

BOB TRICE
pitcher PHILADELPHIA ATHLETICS



HE WAS TOPPS: This is the front of a 1954 Topps baseball card for starting pitcher Bob Trice, a pioneer within the A's organization.

A's first black player is subject of tribute

By Ron Thomas

Independent Journal reporter

Mention Jackie Robinson and even the most casual baseball fan will know that in 1947 he became the first black major leaguer in modern times. Not only did his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers change his sport, but it also had a dramatic impact upon all of American society.

But mention Bob Trice, and even the most ardent baseball fan likely will draw a blank. Yet he, too, is an important figure in the integration of America's most revered sport, for Trice was the first black player to perform in an Athletics' uniform.

Trice, who died in 1988, and the overall integration of major league baseball will be honored tomorrow during the Oakland A's annual FanFest. A variety of discussion sessions will be held in Jack London Square beginning at noon, in-



INSIDE:
Complete schedule of events for tomorrow's Oakland A's FanFest at Jack London Square

cluding one about players such as Trice who were racial pioneers like Robinson, but whose stories largely are untold.

A 6-foot-3, 190-pound right-handed pitcher, Trice broke into the majors on Sept. 13, 1953, when the A's were located in Philadelphia and the owner was the famed Cornelius McGillicuddy, better known as Connie Mack. Trice pitched in Philadelphia in parts of the 1953 and '54 seasons, then ac-

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le models the sports world has to offer

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Trice

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compained the franchise's move to Kansas City in 1955, where he ended his big-league career with four appearances. The A's moved to Oakland in 1968.

Altogether, Trice was 9-9 with a 5.80 ERA in 26 games with the A's, 21 as a starter. Not an enviable record, but he certainly had legitimate excuses. Trice was playing for one of the worst teams in baseball, one that averaged 58 wins and 96 losses during his tenure. Plus, he had to deal with discrimination that became so aggravating in 1954 that he asked to return to the minor leagues because he enjoyed playing there more.

Trice was born in 1926 in Newton, Ga., and began playing baseball in Weirton, W. Va. Although he preferred football and basketball, he lucked into a professional baseball career in 1948. Trice's son, a middle school teacher in Detroit also named Bob, said his father earned a roster spot on the Negro Leagues' Homestead Grays after a friend bet the team's owner that Trice could make the roster.

He was an infielder-outfielder at the time, playing for one of the most famous teams in Negro League history. Trice seldom played in his first two years, not with future Baseball Hall of Famers such as Josh Gibson and Buck Leonard on his team.

Instead, Trice told his son he was in charge of the duffle bag players put their wallet in during a game, passed a hat through the crowd to collect extra money from fans, and carried and packed the team's bats and balls.

The Grays traveled by bus, and Trice recalled that, "Many nights, I slept on the equipment. When you're a rookie, the veterans have grabbed the seats. What are you going to do — tell Josh Gibson you want his seat?"

The younger Trice isn't sure when his dad was converted into a

FanFest schedule

The Oakland A's FanFest is set for tomorrow at Jack London Square, with panel discussions about the integration of baseball held at Jackie Robinson Pavilion in the square. Topics include:

- 12 p.m. — Baseball prior to 1947
- 1 p.m. — Jackie Robinson and breaking the color line
- 2 p.m. — How the game was changed, both immediate and long term
- 3 p.m. — Minorities in sports reporting, barriers and breakthroughs
- 4 p.m. — Crossing the line: beyond Jackie Robinson

The FanFest includes a baseball memorabilia and card show

pitcher. But he knows Trice received tips from one of the best ever, the legendary Satchel Paige. They were teammates on barnstorming teams and Paige once told Trice: "You can call yourself a pitcher when you've got a full count on the batter, the bases are loaded, it's the bottom of the ninth and you throw the man a changeup. Everybody in the ballpark, including the man at the plate, expects you to throw the heat.

"Basically, it's a fool's play. But it's so foolish, it's the best thing to do."

