

African americans in baseball



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Michael Rizzo Murray, Chass (2004). Game Fights Trend of Fewer Blacks. The New York Times This article is about the declination of blacks in the game of baseball. It begins by talking about how successful blacks were in baseball from 1981-1997. Blacks such as Tony Gwynn, Tim Lincecum, and Gary Sheffield were winning National League Batting Titles 16 out of those 17 years. From 1998-2004, only one black player has won the batting title. As a huge baseball fan, I never knew that stat and find it very interesting. The article also entails that black players had won the National League MVP award quite often from 1949-1970.

More recently from 1985-2004, black players had won the MVP 11 times, with Barry Bonds winning 6 of the 11. The article then argues if there is any black ball player who will take Barry Bonds' stardom in Major League Baseball after he retires. In 1995, 19 percent of the players on opening day rosters were black. In 2004 when this article was written, the percentage of black players had dropped to 10 percent. Major League Baseball is aware of the issue and are trying to do as much as the can to promote baseball in urban communities.

Doug Melvin, the current General Manager of the Milwaukee Brewers suggests that young blacks among other young athletes are not interested in going to the minor leagues before they can play at the Major League level. He compares this to the National Basketball Association and the National Football League where young athletes can immediately jump to the pros right after high school. I completely agree with what Doug Melvin suggests in this article because young athletes, whether they are black or white, are trying to get paid millions of dollars as quick as they possibly can.

In the case of young black athletes, most of them come from poor urban communities. They are looking to sign that multi-million dollar contract as soon as they are eligible to be drafted. In order to do so, they need to see the field or court as soon as possible. As Doug Melvin suggests, this is not possible after being drafted into Major League Baseball. I think the greed for instant money and fame is taking a huge toll on the decline of blacks in baseball. In the 2003 Major League Baseball draft, the first two picks were black, which gave some hope to the game.

From 2004-2012, only 5 black players have been selected in the first ten picks of the draft. While this is not a staggering number, it goes to show that there are not many young standout blacks that are entering the professional level of baseball. Melvin is quoted as saying that “ If you exclude the family members that have previously played the game, it’s probably a smaller number of black players”. I agree with this statement. One of the 5 black players I mentioned earlier is Delino DeShield Jr. whose father played in the major leagues for 12 seasons.

The article also mentions Prince Fielder whose father was a all star player in the League for years and Anthony Gwynn Jr. who is the son of the great Tony Gwynn. Baseball is “ America’s Pastime” and become extremely popular after the Civil War. Blacks had some of the best players in the game in the late 1800s- early 1900’s. They played in the Negro Leagues during this time and baseball was passed down generation to generation. Now that other sports have taken over the popularity of baseball in the black community such as football and basketball, black fathers are passing other games down to their children.

So how can Major League Baseball fix this problem? “ They can’t fix that problem overnight” says Fay Vincent, the former commissioner of Major League Baseball. Len Coleman, who is black and was the former National League president, was a leading candidate to help restore the number of black players in the League according to Vincent. Coleman argues, “ baseball didn’t reach out quickly enough to societal changes”. I agree with that statement because Major League Baseball did not react to the issue soon enough and therefore there has been a fallout of blacks in the game.

Coleman was a big reason why the RBI program, which stands for Reviving Baseball in the Inner Cities, has become a popular program to grab the attention of blacks at a young age to engage in the game of baseball. This program has produced a number of current Major League Players such as Carl Crawford, Coco Crisp and Wil Nieves. About 190 RBI programs have been started domestically and at military bases around the country. Major League Baseball is also giving Little League Baseball \$250, 000 a year to expand their leagues to urban programs. They have also constructed a baseball academy in Compton,

California to try to duplicate the success baseball has had in influencing Latin American countries to the game. I think that this article, for being almost ten years old, is still pretty accurate and agree with all of its points. There are still not enough blacks in the game of baseball today. There are also not enough black managers in Major League Baseball which could have an impact on the game too. I think that RBI programs across America are gradually starting to help. Recently, Mark Teixeira of the New York Yankees donated over 1 million dollars to open an RBI program in Harlem, New York.

This goes to show that white players are even noticing the problem and are trying to do something about it. The League has very few black ambassadors today and can definitely use more to influence young blacks. The most popular players today are either American born or from Latin countries such as Albert Pujols, Robinson Cano and Felix Hernandez. Major League Baseball needs another Jackie Robinson. After the Negro Leagues were diminished and other sports started to gain more attention from athletes in the mid to late 1900's, I think black interest in baseball declined drastically.

As I mentioned earlier, most young black athletes are choosing basketball and football as their sport of choice. This has been a trend for a while now and has reflected on the game. Young blacks do not have many role models to look up to in Major League baseball as young Latino and young white Americans do. Until more black players become Most Valuable Players and League Batting champions, I think this trend will continue. Baseball needs more Tony Gwynns, Ozzie Smiths and Derek Jeters to become more relevant in the black community. Until then, I think the declining percentage of blacks in the game of baseball will continue.