



Pitchin' Man

LeRoy Satchel Paige

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In 1948 LeRoy “Satchel” Paige became a Major League baseball star. In truth, he had always been a star, just not like this. This was his dream come true. For twenty-two years he had been a Major League baseball legend, but in another venue. His venue had been in the Negro Leagues and his “America” was the segregated one. Now all that changed, and he was a star on a White Major League baseball team, the Cleveland Indians. The 1947 the sudden integration of baseball caught everyone by surprise. Those who controlled professional sports had held the line against integration since 1884. Today’s baseball fans cannot imagine an all White Major League or for that matter an all White NFL, NBA or NHL. Well, perhaps the last one can be imaged, but for sixty-two years it was that way. Sports were all White, all the time, and it seemed like it would go on like that forever. Most fans knew it was wrong and wanted integration, but the strong southern racist mind set stood firm. It had to change and finally in 1944, the “old turkey neck buzzard” Kennesaw Mountain Landis “kicked the bucket.” His death was a good thing. Now nobody was left to keep Blacks out of Big League Baseball. No great parties of celebration were held, but people of good will started to work immediately to force the sports world to grow up. By the end of 1947, three Blacks were on Major League rosters and many more were in the minor leagues. So on his 42nd birthday, LeRoy “Satchel” Paige became the oldest rookie in baseball history. He was the “toast of the town” and that town, of course, was Cleveland, Ohio. In the Black world, Satchel Paige was a pitching legend. In the White world folks did not know how good he really was, but many White major league players knew exactly how good he was. That was because many top stars had played against him in exhibition games.

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