a result only sporadic information has been carried by this paper. Not one release was sent us pertaining to the late spring jaunt into the south, despite the fact that the team was playing steadily. If the public is expected to pay its way in through the turnstiles, it looks for as much for its money as that given by the Cleveland Indians who provide every possible accommodation for sport scribes. Life histories of every player on the team is immediately left undone to see that the papers are provided with plenty of publicity material. Only the Negro seems to think of you as not needing these considerations.⁵⁷

Because the reporters were naive to the operations of the Negro leagues, he failed to

⁵⁶ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 11 August 1934.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 6 June 1934.

mention that league officials prevented Cleveland from having a viable ball club. League officials continued to finance teams and place puppet owners in Cleveland so that the few powerful teams that dominated the league could make a profit when they were in Cleveland.

Despite the Red Sox' poor record, it did have some fine players. As noted earlier, infielder Pat Patterson represented the club in the East-West Game. At the end of the first half of the split season, the rookie Patterson compiled a .311 batting average. Other notable performances were turned in by third baseman Jesse Brooks who batted .314 and played a solid third base. According to James A. Riley, "Brooks was an adequate, but undistinguished player whose range was restricted and although he was not a great hitter, he showed glimpses of home-run power."⁵⁸ Wilson "Frog" Redus was a hustler who played left field and hit .333 for the Red Sox. Finally, in his last season in the Negro leagues, centerfielder Leroy Taylor batted .296 in fifty-four plate appearances for the Red Sox. Riley notes that Taylor had "good speed on the bases, was adept at stealing bases, and was proficient on either end of the hit-and-run-play."⁵⁹ The following players also appeared on the Red Sox roster, but no statistics were offered for them: B. Byrd(p), A. Cooper(ss), J. Dixon(p), D. Gilcrest(rf).⁶⁰ Once again, no statistics were compiled for the Red Sox' pitching staff.

Following the 1934 campaign, the ability of Cleveland to support a team in the Negro leagues was doubtful. The depression and the failure on the part of stockholders to construct a competitive team were two causes for its failure. More importantly, the stranglehold that Greenlee had on the league also played a role in the demise of blackball in Cleveland. The Red Sox were Cleveland's last representative in the Negro National League and it would be four summers until another black professional team came to Cleveland.

⁵⁸ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 114.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 769.

⁶⁰ Roster for the 1934 Cleveland Red Sox courtesy of Richard Clark, Negro Leagues Committee Chairman, SABR. Statistics are at East-West All-Star break and courtesy of John Holway, 24 February 1990. For more information on the 1934 Cleveland Red Sox see Appendix B.

In December 1938, the Jacksonville Red Caps of Jacksonville, Florida, were transplanted to Cleveland when two prominent local black businessmen, Marcellus Mason and L.R. Williams (former general manager for the Cleveland Stars), bought the rights to the club. The name of the 1939 club was the Cleveland Bears. The Bears were members of the Negro American League, an affiliation that was formed in 1937 under the leadership of H.G. Hall, then president of the Chicago American Giants. The Negro American League was less strongly influenced by the numbers bankers, primarily because the impeccable J.L. Wilkinson of Kansas City was the backbone of the league, and his team (K.C. Monarchs) the league's primary draw.⁶¹ The gangster, Greenlee, was not associated with the new Negro American League. By the late 1930s, clean-government politicians in Pittsburgh ran Greenlee's numbers racket into the ground. Ribowsky indicated that "the periodic for-show raids of the past were replaced by genuine, and regular, busts of betting games at the Crawford Grille."⁶² Concerning the new league, Ribowsky noted that:

For the old purveyors of the vice trade, the game was to become legitimate. Thus, Tom Wilson, who by the time he'd moved the Elite Giants to their most secure home, Baltimore, in 1938, had completely divested himself of his rackets practice and was running the team with undivided attention.⁶³

The new league was comprised of teams primarily in the midwest and the south. Thus, at the end of the 1930s there were two viable Negro leagues, the Negro National League in the east and the Negro American League in the midwest and south.

