

## Foreword by former Commissioner **Fay Vincent**

This is a remarkable book about a remarkable baseball figure. Rube Foster was the founder of the Negro National League and the first President and Commissioner of black baseball. Finally we have his full story with all the glory and all the tragedy ably and deftly assembled by Larry Lester, perhaps the leading historian of black baseball. With careful research Lester takes the reader through the early days of black baseball, before 1900, when Foster emerges as a powerful, hard-throwing pitcher who quickly gains fame during the rough and tumble days when there was little structure to black baseball and when the games were played on poor fields and with few rewards.

Foster was a big man in many ways. He knew baseball well and had a strong sense of what was necessary to build black baseball. He realized the value of organization and the need for cooperation among the early owners of the emerging black teams. Over the first quarter of the twentieth century he worked diligently to forge a league where none had been thought possible. In the process he fought and struggled, often bitterly and sometimes in court, with those who did not agree with this plans or with his decisions. But in that time, before a sad death from the complications of syphilis, he owned and ran this team, the Chicago American Giants, and stood at the top to black baseball from 1911 until he became seriously ill in 1926. He was a combination, one can say without hyperbole, of such baseball luminaries as Connie Mack, Judge Landis and Christy Mathewson. As a player he was as fine a pitcher as every played in black baseball, and he surely ranks among the finest baseball executives. But despite acclaim during his life, he has not been treated to the kind of historical regard he deserved. Larry Lester will have changed all that by giving Foster and his achievements the kind of careful display they clearly deserve.

This book is not hagiography. Much of it is original source material and one man can read the contemporary accounts of Foster's activities. Foster is presented to us as a man of his era who was obligated to confront the vicious racism that surrounded everything he tried to achieve. Yet he regularly spoke of the time when the races would play baseball together and he was among the very first to organize games between black teams and even the Chicago Cubs. Not a romantic dreamer, he was well ahead of his time in many ways. Yet this is essentially a sad story, and Foster's victories and his many notable achievements are necessarily set against the times in which he lived. Like many pioneers he suffered and died without seeing the product of his efforts and the best days of his Negro League. One can hardly imagine what he would think today were he to see the impact black players have had on our great game. Without Rube Foster our game today would be very different.

This book is the story of an authentic American baseball icon. One can only hope Rube Foster will finally begin to be recognized for his superb contributions to the great American institution that for so long refused to permit his race to share the field. It is thus a story of shame and redemption. It is the story of our country.

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