Island Park, Wichita, Kansas, 1925. Courtesy of Photograph Collection, Wichita Public Library.
Soon after his marriage, young newspaper publisher Hollie T. Sims found himself no longer welcome in Greenwood, Mississippi, where he had planned to settle down and raise a family. The town’s sheriff and a group of white residents forced Hollie and his wife Virginia out in 1919 in reaction to a tribute the newspaperman had written to the black soldiers who helped defeat Germany in World War I. “You can’t run that kind of stuff in Mississippi,” the sheriff told the family. “Cotton can grow at the North Pole easier than the news you’re putting out could go in Mississippi.” So the family fled to Wichita. “We couldn’t continue to publish our newspaper and live,” Virginia wrote, shortly before her death in 1989. Separately, in a letter to a fellow member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Hollie Sims, editor and publisher of Wichita’s *Negro Star* newspaper, remembered it this way: “The white man of the South attempted to stop me from praising my people.”¹

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¹ Virginia Sims, untitled autobiographical notes, Sims Private Papers, Kansas African American Museum, Wichita, Kansas; Hollie Sims quoted in Gretchen Cassel Eick’s *Dissent in Wichita: The Civil Rights Movement in the Midwest, 1954–1972* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 34; U.S. Census, 1920, Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas; Kansas State Census, 1925, Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas; *Negro Star* (Wichita), May 7, 1920. H. T. Sims is identified as the editor and publisher of what appears to be the first extant copy of the Wichita version of the *Negro Star*, May 7, 1920, although it is volume 12, number 51. Sims founded the Wichita chapter of the NAACP in 1919, six years after the first Kansas branch was established, and by 1920 the chapter counted ninety-three members. Virginia Sims, who helped publish the paper for thirty-four years, died at age 108. “Black leader Virginia Sims dies,” *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*, August 6, 1989.
Stories like the Sims’ help explain the period of uplift experienced by black communities in the Midwest and North during the 1920s, during a movement of self-help led by Booker T. Washington that set up dramatic progress toward integration in the 1930s. A key component of this ad hoc movement was the rise in popularity among blacks and whites together of black sports teams. Supported and publicized by bootstrapping black newsmen such as Hollie Sims, the athletic achievements of black teams served to chip away at mainstream society’s ignorance of and apathy toward segregation and a divided society. This article examines newspaper coverage in Wichita during the first half of the 1930s to show how commentators responded—and sometimes did not respond—to increasingly interracial play in baseball as the decade progressed. These responses reveal some of the changes underpinning and animating integration in the American heartland during the Depression Era, more than a decade before Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers broke major league baseball’s color barrier in 1947 and two decades before Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, held that segregation in the nation’s public schools was unconstitutional.

Specifically, this article looks at sports coverage from 1930 until 1935 in the two big dailies in Wichita, the *Wichita Eagle* and the *Wichita Beacon*, as well as several weeklies, including the city’s two African American newspapers at the time—the *Negro Star* and the *People’s Elevator*—the *Kansas Kourier*, and the *Catholic Advance*. This work is particularly important in that the sports coverage in the *Negro Star* has not yet been fully researched.  

As historian Pat Washburn pointed out, because white newspapers refused to cover blacks except as “athletic stars, entertainers, or criminals,” black Wichitans had only the *Negro Star* and *People’s Elevator* from which to learn about everyday life in their largely segregated community. In popular accounts of history, African Americans, and in particular southern blacks, are often seen as history’s victims, not its makers, underlining the importance of depictions of group life and ideas of racial identity within the black community. In popular accounts of history, African Americans, and in particular southern blacks, are often seen as history’s victims, not its makers, underlining the importance of depictions of group life and ideas of racial identity within the black community found in newspapers such as the *Negro Star*. Like accounts of everyday life presented in white publications, such depictions in the black press are often those of a people making their own history, however in the case of blacks such activity happened in a “city within a city,” to borrow Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake’s description. Though they were not covered in white newspapers, blacks too were building up businesses and founding civic and church organizations. They were also engaged in a pursuit that would, perhaps inadvertently, help to introduce black concerns into white mainstream papers, establishing a brand of baseball comparable to white baseball.

Additionally, this research fills a void in the sports narratives of Wichita, the state of Kansas, and the nation by adding the important contributions of the black press and black baseball players to integration of the sport. Harold Evans’s “Baseball in Kansas, 1867–1940,” for example, does not mention players of color in any context, while Bob Rives’s *Baseball in Wichita* only briefly mentions the all-black Wichita Monrovarians in its only reference to African Americans in the sport. By focusing on newspaper coverage, this article also seeks to build on scholarship outlining Wichita’s integration in sport produced by Jason Pendleton in “Jim Crow Strikes Out: Interracial Baseball In Wichita, Kansas, 1920–1935,” and to continue a more exhaustive study by the present author that began by looking at segregation in Wichita in the 1920s. Pendleton’s article examines integration in the 1920s and early 1930s, mentioning a June 1925 baseball game between the Monrovians and a team fielded by the local Ku Klux Klan chapter; this author subsequently placed that game into historical, social, and cultural context in order to better understand racial conditions of the period.