The absence of a local black team for four summers gave the new ownership hope that the black community was ready to support a local team. However, instead of acquiring quality talent (what the fans wanted), the management attempted to promote the club by initiating various marketing strategies. For instance, the team's uniforms were placed on display at local stores, a band concert was planned at the Majestic Hotel to welcome the team's return from spring training, free tickets were given away, and a

⁶¹ Rogosin, *Invisible Men*, 17.

⁶² *Ibid*, 205.

⁶³ Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 206.

parade was scheduled to take place on opening day.⁶⁴ The stockholders of the Bears also tried to rekindle the baseball spirit in the black community: “In an endeavor to stimulate interest and give the local baseball players a chance to play in organized baseball, the managers and backers of the Cleveland Bears announce that they will hold tryouts for possible local talent and providing they make the grade will add them to the line-up of the Cleveland Bears, local entrants in the Negro American League.”⁶⁵ However, the only local player to make the final roster was Parnell Woods.

The Bears opened spring training in Jacksonville, Florida, at the end of March and took two from the Chicago Giants in the first two exhibition games. Although the Bears played the majority of their games in League Park, they opened the season at municipal stadium on Sunday, May 14. One news release stated that a crowd of 4,000 paying fans attended one of the Bears’ games in May.⁶⁶ Another article indicated that 2,500 fans attended a game in late June.⁶⁷ Compared to other teams, crowds at the Bears’ games were about the league average. In her study on the Kansas City Monarchs, Janet Bruce indicated that the Monarchs averaged between 3,000 and 6,000 fans for their home games during the 1930s.⁶⁸ As small as the crowds may seem by today’s standards, the fact that blacks were attending the games (at 55 cents a game) exhibited that the economy in Cleveland was beginning to improve towards the end of the 1930s. More specifically in Cleveland, by 1937, New Deal public work projects had succeeded in reducing unemployment among Negroes from about 50 percent to 30 percent and the federal government had become the largest single employer of Cleveland Negroes as well as the most important new influence on the Negro job structure.⁶⁹ The Bears began the season with a 6-0 record, but it eventually ended the first half of the split season

⁶⁴ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 4 May 1939.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 4 May 1939.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 25 May 1939.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 29 June 1939.

⁶⁸ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, 74.

⁶⁹ Wye, “The New Deal and the Negro Community,” 259. *Census of Partial Employment, Unemployment and Occupations: 1937: States from North Carolina to Wyoming, Alaska, and Hawaii*. Part 4: *Nebraska-Oregon* (Washington, 1938), 71-75. “Annual Report of the Negro Welfare Association, 1938,” Cleveland Urban League Papers.

with a record of 9-9. During the second half of the season, the Bears once again raced out to an early lead by winning five in a row. However, the Bears final record can not be determined because no final standings were published by the league. In fact, the black newspaper only covered one game (on August 24th) after the East-West All-Star Game on August 6th.

The Cleveland Bears were managed by player/coach Alonzo “Hooks” Mitchell, a bowlegged, sidearm curveballer who could throw hard, even toward the end of his career.⁷⁰ When the right-hander was not pitching, he sometimes played first base. One of the more notable Bears was East-West Game participant Parnell Woods. Woods who received 67,888, votes played third base and batted second for Mitchell’s squad. The *Cleveland Call and Post* offered a brief biographical sketch on Woods:

Parnell Woods was born Feb. 6, 1913 in Cleveland, Ohio. At twenty-six he stands 5 feet 9 inches and weighs 170 pounds. Another product of the “Birmingham Black Barons he started in 1934 and remained through the 1938 season. Slated for the regular third base job this year and can hold his own with any man in the league at that position. A good hitter, he bats from the right side. Has a good arm and gets the ball away from him fast, making it tough on bunters. He hit .310 for the Barons last year.⁷¹

The dainty pitcher, Leo “Deacon” Henry, nearly made the summer classic squad with around 50,000 votes. The same goes for Clarence LaMar, a light-hitting shortstop from Augusta, Georgia, who tallied 29,003 votes.⁷²

Available statistics for the Bears’ players were compiled for only the first four contests (because those were the only games that the *Call and Post* published box scores), in which the local team won all four games. Two of the victories were against the Chicago American Giants by scores of 5-3 and 5-1 and the other two were against the Indianapolis ABC’s by scores of 5-1 and 10-8. Based on the members of the Bears who played in those first four games, Henry Turner led the team in hitting with a .462 batting average. Turner was the Bears’ clean-up man in the batting order and also

⁷⁰ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 556.

