

Finding 42

By Gretchen Griffith



Three Washington Nationals players unveil 42, the number that Jackie Robinson (above) wore when he played baseball for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Jackie Robinson's number has a special place in all Major League stadiums.

If you've been to a Major League Baseball game, you may have noticed a large number 42 somewhere in the stadium. High above one ballpark, the number appears on a banner that flaps in the wind. In another, it hangs from the outfield fence. In others, it can be seen on the scoreboard or on a "wall of fame."

Ball teams sometimes retire numbers of outstanding players when their careers end. That means no player will ever wear

that number for that team again.

Forty-two is so special that no new player on *any* Major League team will ever be assigned to wear it on a daily basis.

Forty-two was the number worn by Jackie Robinson.

Jackie Robinson was a great baseball player. But his number has not been retired just because of his greatness on the field. Robinson changed baseball forever. And as baseball changed for the better, so did America.

An All-Sport Star

When he was a child, Jackie Robinson excelled in many sports. By the time he reached the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), he was a standout in baseball, basketball, football, and track and field. After college, he served in the Army. Then, in April 1945, Robinson signed with the Kansas City Monarchs, a team in the Negro League. It was the only league that would accept a black player.

Then, on April 15, 1947, Jackie Robinson made history when he stepped onto the field wearing number 42 for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He was the first black player on a modern Major League Baseball team. Some spectators booed him, thinking that an African American man should not be allowed in the league. Robinson would hear those jeers for many years.

In some places in the United States, laws and rules segregated people based on the color of their skin. Separate schools were set up for blacks and whites, as well as separate hospitals, bathrooms, and even water fountains. Because of segregation, Robinson couldn't eat

in some restaurants with his teammates or stay in the same hotels when they visited certain cities. Yet he played on, and he gave a face to the unfairness.

Robinson's situation helped make many people aware of these unfair rules. They wondered how America could truly be a free country with this way of life. Eventually, new laws were passed to eliminate some of the unfairness.

No new player will be assigned number 42.

In his ten seasons, Robinson had more than 1,500 hits and a career batting average of .311. His courage inspired many people to pursue their own dreams.

On April 15, 1997, exactly fifty

years after Robinson's first Major League game, the Dodgers played against the Mets at New York's Shea Stadium. Acting Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig stood before a microphone and reminded the crowd of the day when baseball became a game for everyone.

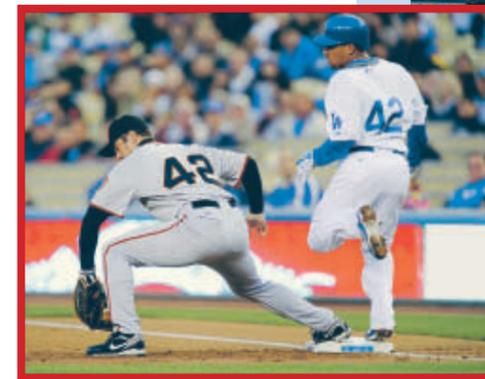
Selig declared that in honor of Jackie Robinson's accomplishments, the number 42 would be retired from all Major League teams and forever displayed in the stadiums.

This time the crowd cheered for Robinson and the way he'd played the game. He had never responded negatively to the boos and jeers—they had just made him play harder. He didn't argue with the fans who tried to insult him—he would just run faster around the bases.

Forty-two now hangs in every Major League ballpark in America as a symbol of equality and the freedom to dream. 

In 2009, They All Wore 42

Major League Baseball teams have continued to honor Jackie Robinson in many ways. During the games of April 15, 2009, *every* player, coach, manager, and umpire wore number 42. Through that gesture, all of those people showed respect to Robinson.



Which player still wears number 42 all the time? Find out on HighlightsKids.com.



These children (above) wore Jackie Robinson's number in a pregame ceremony at Dodger Stadium. Players from opposing teams also wore number 42 (left).