Baseball provides a convenient lens through which to examine integration’s contexts because the sport flourished alongside banking, insurance, gambling, and journalism as one of the most successful African American business enterprises during the “bleak decades of racial exclusion.” Culturally, baseball provided one of the important summertime rhythms for black communities throughout the country, from the roaring 1920s through the war-riven 1940s. The sport survived both the Depression and constant bickering and in fighting among black baseball’s owners. Demonstrating the importance of baseball to the local black community, the hugely successful Kansas City Monarchs were described as “the life of Kansas City in the Negro vicinity.” This article suggests that the Monarchs—led by one of baseball’s and sport’s most accomplished players, Leroy “Satchel” Paige—and coverage of the team wherever it barnstormed, contributed as much to the integration of the sport in Wichita and, therefore, in Kansas as any other single factor.

The coverage shows Wichita sports opening up to participation and spectating by blacks, sharply contrasting Wichita’s race relations with those of the South, where Jim Crow laws and policies were entrenched. The coverage is a tribute to the black press during the period,

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Building up Wichita’s black community was probably not on the Sims’ minds when, after being warned off by the local sheriff, they and two other families who helped publish the Negro Star in Mississippi loaded up their printing press and boarded a northbound train to Kansas. Immediately after relocating to Wichita in June 1919, Hollie and Virginia began publishing the paper from a barn behind their home at 1241 Wabash.9 Newpapering and involvement in the church defined the Sims family. Hollie T. Sims’s father, R. T. Sims, published a black church newspaper in Canton, Mississippi, the Mississippi Baptist. Hollie T. Sims also became a prototypical black newspaperman, serving as an important voice in and for Wichita’s black community and involving himself deeply in the community’s efforts to lift itself up out of poverty. “The Negro reporter is a fighting reporter;” wrote long-time Pittsburgh Courier reporter and editor P. L. Prattis. In his newspaper, the self-proclaimed “mouth-piece of 28,000 in Kansas,” Sims wrote that “a newspaperman’s duty is to serve the public by giving the truth of all matters touching the interests of the public regardless of his own individual opinions or creed.”10

Soon after moving to Wichita, Sims founded the city’s chapter of the NAACP, and he served as treasurer of the Water Street YMCA, a cultural nexus for Wichita’s black community in the 1920s and 1930s. He also served as secretary of the Baptist Young People’s Union, an organization that had important political influence in speaking for black Baptists, particularly young blacks. In these roles, Sims fulfilled Booker T. Washington’s philosophy of bootstrapping, first by employing six people to publish the Star, but also in attempting to expand business and enterprise in Wichita’s black community. In early 1922, for example, he joined with his long-time business manager and advertising representative, B. H. Neely, to organize the Kansas Coal and Mercantile Company. The business partners sold shares in the new company, announcing, “We need your and every Race man and woman’s $s and cooperation to make this Company a success.” Judging by advertisements in the Star, which ran throughout a period of six years, the company was a success, but it is not known on what scale. Neely was a “Race man” himself, organizing with national backing Wichita’s Local Porters Union in 1924, while also working at the Star and running the mercantile company. So also was Sims’s brother, Hugh N. Sims, who moved with the Sims family to Wichita from Mississippi, and was one of Wichita’s two black dentists in 1925.11

Sports coverage in the Negro Star was almost entirely reflexive, or passive, until the middle of the 1934 baseball season, when the paper contracted its first and only sports editor, Bennie Williams. The weekly newspaper solicited and sometimes received reports from teams and clubs in the city’s black community, including the Monrovians, the ABCs, the Gray Sox, and many of the city’s South Central Athletic Association basketball teams. The paper appears to have published the reports it received in a reactive approach that yielded no comprehensive or systematic coverage of any sport, much less of any one team or organization. The Star did briefly experiment with sports coverage in 1922, but the section was entirely dependent on wire service copy and disappeared after only one issue.12

Wichita baseball began integrating in 1932 without fanfare, with nothing to mark the occasion or note the
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Demonstrating the importance of baseball to the local black community, the hugely successful Kansas City Monarchs were described as “the life of Kansas City in the Negro vicinity.” The Monarchs, led by one of sport’s most accomplished players, Leroy “Satchel” Paige, and press coverage of the team wherever it barnstormed, contributed as much to the integration of baseball in Kansas as any other single factor. As if following a Hollywood script, the 1934 Monarchs, pictured here, lost the final game of the Denver Post Tournament to the House of David, a Benton Harbor, Michigan, barnstorming team that had hired Satchel Paige as a ringer just for the semi-pro tournament. Paige pitched the “Bearded Beauties” to a 2 to 1 win over his old team to take the $6,500 prize.