⁷¹ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 4 May 1939.

⁷² Votes for all-star game were made available by the *Cleveland Call and Post*, 27 July 1939.

played right field and catcher. James Riley notes that the 5'11" right-handed batter was an exceptionally hard hitter and considered very tough in the clutch. He was called one of the best right-handed hitters in the South.⁷³ After Turner, the next best hitter on the Bears was left fielder Howard "Dukes" Cleveland. In fourteen at bats, Cleveland hit safely six times for a batting average of .429. Playing shortstop and hitting third in the lineup, John Lyles batted .308 in 1939. Lyles was considered an average player in all aspects of the game throughout his twelve-year career in the Negro leagues. The Bears eighth player in the batting order was Albert Frazier who also played second base. In ten attempts at the plate, Frazier only managed two hits for a .200 batting average.⁷⁴

Based on the available pitching statistics compiled for the Bears, only three pitchers appeared in the first four games. Leo Henry started two games for the Bears and in eighteen innings, the right-hander won both games. Likewise, the left-handed Raymond Owens started two games, but managed only one win. The final Bears' pitcher who was credited with a start and victory in 1939 was Herman Howard. Other pitchers on the Bears roster included H. Andrews, A. Boone, J. Burton, M. A. Cox, W. Ferrell, Green, and A. Mitchell.⁷⁵

At the conclusion of the 1939 season, J.B. Greer published a letter to the black community of Cleveland. It appeared on September 25, 1939, in the *Call and Post*. Greer's letter was primarily a recapitulation of the 1939 Bears' season. But, in the concluding portion of the letter, Greer wrote:

I wish to convey this idea to the fans of Cleveland that all I am interested in is giving you the best brand of ball obtainable by a club you may be proud of and that will satisfy you so that you will feel that you are going to see a real ball game and get your moneys worth when the Bears are playing. . . . On behalf of the team members as well as myself we wish to thank the fans for their wonderful support during the 1939 season and hope that we can give you the kind of baseball that

⁷³ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 794.

⁷⁴ Batting statistics for the 1939 Cleveland Bears were based on only the first four games. Statistics were compiled by Merl Kleinknecht, SABR, 13 June 1990. Lineups for the 1939 Cleveland Bears courtesy of Richard Clark, Negro Leagues Committee Chairman, SABR. For a detailed description of the Bears available batting statistics see Appendix B.

⁷⁵ Pitching statistics for the 1939 Cleveland Bears were based on only the first four games. Statistics were compiled by Merl Kleinknecht, SABR, 13 June 1990.

will merit your continued support.⁷⁶

The team that prompted Greer's public plea for support lasted only one more year.

In 1940, the Bears were once again Cleveland's team in the Negro American League, thus becoming the first professional black baseball team in the city to remain for two consecutive seasons. In hopes of improving the previous season's record the Bears' organization made a few changes. First, Bears' management hired local sports promoter Harry Williams as business manager of the club. Second, the Bears replaced Alonzo Mitchell with James "Big Jim" Williams as manager. Williams was a hard-nosed, former all-star outfielder who batted behind Josh Gibson and Buck Leonard in 1938 with the Homestead Grays. In addition to his managerial duties, Williams also inserted himself into the lineup for the Bears. Third, in an attempt to improve the team's talent management Bears added eight (including manager Jim Williams) new ball players to the 1940 roster.

During spring training, the Bears were victorious in fifteen of twenty-two contests against various members of the league, as well as against semi-professional teams. There were two reasons why the Bears played such a great number of spring games. First, no different than the all-white major leagues, spring training was a time to master the skills of the game. Second, and more importantly, spring games were an additional pay day for the players and management. The success of the Bears during the spring was even more impressive given the fact that at least three of the club's key player sustained major injuries. For instance, the Bears starting second baseman Al Frazier, and first baseman Milt Jones were hurt when the team bus overturned on April 5.⁷⁷ In addition, Joe Brown, the projected first-string catcher, was lost for the season due to a broken right leg incurred in a practice game while he was sliding into second base.⁷⁸ The Bears' first half schedule was comprised of four double header games, playing the St. Louis Stars in the opener, the powerful Kansas City Monarchs on June 2nd, the

⁷⁶ *Cleveland Call and Post*, 9 September 1939.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 1 June 1940.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 1 June 1940.

