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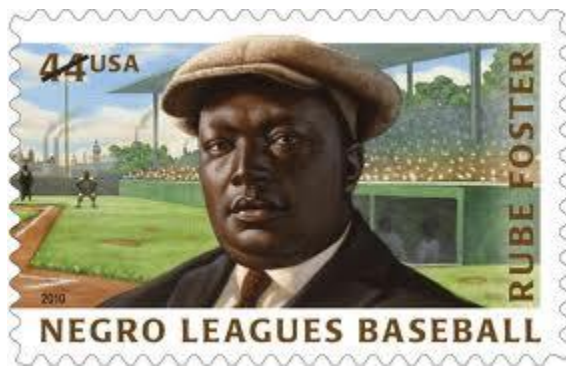
from the mind of a Detroit Tigers fan who happens to enjoy conscious music & a good read

- About R.J. Page

Ode to Big Rube Foster

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Andrew “Rube” Foster is considered the Father of Black Baseball by those that are familiar with his



contributions to the sport. The problem is, Foster has toiled in anonymity for so long that most are unaware of these contributions. Having recently read Negro League historian **Larry Lester's** latest book on Rube Foster, it is evident that “Big Rube” stands at the apex of black baseball while few people realize the tremendous impact he had on Major League Baseball as well. On the 94th birthday of Jackie Robinson, I'd like to shine a light on the man who paved the way for number 42. This is my ode to Rube Foster the pitcher, manager, Commissioner, and visionary.

Andrew “Rube” Foster the Pitcher

With a career record of 191-60, Rube Foster is considered by many as the best pitcher of the black ball era. Pitching from 1899-1918 Foster spent a majority of his career pitching in Chicago between two teams the Leland Giants and the American Giants. He threw 7 no-hitters and amassed a career ERA of 1.82. The nickname “Rube” was bestowed upon him in 1903 when Foster out pitched Hall of Famer Rube Waddell in an exhibition contest between black baseball's Cuban X-Giants and the major league's Philadelphia Athletics.

- Following on of Foster's epic performances on the mound Hall of Fame manager John McGraw hired Rube Foster in 1903 to serve as pitching coach to a young Christy Mathewson. Prior to the 1903 season Mathewson had amassed a win/loss record of 34-37. Foster came to the New York Giants to teach Mathewson the art of the screwball. For the remainder of Mathewson's career he was and still is regarded as the best screwball pitcher in baseball. His win loss record after working with Foster was 339-151, totals that earned him induction into the first class Hall of Fame inductees. Rube Foster was not elected to the Hall of Fame until 1981, over 50 years after his death.
- Unbeknownst to Rube Foster his pitching career also benefited boxing Heavyweight Champion Jack Johnson. Having been convicted of a crime for transporting his future white wife across state lines for immoral purposes, Johnson was sentenced to serve one year in prison. Johnson utilizing his slight resemblance to Foster, disguised himself as the pitcher and joined the team as they traveled to Ontario Canada. Once there he boarded a ship to Paris avoiding the criminal charges for the next 7 years.

Andrew “Rube” Foster the Manager

As the manager of the Negro National League’s Chicago American Giants Rube Foster finished with a 293-164 record winning 64% of the games his team participated in. He has been compared to the likes of Hall of Fame managers, John McGraw and Connie Mack for his innovation and success in the game of baseball. At a time when blacks were not given much respect for their intellectual capabilities many white managers watched and learned from Foster as he managed his players as if they were pieces on his personal chess board.

- Rube Foster developed a style of baseball known as “Inside Ball,” which centered on speed, bunting, and sacrifices. Sound familiar? Yes, the same style popularized in the Major League’s by the 1951 World Champion “Go-Go” Chicago White Sox, Whitey Herzog, and Ozzie Guillen originated with Rube Foster. Those that saw Foster’s teams play could not ignore the manager’s emphasis on speed and quickness. The stolen base was a hallmark of his teams as his players constantly took an extra base in a bold like fashion, an art that was absent from the white game at the time.
- Rube Foster was on a constant mission to prove his teams superiority. Rube was one of the first black managers to take his team on extended trips to the West Coast in an effort to expose the masses to black baseball at its finest. He repeatedly took his teams into the deep South, Cuba and Canada and was not afraid to take the credit for teaching many young black spectators the right way to play the game.
- Foster also issued many challenges to white baseball clubs. While few teams responded to his challenges the ones that did left with a new-found respect for Foster and the teams he put together. Foster issued these challenges with an end goal in mind. It was his vision that once he garnered the respect of white baseball, the fans would demand an annual Cultural World Series pitting the best black baseball team against the best white ball club. He cited the achievements of boxing great Jack Johnson and his ability to fight the top white boxers as the foundation for his dream Series.

Andrew “Rube” Foster the Commissioner

Rube Foster wasn’t the first to recognize the need for black baseball to be organized but he was the first person to create a sustainable league featuring the top black talent in the country. As any intelligent leader would, Rube learned from others failures and in 1920 developed the Negro National League which lasted well after he resigned his post in 1926 due to health challenges.

- In 1887 the League of Colored Baseball Clubs was formed and in less than a month the operation was shut down. In 1906, the National Association of Colored Baseball Clubs of the United States and Cuba was formed by several white owners. Their association was over before it started as they failed to play one game. And finally in 1907, the National Colored League of Professional Ball Clubs was formed yet never materialized. It was not until Andrew “Rube” Foster’s Negro National League was formed that black ball players had a thriving league they could call their own.
- The Negro National League did have their difficulties. Some teams were not as financially equipped as others and had challenges fielding teams the fans were willing to walk through the turnstiles for. As President of the NNL and head of the Chicago American Giants, Foster was in a rather enviable financial position. Chicago was the Harlem of the Midwest for the black community, and Foster was one of the few owners that had an ownership stake in his team’s home ballpark. Therefore, he was paid anytime a rival club needed a field to host their game (this happened often as many clubs wanted to play in markets with flourishing black communities). The well to do Foster was able to loan struggling clubs money to make payroll, and if a team needed a boost at the box office Rube would loan them a player sure to draw a crowd. Rube recognized the benefits of star power very early. In fact, when the NNL was formed Foster’s American Giants fielded some of the best players black baseball had seen. Placing the success of the league above his own, Foster distributed his top talent to other teams so that each team could have at least one star player. For an example of

Foster's benevolence towards the league as a whole one need look no further than Oscar Charleston. Bill James, the godfather of sabermetrics considers Charleston the **fourth greatest player ever** behind Ruth, Wagner, and Mays. Foster gave Charleston to the Indianapolis ABC's in his prime for the greater good and ultimate success of the Negro National League.

- Rube felt that the Negro National League could not truly be a league for his people until they hired black umpires. Initially the league contracted white umpires stationed in the city that the game was to be held and paid them on a per game basis. Foster saw fit to hire 8 black umpires that were salaried employees and traveled from city to city. The addition of these traveling employees cost the league an extra \$4,000 but it was important to Rube that blacks in all aspects of the game received an opportunity to take part in the "American Pastime."

Again, props to Larry Lester for the hard work and research. This post could not have been written without the fresh insight of his latest book, **Rube Foster In His Time: On the field and in the papers with Black Baseball's greatest visionary.**

As always, thank you for visiting and I welcome your thoughts, comments, or complaints on Rube Foster and his impact on the sport we love. Peace!