13. In one of the few game reports, the Beacon commended the Mexicans, losers to North End 7 to 6, for showing “fine form for their first appearance in the league.” See “North End Wins Over Mexicans,” Wichita Beacon, June 12, 1932.

14. “Fast Colored Team Entered in Baseball Tourney,” Wichita Beacon, July 30, 1932. The team was called a “crack negro club” in “Record Entry List For Baseball Tourney Here,” Wichita Beacon, July 31, 1932. See also Evans, “Baseball in Kansas,” 188, for more on the history of the state semi-pro tournament. Now called the NBC World Series, the tournament actually missed one year (1934) in the wake of the Island Park fire.
wrap-up story in the *Beacon* on the tournament describing its “many oddities” did not mention race in any context, settling instead for a mundane list of numbers of balls used, bases stolen, and balks issued.\(^{15}\)

The *Beacon’s* and *Eagle’s* seeming ignorance of the historical or societal significance of a black team playing in a previously all-white regional baseball tournament should not be surprising. Glen Bleske and Chris Lamb analyzed variances between white and black press coverage of Jackie Robinson’s debut in the major leagues in 1947 and found wide gulfs. The authors found the black press to have been much more cognizant of the historical and social importance of Robinson’s membership in major league baseball. Lamb also found that the Associated Press filed several articles about Robinson’s signing by the Dodgers, but that none of them included an interview with Robinson or “anything substantive on the social or historical significance of the story.” After the signing, the story basically disappeared from the mainstream press, while the black press “played up the story on their front pages and sports sections for weeks,” according to Lamb.\(^{16}\)

The Devils’ entry came at an opportune time for garnering attention. The Wichita tournament was ascendant. When the Topeka Jayhawks semi-pro team chose to play in Wichita in 1932 rather than in the more established Denver Post Tournament, an annual event called by one historian “America’s premier baseball event outside the major leagues,” the *Beacon* dedicated a story to the announcement. “The Topekans were at first contemplating entering the Denver Post tournament but believed that the state meet this year would be on par with the Colorado meet,” the *Beacon* wrote in anticipation of the event.\(^{17}\) Over its ten-day span, Wichita’s tournament drew a total of thirty thousand fans and scouts from six major league teams. The winner, the Southern Kansas Stage Lines, pocketed $7,500, which was $1,000 more than the purse offered by the Denver Post Tournament.

\(^{15}\) “Fast Colored Team Entered in Baseball Tourney,” *Wichita Beacon*, July 30, 1932; and “State Baseball Tournament Furnished Many Oddities,” *Wichita Beacon*, August 21, 1932 (one balk, five hundred baseballs, and 143 stolen bases).


the “Bearded Beauties” to a 2 to 1 win over Paige’s old team to take the $6,500 prize.\textsuperscript{18}

In the 1932 tournament in Wichita, the Colored Devils won only the first round, beating the “colorful” State Reformatory baseball club. Because no game results or recaps were provided of Colored Devils games, the coverage and standings have to be divined to determine that after winning its first game the black team lost in the second round to the Southern Kansas Stage Lines team, then to the Wichita Broadview Hotelmen, the team the Stage Lines club ultimately beat to take the title.\textsuperscript{19} The Devils were not being discriminated against in coverage; few teams received more than mere mentions in Wichita’s dailies throughout the tournament.

While largely silent on matters of race during summer 1932, the \textit{Beacon} almost daily trumpeted one white Wichitan’s efforts to organize an “Old Timers” club, an “army of fans” rallied to support the white Wichita Izzies minor league baseball team. In lending its full support to the recruitment effort and remaining silent on segregation and race questions, the \textit{Beacon} demonstrated its allegiances and priorities: “Fans interested in joining the club can get in touch with Mr. [Howard] Darling or the sports department of The Beacon and they will be enrolled in what promises to be one of the biggest booster organizations in recent years.”\textsuperscript{20} Further evidence of the \textit{Beacon’s} indifference toward race is the fact that columnist Jack Copeland, who wrote a daily column on local and national sports, did not mention race in any context during the period studied.

Segregation was firmly entrenched at a societal level in Kansas in the 1930s, perhaps providing a reason for the pervasive indifference toward racial issues in local newspapers. State law did not effect this segregation, as it did throughout the Deep South, however. A story in a 1924 issue of the \textit{Star}, for example, offered to “Any Group of Colored Boys” a baseball field at Ninth and Mosley, a field owned by the city but run by the black Water Street YMCA, two afternoons and two evenings each week.\textsuperscript{21} This allowed blacks and whites to use the park on alternate days.