Crawfords on June 9th, and the Birmingham Black Barons on June 30th.⁷⁹ On Sunday, May 26, the Bears opened the 1940 season at League Park against the St. Louis Stars, who were awarded winners of the second half of the NAL in 1939 by league officials. In between the scheduled league games, the Bears played exhibition contests against minor league clubs and local industrial teams to earn money. The Mayor of Cleveland, Harold H. Burton threw out the ceremonial first pitch to Lawrence O. Payne, the former councilman and present State Parole Commissioner.⁸⁰

Local expectations for the team were high, demonstrated by the number of local celebrities who were in attendance. According to an article in the *Cleveland Call and Post*,

Sunday's activities promise to be complete with thrills. A citizens committee headed by William O. Walker, 17th Ward Councilman and Call-Post editor, tops a list of local celebrities that have promised to be on hand for the opening fireworks. The other members of our landed gentry who have promised to grace the front news at the ball park include: E.F. Boyd, the furniture man; James "Foots" Mitchell, an illustrious and distinguished gentleman, to quote the master of ceremonies; James "Gameboy" Owens, the Mayor of Harlem; Perry B. Jackson, assistant police prosecutor; M.C. Clarke, president of the Dunbar Mutual Life Insurance Co., who presented the team with a horseshoe that must have been loaded; Mrs. M. Gentles-Turner and her husband owner of the Gentles Flower Shop on Cedar Avenue, who also presented the team with flowers; John Frew Morning, district manager of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Co.; Dr. N. K. Christopher of the Augclus Funeral Home, Dr. Charles H. Gavin, member of the Liberty Board; Charles W. White, Assistant City Law Director; Watkins Davis, local Democratic political figure, and Clarence B. Shaw, Cleveland sports announcer.⁸¹

Unfortunately for the Bears' fans, the St. Louis Stars swept the double-header from the Bears in front of 5,100 fans by the scores of 7 to 1 and 4 to 3. Leo Henry, the ace of the Bears pitching staff going into the season, took the loss in the first game, surrendering eight hits. Newly acquired pitcher Andrew Sarvis lost in the second game. Despite the Bears' new manger's previous accomplishments on the field, he did not perform well for the Bears in front of the home crowd. For instance, in the home opener

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 16 May 1940.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 1 June 1940.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 1 June 1940.

the goat of the game and what a spot he's in, was the Bears' manager, Jim Williams. Williams, who held down first base, because of the illness of the regular first baseman, and acting as if he was suffering with hardening of the arteries, had difficulty in fielding the ground balls. Not only that but Williams proved futile at the bat. In the fourth inning he came to bat with two men out and the bases loaded only to send a foul high in the air that was willingly received by the Stars man at third.⁸²

While no individual or team statistics were compiled, a typical box score as it appeared in a local black newspaper showed those who probably played on a regular basis during the 1940 season. The following is a box score for the Bears in a contest they lost against the St. Louis Stars:

Bears	A	H	O	A
Ray, rf	2	1	5	0
Woods, 3	3	0	3	1
Cle'land, cf	5	0	1	0
Turner, c	4	0	5	1
Williams, 1	4	1	4	1
Sampson, 2	2	1	3	1
Cole, lf	3	0	4	1
Lamar, s	3	0	4	1
Henry, p	3	0	0	2
Totals	29	3	27	9 ⁸³

The reserve players on the Bears who did not appear in this box score included pitchers Ted Alexander, Raymond Owens, Andrew Sarvis, and "Lefty" White; fielders Herbert Barnhill, Ed Bordes, Howard Dukes, Albert Frazier, Walter Robinson, and K. Robinson.⁸⁴ The Bears finished the season with a .500 record (10-10), placing them in a three-way tie for second place out of six teams. Following the 1940 campaign, the Bears returned to Jacksonville for the 1941 season and black baseball would not return to Cleveland until 1942.

