



Jackie Robinson  
with daughter  
Sharon.

# About My Father

By Sharon Robinson

**A**pril 15 marks the anniversary of Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier in *Major League Baseball*. A student once asked me: "What is the *color barrier*?" Baseball's "color barrier" signifies the period in American history when black- and brown-skinned ballplayers were kept out of the *Majors*™. In 1947, my father, Jackie Robinson, broke through that barrier and opened the door for others to follow.

Over 17 years ago, I began working with *Major League Baseball* and educators to help students understand "breaking barriers" and Jackie Robinson's legacy of change. By participating in these lessons, you'll learn about the values that made my father successful on the field, and which also guided him as a parent. You'll likewise discover strengths in your own character to help you overcome barriers in your life. Let's get started!

American baseball became popular during the Civil War. Briefly in the late 1800s, two black ballplayers, Bud Fowler and Moses Fleetwood Walker, played alongside whites. But

by 1890, most professional baseball leagues in America were "segregated." Until 1947, black- and brown-skinned players were in the Negro Leagues, while whites played in the *Majors*.

In 1945, Branch Rickey, president and general manager of the *Brooklyn Dodgers*™, stepped forward to break baseball's color barrier. He studied the field, using scouts to explore the pool of players. There were many Negro League players who were well-known and proven professional baseball players. Players such as Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson certainly headed the list provided by Mr. Rickey's scouts, but they agreed on Jack Roosevelt Robinson.

The scouts told Mr. Rickey that, during his season with the Negro League team the Kansas City Monarchs, Jackie Robinson played shortstop. He hit .387, perfected his skill at stealing bases, and was selected for the league's All-Star Game.

They presented my father's college statistics next. Rickey learned that while at UCLA, my dad was the leading basketball scorer in his conference, the national champion in the long jump, an All-American halfback in football, and a varsity baseball shortstop. In fact, Robinson was the first athlete at UCLA to letter in four sports in a single year.

In a now-famous meeting, Branch Rickey painted the stressful conditions my father would face in the *Majors*. Rickey role-played a racist fan shouting angry insults. A spiteful opponent might spike my father with

metal cleats. Rickey was testing whether my father would have the strength of character to fight back with his bat rather than his fist. My father agreed to this approach. Two months later, he signed with the Montreal Royals, the *Dodgers*™ farm team.

As predicted, my father played baseball against amazing odds. He fought back with perfectly timed bunts, hard line drives, and stolen bases. On April 15, 1947, Jack Roosevelt Robinson stepped onto the grass of Ebbets Field™ as a member of the *Brooklyn Dodgers*™. He went on to play 10 seasons, earning such awards as Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player.

**“ Robinson was the first athlete at UCLA to letter in four sports in a single year.”**

It took 13 long seasons before every *Major League Baseball* team had at least one African-American player on its roster. Today, *Major League Baseball* players come from around the world and continue to break barriers of culture, language, race, and religion. Like you, they face barriers and meet challenges with the same set of values that helped my father succeed on and off the field. ♦

Jackie Robinson sliding into home, 1949.