\textbf{T}hrough 1933, the state baseball tournament was held at Wichita’s premier sporting venue, Island Park on Ackerman Island in the middle of the Arkansas River, open to black and white recreationists. The Island was also home to a thirty-four-acre leisure complex that included the Wonderland Amusement Park, which, with its Giant Thriller roller coaster, was built in 1905. Also on the property were a swimming pool, vaudeville theater, dance pavilion and bandstand, roller rink, and a collection of larger-than-life statues acquired from the 1904 World’s Fair. After burning down in 1933, the baseball field was replaced for the next season by Lawrence Stadium, which, as Lawrence-Dumont Stadium, still serves as the city’s minor league baseball stadium today.\textsuperscript{22}

Though the \textit{Eagle} and the \textit{Beacon} followed white baseball with wire-to-wire coverage in 1933, black baseball was almost completely ignored. T. J. Young, who had played for the Monrovians in 1926 and later for the Kansas City Monarchs, among other teams, became the first black in any of the city’s leagues when he joined the otherwise white Mulvane team in the city’s Oil Belt League in 1933.\textsuperscript{23} Thomas Jefferson Young, Wichita’s Jackie Robinson, simply was not news for the \textit{Eagle} and the \textit{Beacon}, though occasionally these papers

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Sanford, \textit{The Denver Post Tournament}, 49. Integration is a problematic term. The Cheyenne Indians, a team of Native Americans, played in no fewer than seven Denver Post tournaments in the 1920s, winning it in 1923 (27). And the first black player in the Denver tournament, Congo Collins, of the Sioux City, Iowa, team, played in 1931, three years before the Monarchs’ and White Elephants’ entry (77). The White Elephants were one of the top semi-professional teams of any color in the Rocky Mountain West. Army Cooper, who managed in the Wichita tournament in 1934, played in the 1920s for the White Elephants. The second-place Monarchs took home $5,000 (54). House of David team members did not shave their beards or cut their hair. Monarchs owner J. L. Wilkinson’s partner, Tom Baird, served as a booking agent for the House of Davids (50).
  \item \textsuperscript{19} “Seven Feature Games Scheduled for Day-Night Program in Kansas Baseball Tourney,” \textit{Wichita Beacon}, August 7, 1932. In the 1920s, the Hotel Broadview, which still is one of the city’s nicer hotels, annually fielded one of the semi-pro tournament’s stronger teams, and was one of the few team owners or sponsors that paid its players.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} “Old Timers to Organize Club to Aid Baseball,” \textit{Wichita Beacon}, June 11, 1932. The next day’s \textit{Beacon} celebrated Darling’s “enthusiasm” and projected “1,000 rabid supporters” to answer Darling’s call; “Expect Many Old Timers To See Izzie Tilt,” \textit{Wichita Beacon}, June 12, 1932.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} After 1879 Kansas law allowed elementary school segregation in cities of the first class. This law, which enabled Wichita officials to opt for segregation in 1906, is evidence of the exception rather than the rule. Eick, \textit{Dissent in Wichita}, 17–25; “Base Ball Field Open To Our Boys,” \textit{Negro Star}, July 18, 1924.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} “Young to Catch,” \textit{Wichita Beacon}, May 21, 1933. Thomas Jefferson Young played catcher for parts of a dozen seasons with the Monarchs. See James A. Riley, \textit{The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues} (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1994), 891.
\end{itemize}
would run a brief item on him. Judging by how these items were written, it is likely they were submitted to the newspapers by Young’s team. For the Star, however, in which Jefferson was known as “T Baby” Young, Tom Young was, along with pitcher Andy “Army” Cooper, a local hero. By the Star’s account, Young was “one of the greatest catchers that ever lived. Wichitans should be proud of him.”

The entrants into the state tournament held each year in Wichita serve as convenient yardsticks for measuring integration of the sport in the state and region. Two black teams in 1933—the Ninth Cavalry of Fort Riley and the Arkansas City Beavers—doubled the black presence from the year before. Behind the pitching of Andy Cooper, who was two years removed from his four-year stint with the Kansas City Monarchs, the Ninth Cavalry team reached the finals. Because of the successes of the Monarchs, the Beacon heralded black teams in the tournament. The same month, the Beacon trumpeted for five consecutive days an upcoming game in Wichita between the Monarchs and the House of David team, which the Kansas City club took 6 to 2.