In general, the 1930s in America were an extremely difficult decade for the majority of Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity. In Cleveland, the blacks who

⁸² *Ibid*, 1 June 1940.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 1 June 1990

⁸⁴ Roster for the 1940 Cleveland Bears courtesy of Richard Clark, Negro Leagues Committee Chairmen and Merl F. Kleinknecht, SABR, 13 June 1990. For the exact positions(s) each member of the club played see Appendix B.

migrated north in order to improve their existence more often than not were the first to be fired from their occupations. Furthermore, the majority of blacks who lived in Cleveland resided in the Central Avenue district or “black ghetto” of Cleveland. Conditions for blacks there grew worse as the decade proceeded. For example, the New Deal relief programs tended to harm, rather than hurt Cleveland’s black community. Although the number of blacks that came to Cleveland during the 1930s was only around 12,000, the fact that ten percent of the city’s population was black by 1940 indicated that there existed a slight possibility that black baseball might succeed in Cleveland. However, repeating black professional baseball’s failure in Cleveland during the 1920s, during the depression decade the black baseball teams that represented the city were not able to remain in town for more than one season, except for the 1939-40 Bears, and they eventually left after their second season.

While the 1930s were not a time of great success on the field for the black baseball teams that competed in Cleveland, they had an enormous impact on the players. However, the effect the teams had on the black community remained at a minimum.. First, for the players, an opportunity to play in the Negro leagues, especially during the depression, represented at the bare minimum a seasonal pay day. On average, during the depression, a black ball player would make between \$150 and \$250 a month for his services during the season. The Negro league season generally lasted from April through August., thus players made between \$750 and \$1,250 for five months of work. The lone exception to this rule was Satchel Paige, who was paid \$3,600 by Gus Greenlee for the 1932 season. Those teams that made the playoffs were usually paid based on the number of games they played. In Bruce’s *Kansas City Monarchs*, she described a typical situation for a Negro leaguer during the 1930s:

Outfielder Eddie Dwight's situation was typical. His salary was \$125, and he earned an extra \$25 a month for driving the bus. But after living on the road and sending money home, he had \$45.73 coming to him at the end of the 1936 season.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, 86. Based on Eddie Dwight interview; 1936 ledger sheet in Dwight papers.

While Dwight's salary may seem low, it was probably better than most blacks made at the time. Harvard Sitkoff, in *A New Deal for Blacks*, claims that in 1932 the median income (based on two-thousand families) for skilled black workers in Harlem was \$1003.⁸⁶ Therefore, in a five month period, most black players made well over half of what they would have made had they not played baseball.

Despite the seasonal pay check, in most instances, the money that the black players made during the season was not enough for the entire year. Therefore, in order to supplement their income, many of the good black ball players either played in California or in Central America during the winter, while those of lesser ability usually worked in some type of menial job, such as shoveling snow or coal or scrubbing salon floors.⁸⁷ However, landing a seasonal job for blacks was difficult during the 1930s.

According to Sitkoff:

Unemployed whites scrambled for the menial jobs traditionally reserved for Afro-Americans, particularly street cleaning, garbage collecting, and domestic service. Negro maids, cooks, and housekeepers--the hardest hit by white displacement--constituted nearly half the urban black unemployment in the South. But no job was safe for Negroes. White girls replaced black men as restaurant and hotel employees and elevator operators. The more the depression worsened, the more whites demanded that blacks be dismissed.⁸⁸

The editors of the *Kansas City Call* praised two Monarch ballplayers for working during the off-season: "There's something else in life for a good ball player to do in the winter besides loafing around, playing cards or going out into the far sunshine to play winter league ball."⁸⁹

Second, the impact of the black teams that played in Cleveland during the depression remained low during the depression. The economic conditions in Cleveland during the 1930s virtually prevented widespread interest in the local black teams. In fact, noted capitalist Cyrus Eaton commented that during the depression, Cleveland was

⁸⁶ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks, The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 37.

⁸⁷ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, 86.

⁸⁸ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 36.