Sports coverage in the Negro Star during the early 1930s was sporadic, sometimes disappearing for weeks and even months at a time, then reappearing without notice. In August 1934, however, a separate and distinct sports page appeared in the Star for the first time, coinciding with the paper’s taking on its first sports editor, and it ran through January 1935. The newspaper, therefore, covered the 1934 state tournament, which had no fewer than six black teams in its field: the Arkansas City Beavers, the Kansas City Colts, the Wichita Wolverines, the Topeka Darkies (a.k.a. the Cuban All Stars), Colored Stars, and Wichita Elks. This time Cooper, “a Wichita


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The page was titled "Amusements and Sports, by Bennie Williams," Negro Star, August 24, 1934. One story, subtitled "Andy Cooper Says He Will Shut Out The Davids," stated that Andy Cooper, who played for the Monarchs and Detroit Stars, began his baseball career on an "old ball diamond at Wabash and 11th Street." Another item heralded "Army Cooper" as the "Hero of State Tournament." Under consideration here are taken as definitive, charting progress toward integrating professional baseball. In the article, ANP writer Byron "Speed" Reilly, who also was a sports promoter in California, wrote extensively of the Monarchs' fortunes in the Denver Post Tournament.27

In addition to reporting on baseball, Williams, a one-man operation, covered football, basketball, boxing, and tennis. In September 1934, he announced that the King brothers, who previously played baseball for Wichita's Colored Devils, were organizing the city's first "all colored football team," the Wichita Warriors. During

Over time, however, the weekly “Stove League” column did provide readers with a fairly robust history of the Negro leagues and, therefore, a context for such enterprises as the Monrovians, Elks, and Monarchs. T. J. Young used the first “Stove League” column on November 2, 1934, to pay tribute to the father of Negro league baseball, Chicago’s Andrew “Rube” Foster, who cofounded the first black league of substance in 1920. Young’s second column similarly praised another business captain of the Negro leagues, Cum Posey, owner of the powerhouse Homestead Grays in Pittsburgh.

Andy Cooper, who wrote the third through sixth weekly installments, gave readers a sort of clinic on how the sport should be played, providing a history of black baseball along the way. There would have been no other source for this sort of context except perhaps a subscription to the Pittsburgh Courier or Chicago Defender. This important history should not be undervalued, engendering as it did self-respect and pride among blacks. By placing developments in black baseball at a local level into the context of a national narrative, as part of the success story of black baseball in the United States, the column provided an important source of African American self-definition and identity. In turn, as a unique source of this kind of history and race consciousness, the Star was proving itself important as a paper of record for the black community.

The historical context provided by the Star would soon prove useful. In February 1935, alongside reports from Negro league spring training camps, a Star article trumpeted “the first time in history that two major Negro clubs have ever played in Wichita.” The Chicago American Giants and the Kansas City Monarchs were to play in Wichita in April. The Giants’ visit would be the first by the “famous boys from the windy city.” Unfortunately, Bennie Williams’s sports coverage disappeared from the Star in April and with it went meaningful analysis of black participation in Wichita sports. The May 3 Star had some sports coverage, but nothing on baseball, nothing on the Monarchs playing the American Giants, and nothing on the Monarchs playing a Chinese team in Hong Kong that month. By May 17, all sports coverage had disappeared.

While Williams was on the watch, however, he had help fueling the extensive off season baseball coverage. A series of exhibition games in October 1934 featured major league baseball stars squaring off against Satchel Paige and his Kansas City Monarchs in Wichita. St. Louis Cardinals great Dizzy Dean and his “All-Stars,” including brother Paul Dean, also a pitcher with the Cardinals, beat Paige and the Monarchs in the first game 8 to 3. As was common in black press coverage of these interracial clashes, Dizzy Dean is lauded as a hero, without any mention of major league baseball’s color bar and critical of no one. Though the game presented the Star with an ideal opportunity to challenge baseball’s segregation, the weekly focused instead on attendance. The 8,500 on hand at Lawrence Stadium proved “the largest crowd ever to attend a baseball game in Wichita.” At Kansas City later in the week, Andy Cooper pitched the Monarchs past Dean’s All-Stars in a second game 9 to 6.

The Monarchs were the one black team that routinely got more than brief mentions in the Star, Eagle, and Beacon. As Wichita native and baseball historian Tim Rives pointed out, no Negro league team “won more

28. “Wichita Colored Football Club to be Known as the Wichita Warriors,” Negro Star, September 28, 1934; “Wichita Warriors Tie Trojans in Bitter Conflict,” Negro Star, October 26, 1934. The latter covered the Warriors’ first game, which was played at Lawrence Stadium. “Hot Stove League” and “Stove League” are terms that refer to baseball’s off-season, when, at least metaphorically, baseball fans gather around the stove during winter to discuss the sport, player trades, past performances, and predictions. The terms do not, therefore, refer to real stoves or even real leagues.