⁸⁹ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, 86. *Kansas City Call*, 17 October 1930.

hurt more severely than any other city in the country.⁹⁰ Unfortunately for the black teams that represented Cleveland in the Negro leagues during the 1930s, the black community of Cleveland was hurt the most severely by the depression, thus it could not afford to offer the support that the local teams needed and warranted. During the depression, the local clubs would have been lucky to attract 1,000 paying fans. In comparison, teams in Kansas City (Monarchs) and Pittsburgh (Grays and Crawfords) averaged between 3,000 and 6,000.

In retrospect, the economic conditions caused by the depression only provide one reason why black professional baseball failed in Cleveland once again during the 1930s. First, the way that the league was administered kept Cleveland from establishing a viable team. The two main leaders of black professional baseball during the 1930s, Cum Posey and Gus Greenlee, did not want Cleveland to have a powerful team. Because of their economic stranglehold on the league, Posey and Greenlee were able to establish league rules, raid the good players from other teams, and place teams where they saw fit. For example, despite finishing second in the league in 1933, Greenlee declared his club, the Pittsburgh Crawfords, league champions.⁹¹ Moreover, in 1931, Greenlee was able to lure Satchel Paige away from the Cleveland Cubs and Josh Gibson from the Posey's Grays. By the mid-1930s, Greenlee had raided more Grays and, in effect, decimated Posey's control of black baseball.

Cleveland, having one of the largest black populations in the country, was an obvious site for a black ball club. Instead of allowing local black entrepreneurs in Cleveland to establish clubs, Posey and Greenlee placed front men to administer the teams in Cleveland. This tactic was the same one used by Foster during the first decade of black professional baseball. Posey and Greenlee used Cleveland as a mere stopping ground (on their way to and from the East) for the better teams to play games in order to collect money for the league from the gate receipts. In effect, league officials only

⁹⁰ John Grabowski, *Sports in Cleveland: An Illustrated History*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 41.

⁹¹ Peterson, *Only the Ball Was White*, 270.

wanted the teams in Cleveland to put on a good show when the more powerful teams, such as the Grays or Crawfords were in town. On one occasion, on October 1, 1933, Greenlee backed a game between his club and his friend's Tom Wilson team the Nashville Giants in Cleveland's League Park. What was ironic about the game was that neither team was based in Cleveland, but Greenlee knew that the black community of Cleveland would come to watch two of the league's best teams.⁹²

Second, unlike Cleveland, Pittsburgh had a black newspaper that had a regional following. Posey and Greenlee were able to utilize the Pittsburgh *Courier* for their own benefit. In the early 1930s, Posey published articles through the *Courier* to other major black newspapers in order to promote his league and club. In addition, Posey used the articles to acknowledge the corrupt doings of his local competition, Gus Greenlee. When Greenlee became president of the Negro National League, he placed John L. Clark, writer for the *Courier*, on the bank roll of the Crawfords. By acquiring Clark, Posey was able to write anti-Posey articles in one of the nation's leading black newspapers. Furthermore, when Greenlee established the East-West All-Star game, he utilized the *Courier* to get as many members of his team on the squad. Unfortunately for Cleveland, the *Gazette or Call and Post*, did not provide the black community of Cleveland an opportunity to vote for the games. The authoritative control over professional black baseball that Posey and Greenlee exhibited, along with the use of the *Courier* severely hampered the impact that the ball teams in Cleveland had on the black community.

Finally, while Cleveland's teams did not have sound management or financial backing to create a viable organization during the depression decade, the Kansas City Monarchs did despite having a black population that was half that of Cleveland's. Whereas Posey and Greenlee dominated the Negro leagues during the 1930s, Monarchs' owner, John Leslie Wilkinson, achieved the greatest success. The Kansas City Monarchs were able to do this even though they were not active members of the

⁹² Ribowsky, *A Complete History of the Negro Leagues*, 178.

Negro leagues from 1931 to 1937. Instead of getting involved in the corrupt doings of professional black ball, the ingenious Wilkinson took matters into his hands and played independent ball in order to survive the harsh years of the depression. In 1929, Wilkinson commissioned the Giant Manufacturing Company of Omaha, Nebraska, to build a portable lighting system.⁹³ Although Wilkinson was heralded as the “father of night baseball,” he was not the inventor, but he resurrected the idea.⁹⁴ Janet Bruce described Wilkinson’s system for night baseball:

Wilkinson’s lighting equipment consisted of telescoping poles, which elevated lights forty-five to fifty feet above the playing field. Each pole supported six floodlights measuring four feet across. The poles fastened on a pivot to truck beds and were raised by means of a derrick. Wilkinson positioned the trucks along the foul lines, behind six-foot canvas fence that stretched around the outfield. If playing in a stadium, he placed a “battery of lights” on the roof of the grandstand; otherwise, another truck was parked behind home plate.⁹⁵

With the portable lighting system, Wilkinson’s Monarchs barnstormed across the country playing twilight doubleheaders. In order to pay for the portable lighting system Wilkinson gambled his and his family’s life savings of \$100,000. The return on Wilkinson’s investment was enormous, as people from miles away would come to watch the Monarchs when they were in town, thus a bigger check on pay day for the organization. James Riley claimed that Wilkinson’s lighting system was so successful that it was paid for during the team’s spring training tour of the Southwest in 1930.⁹⁶ Not to be outdone, Greenlee installed lights at his field in 1933, but they were not portable, thus he was not able to take his show on the road in search of additional pay day.

Probably. the greatest advantage that Wilkinson had over the other owners in the Negro leagues was the color of his skin. The fact that Wilkinson was white gave him

⁹³ Bruce, *The Kansas City Monarchs: Champions of Black Baseball*, 69.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 69. The first night baseball game was played on September 20, 1880, less than one year after Thomas Edison perfected the electric light. Teams from two Boston department stores played the game in Hull, Massachusetts. Wilkinson attempted night baseball in 1920 in Des Moines, Iowa, but baseball authorities recognize the game between teams from Salem and Lynne, Massachusetts, on June 24, 1927, as having been the first organized night game.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 69.

⁹⁶ Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*, 843.

opportunities that the black owners did not have at their disposal. Playing independent ball from 1931 to 1937, Wilkinson was able to book games with white owners of independent teams, as well as with black clubs. The Monarchs often barnstormed with the all-white House of David baseball team. The House of David was a religious sect, established in Michigan in 1903. As a part of their religious identity, members did not shave their beards or cut their hair. In the public mind, the House of David was best known for its traveling baseball team and not a religious sect.⁹⁷ In fact, Monarchs' booking agent, Thomas Y. Baird, was also the booking agent for the Hose of David.⁹⁸ The two teams barnstormed throughout rural communities, either playing against each other or against local competition. Wilkinson said "that experience had taught him that colored players were better attractions through the sticks and the cactus."⁹⁹ In search of a crowd, the Monarchs also traveled to Canada and Mexico. Moreover, during the depression, white major leaguers were more inclined to travel and play with the blacks. For example, following their World Series championship in 1934 with the St. Louis Cardinals, Dizzy and Daffy Dean created the Dean All-Stars. The Dean All-Stars were comprised of white major leaguers who like the Monarchs wanted to make extra money during the winter. According to Janet Bruce, the Dean All-Stars and the Monarchs drew fourteen to twenty thousand fans per game.¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately for the black baseball teams in Cleveland, they did not have wealthy owners during the depression decade. Posey and Greenlee were able to use their financial resources to make their clubs into two fairly productive clubs. Both headed leagues and, in the spirit of Andrew Foster, both ruled with an iron fist. Neither saw a need for a viable black baseball organization to be placed in Cleveland. They only wanted Cleveland to have a team that they could play against while on the road in order to collect a pay check. This control retarded the impact that the local teams had

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 73.

⁹⁸ Following the 1948 season, Baird bought out Wilkinson's Monarchs and moved the team to Kansas City, Kansas. He eventually sold the club during the 1950s.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 77.

on the black community of Cleveland. Besides being wealthy, Wilkinson was able to make it through the harsh 1930s due to ingenuity and skin color. In 1937, when Greenlee's numbers racket was being run out of town, he resigned as president of the Negro National League. The new league was administered by men who truly wanted to create a viable league in markets that had a substantial number of blacks. This opened the door for local entrepreneurs in Cleveland to take the necessary steps to create a professional baseball team that became one of the best in the succeeding decade. In turn, the success of the new organization finally had an impact on the black community of Cleveland.