29. Andy Cooper, “Stove League By Andy Cooper,” Negro Star, November 2, 1934; the column also appeared in the January 11, 18, and 25, and February 1, 1935 editions. For more on the roles of the Courier and Defender in writing this history, see Carroll, When to Stop the Cheering?, which documents the contributions of the Negro leagues to the push toward integration nationally in the 1920s through 1940s.

30. Andy Cooper, “Stove League” Negro Star, November 16, 1934; the column also appeared in the January 11, 18, and 25, and February 1, 1935 editions. For more on the roles of the Courier and Defender in writing this history, see Carroll, When to Stop the Cheering?, which documents the contributions of the Negro leagues to the push toward integration nationally in the 1920s through 1940s.


32. “All-Stars Defeat Monarchs 8–3,” Negro Star, October 19, 1934; also suiting up for the Monarchs were T. J. Young and fellow former Wichita Monrovian Newt Joseph. The Star’s October 12 issue quoted Young, who had arrived in Wichita a week before the big game, with regard to the upcoming showdown; among other things, he reportedly said “that Dizz and Paul Dean are fine boys and color makes no difference to them.” See “Base Ball News,” Negro Star, October 12, 1934.
During the off season, Williams and the Star actually expanded baseball coverage, running ANP wire copy and a weekly "Stove League" column written by local black baseball stars T. J. Young and Andy Cooper. Pictured here is their inaugural column, written by Cooper and published on November 30, 1934. Over time the "Stove League" provided readers with a fairly robust history of the Negro leagues and, therefore, a context for such enterprises as the Monrovians, Elks, and Monarchs.

pennants, sent more players to the major leagues, or has more members enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame than the Monarchs. The team barnstormed throughout the Midwest in the 1920s, taking the Negro league brand of baseball and its own brand of comedy to small towns, to black communities in larger cities, and to white fans everywhere. Like Joe Louis and Jesse Owens in boxing and track and field, respectively, the Monarchs won blacks in baseball a measure of credibility and notoriety, and coverage in both the Eagle and the Beacon demonstrates this. In stories appearing in the big dailies there is no trace of prejudice, antagonism, or institutional bias against the Monarchs merely because of their race, though neither is there recognition of the injustices and discrimination that gave birth to the Monarchs and the Negro leagues in the first place.

The Monarchs also introduced night baseball to Wichita. The team's white owner, J. L. Wilkinson, developed professional baseball's first reliable portable lighting system and barnstormed with it in the early 1930s in cities such as St. Louis, Dallas, and Wichita. Wilkinson's lights, which he developed with the Giant Manufacturing Co. of Omaha, Nebraska, preceded by five years night baseball in the major leagues, which made its debut at Cincinnati's Crosley Field in May 1935. After the premiere of night baseball in Enid,


In the Wichita Beacon, see, for example, "House of Davids May Battle Monarchs," Wichita Beacon, August 15, 1933; "Bullet Joe Rogan Is Slated To Pitch Game Against House of Davids Here Today," Wichita Beacon, August 20, 1933.

Oklahoma, on April 29, 1930, the lighting system came to Wichita, where it required fifty workers to install. Noting the importance of the innovation for the sport, both the *Eagle* and the *Beacon* devoted several days to the game, which was played on the night of June 2, 1930.\(^{35}\)

The coverage highlighted the technological progress the lights represented but made little mention of the Monarchs’ race or that the game was between two black clubs. The *Eagle*’s June 2 story carried the headline, “Night Baseball To Get Introduction In Wichita For Two Games,” and its lead paragraph read: “Between 7 a.m. and 8:15 p.m. today, Island Park will be transformed into a modern electrical plant . . . so fans in this vicinity can view night baseball for the first time.” The next day’s paper told Wichitans that “Night Baseball Proves Success At Island,” and that playing conditions were “almost as perfect as . . . daylight could give.” Two years later, when Wichita’s white team, the Izzies, staged its first night game, little note was made of the event in either of the big dailies.\(^{36}\)

The *Eagle*’s columnist, Pete Lightner, served as a sort of Monarchs apologist, a peculiar posture for a white writer at a mainstream daily in the 1930s. He remained a Monarchs booster throughout the decade, and he was especially enamored with Satchel Paige, whom he called the “greatest colored pitcher in the country and perhaps the greatest pitcher regardless of race.” For Lightner, who with his “Just In Sport” column covered the state baseball tournament wire to wire, Paige was easily worth the $500 per game his manager said a team would need to be able to afford the star pitcher.\(^{37}\) Paige’s Bismarcks, an interracial team with four blacks on its roster, joined a tournament field in 1935 that included six all-black teams, matching the number from the previous year. These teams included the Blackhaws from San Angelo, another popular Wichita ballplayer, Neut Joseph, formerly of the Monrovians, took the field for the Monarchs against Dizzy Dean’s “All-Stars” in October 1934. One of Joseph’s teammates, T. J. Young, told the Star “that Dizz and Paul Dean are fine boys and color makes no difference to them.” Photograph courtesy of Larry Lester, NoirTech Research, Kansas City, Missouri.

Texas; the Memphis Red Sox of the Negro Southern League; the Monroe (Louisiana) Monarchs; Texas Centennials; Denver Stars; and Austin Aces.

Lightner compared the Blackhaws, which featured four former Colored Elks, to a major league ball club, saying they had made plays “no other team in the tournament could make. The colored flashes from Texas can throw that pill with the best,” wrote Lightner on July 20, 1935. The team, whose players featured arms as “true as steel,” added “considerable class to the tournament

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37. Pete Lightner, “Just In Sport,” *Wichita Eagle*, July 18, 1935; June 3, 1930; July 23, 1935; and July 24, 1935. It is interesting to note that however well the night baseball game in Wichita went, Lightner wrote that he could not foresee lights catching on in football, not “after the newsness wears off,” nor could he envision a World Series played at night (June 3, 1930).
and has drawn a lot of folks to the stadium,” according to Lightner, who wrote rhapsodically of the team’s slapdash style.\textsuperscript{38} He went out of his way to demonstrate the black team’s credibility as champion, writing that the Blackhawks had been “praised by tournament management not only for their playing ability but for their sportsmanship and fair conduct on and off the field.” Their success, by drawing “a lot of folks to the stadium,” benefited all of the tournament’s teams, Lightner argued.\textsuperscript{39}

After years of quiet integration, in 1935, at the inaugural National Baseball Congress tournament, tournament officials faced a test with the inevitable on-field matchups of southern teams and all-black clubs. Entries from Gadsden, Alabama; Shelby, North Carolina; Rossville, Georgia; and New Orleans, Louisiana, spelled trouble for the tournament, according to Lightner, whose attitudes toward race bubbled up in his daily coverage. Running alongside a story headlined “Japs Play Negro Club,” Lightner’s August 13 column identified the presence of the southern teams and black clubs as “a real problem.” He posed the question: “How to run a tournament without having the southern boys clash with the colored teams. . . . For down south they don’t compete. And naturally the Dixie boys would prefer to keep it that way.”\textsuperscript{40} Absent in Lightner’s clinical discussion is any criticism of the color line in baseball or of the attitudes toward race prevalent in the South, or of the inequitable first-round matchup of the Memphis Red Sox and the San Angelo Blackhawks purely because of concerns about race-based conflict.

Five days later, on August 15, the first photo of a black baseball player in any context appearing in either the \textit{Eagle} or the \textit{Beacon} was published: Satchel Paige pictured joyously with an interracial group of fans at Lawrence Stadium. Also pictured were the six major league scouts on hand. Paige was a celebrity.\textsuperscript{41} He also was the first player to be referred to routinely in headlines, a measure of celebrity and an indication that for southern teams to balk at interracial play would reflect poorly on them rather than on their black counterparts. The August 16 edition of the \textit{Eagle} ran the headline, “Satchel Paige Fans 16 For Huge Crowd.” The story ran on page one—rare placement for any sports coverage in either the \textit{Eagle} or \textit{Beacon} at the time. Three days later the \textit{Eagle} touted, “Satchel Displays Brilliant Stuff In Relief Role,” a headline that did not find it necessary even to note the famous player’s last name.\textsuperscript{42}

It cannot be known whether Paige’s star power mitigated tensions or protestations from southern ball-players, but this ameliorative effect is a possibility. The issue of potential racial tension simply faded from the sports coverage; Lightner did not bring it up again. When Chester Brewer pitched the Bismarcks to a 7 to 1 win over the Shelby, North Carolina, team, the first game to pit an interracial team against an all-white southern squad, there was no report of trouble and race was not mentioned at all in either the \textit{Eagle} or the \textit{Beacon}. In an August 23 column, Lightner noted that several Gadsden players had been offered major league contracts before they left Wichita, but he did not mention that the tournament’s best player—Satchel Paige—was not even eligible for such a contract purely because of his skin color. It is also worth noting that almost without exception Lightner referred to black teams as “colored,” as in the “colored Monarchs,” the “colored Stars,” and the “colored Blackhawks.” The black teams did not so designate themselves.\textsuperscript{43}

Paige was “the elongated, skinny, gangling and gawky pride of the colored race,” according to the \textit{Eagle}, which, as many publications were prone to do, seized on Paige’s unusual physical appearance. He easily pitched his Bismarcks to the title, 5 to 2, over the Halliburton Cementers of Duncan, Oklahoma, drawing nine thousand fans to Lawrence Stadium for the night game. The crowds Paige generated helped to ensure that the tournament would be a financial success as well as a


42. “Satchel Paige Fans 16 For Huge Crowd,” \textit{Wichita Eagle}, August 16, 1935; see also “Satchel Displays Brilliant Stuff In Relief Role,” \textit{Wichita Eagle}, August 19, 1935. Paige helped attract five thousand fans to the Sunday game, the “largest day turnout here in years,” then struck out another dozen the very next day.

fan favorite. According to Lightner, “when one visiting manager heard that fans were going to give Satchel Paige a watch, he suggested they spend another ten spot for a horse to put him on” to take him out of town. “Satchel is popular with everyone but the opposing hitters,” Lightner wrote. In fact, Paige was awarded a Cadillac for leading the Bismarcks to the title.44

After the tournament, Lightner’s lionization of Paige continued. For his August 27 column, Lightner interviewed ex-major leaguers such as Joe Hassler, who said Paige ranked with “THE greatest of all time.” Lightner did not address, however, why Paige would not be allowed to play in the major leagues for another thirteen seasons. In his tournament wrap-up column, Lightner wrote that the 1936 tournament would have to separate white and black teams, its “most difficult problem.” In his estimation, some southern teams, such as Gadsden and Shelby, were opposed to playing teams with black players. But he offered no solutions and no alternative analyses of the problems behind, as he described it, the purely logistical puzzle race produced.45

Beacon columnist Jack Copeland simply avoided race in any context, preferring the national sports scene to Wichita’s local offerings. In one of his rare discussions of local sports, Copeland referred to Paige as “Brother Paige,” writing that Octavus Roy Cohen, creator of the Florian Slappey cartoon series, “would have gotten a great ‘hoot’ listening to one of the colored lads describing the pitching prowess of Satchel Paige. It went something

44. Pete Lightner, “Just In Sport,” Wichita Eagle, August 24, 1935; “Bismarck Clinches Title Over Duncan,” Wichita Eagle, August 28, 1935. The nickname “Satchel” might have been a shortened version of “Satchelfoot,” which some white and mainstream publications used to refer to Paige’s extraordinarily large size-eleven feet. Black newspapers referred to him only as Satchel, a nickname perhaps originating with a part-time job Paige had carrying luggage—satchels—for passengers disembarking from trains. See Brad Snyder, Beyond the Shadow of the Senators (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2003), 125.

like this: ‘Folkses, yonall lookin’ at de best pitchah in de world. Yassah, dats him, ole Satchel Paige. You Wichitaw Watah boys don’t need to be discouraged—he mows de best of de big leaguers down just the same as he’s a-mowing youall.’

Copeland’s derision notwithstanding, racial tensions diminished somewhat in the 1930s as both races grappled with the Great Depression. A Kansas City Call writer noted this unexpected byproduct of hard economic times, writing, “Oh but! for just a little more of this ‘depression.’” The fiscal reality prompted more white teams to barnstorm and, therefore, to be willing to play black baseball teams. Everyone recognized the box office draw of talents such as Paige, Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe, and Brewer, among so many others. Ray Dumont, for example, a Wichita entrepreneur, developed the National Baseball Congress tournament in the mid-1930s to challenge the Denver Post Tournament, and he regularly invited black teams to participate.

As it did throughout the sport, beginning with the big regional tournaments and continuing with major league baseball and finally with spring training, capitalism proved the catalyst in integrating baseball. The picture of Paige driving out of Wichita in his brand new Cadillac is a useful image to represent the two-way street paved with money. White ownership was able to give Paige a new car because Paige had helped bring record crowds to Lawrence Stadium.

There was no luxury car or grand exit for the Sims, however. The last Negro Star rolled off the presses in January 1953. “Because of Editor Sims continued weak condition, we are giving up printing; it goes into new hands later this week. . . . Now that we are old and can do very little at pulling the load—we are asking every member of the race to get with us and help push.” In the tradition of Booker T. Washington and Claude Barnett, the Sims had indeed pushed for thirty-four years, and in their pushing had advanced the dreams and desires of Wichita’s city-within-a-city. Forced to migrate and exchange their shared life for another, the Sims helped Wichita’s blacks to, as social critic Richard Wright wrote, catch “whispers of the meanings that life could have,” and so to share a distinctly black identity. Black Wichitans could point to Satchel Paige, the Monarchs, the Monrovians, Devils, and even the Star itself for pride and a sense of accomplishment and cultural identity far richer than the mainstream papers were willing—or able—to acknowledge. The Sims had never stopped praising their people, and Kansas and American history is richer and more complete for it.


47. Rives, Baseball in Wichita, 67; the Call, October 9, 1931, quoted in Bruce, The Kansas City Monarchs, 75.

48. Negro Star, January 16, 1953. The farewell likely was written by Virginia Sims.

49. Wright, introduction to Drake and Cayton, Black Metropolis, xviii.