An encyclopedia of the Negro Leagues lists Trice as a pitcher-outfielder with the Grays from 1948-50, before he joined integrated baseball in 1951 with Farnham in the Provincial League in Canada. In 1953, he was the Triple-A International League's Rookie of the Year after compiling a 21-10 record with Ottawa.

The younger Trice doesn't know how and why his father was signed by the A's, but Philadelphia promoted him to the big leagues that September. According to his son, on Trice's first day with the A's, he was ignored by all of his new teammates except pitcher Bobby Shantz.

Trice put on his uniform in the locker room. "Not one person would speak to me," he told his son. Then he ran to the outfield just to get a feel for his surroundings. Shantz later came out of the dugout, ran out to center field, introduced himself and said, "Trice, I'm glad that you're here."

More than 43 years have passed since then, yet Shantz still remembers that scene.

"I just went out and just talked to him a little," said Shantz, now 71 and retired in suburban Philadelphia. "These other guys were trying to act indifferent. I didn't want it to bother him, and I don't think it did bother him."

Trice lost his big-league debut, 5-2, against the St. Louis Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles) on Sept. 13, 1953, but Philadelphia Inquirer reporter Art Morrow praised his performance, writing "... he flashed a fastball and slider that promised brighter things to come."

A week later, Trice picked up his first win, 13-9, over the Washington Senators (the current Minnesota Twins). He finished that season with a 2-1 record and a 5.48 ERA.

His teammates' rude welcome was the first of many racially-based aggravations Trice had to tolerate.

The A's added two more black players the next season, Joe Taylor and Vic Power, and true to the segregated customs of the South, they often were not allowed to stay at the team hotel during spring training. Instead, Trice lived with a black family in Florida.

"The only thing I remember about that prejudice crap was dropping them off in colored neighborhoods to change clothes," Shantz said. "They'd take us (the white players) to the hotel, and when we'd go back to the ballpark they'd pick him up. And then after the game, drop him off again.

"I felt a little uncomfortable about it. I never said anything. Nothing I could do about it."

Restaurants also discriminated against black players, and once Trice became very upset about A's management's lack of sensitivity to his situation. The team bus had stopped at a restaurant in the South, and when they refused to let Trice enter, he went back to the bus by himself and read a book.

"All of his team went in and had dinner," the younger Trice said.

Afterwards, they brought Trice three hot dogs in a doggie bag. Trice merely put the bag on the floor of the bus and kept on reading, but inside he was seething.

"Nobody apologized for this," his son said. "My father was so upset when he went in and spoke to management, and said in the future I'll go to my side of town to eat. You will arrange for me to have enough money to eat where I feel comfortable, and arrange for a cab so I can come back to the bus and sit there and read my book."

But there were good people and good times, too. That year another player, first baseman Lou Limmer, also befriended Trice. And Shantz laughed about the time when, "At the beginning of one of those seasons, we opened in New York and Bob and I and Vic Power were on the 'The Ed Sullivan Show' (a top-rated television show) and we sang 'Take Me Out to the Ballgame.'"

"I think they gave us \$500

apiece. That was a lot of money; not like today. And none of us could sing."

Trice was 7-8 in 19 games in 1954, a very good record considering that the A's finished 51-103 that year, but in mid-season he asked to return to Ottawa in the minor leagues. In addition to the spring-training hassles, he had become convinced that the team had hired detectives to follow him.

Trice never confronted management about it, but eventually he asked to go back to the minor leagues "for more seasoning," his son said. Shantz, who remembers Trice having good control and a good changeup, was shocked when Trice was demoted.

"He pitched three or four good ballgames," Shantz said. "Then he had a couple when he couldn't get anybody out, and next thing you know he was back in the minors and somebody said he asked Mr. Mack to send him back to work on some things. I couldn't understand why."

Shantz didn't know about the frustrations Trice had endured.

"My father explained that when he first got there, there was novelty to being in the major leagues," said Trice's son. "It was like an adrenaline rush, a surge, a moment of making it to the top of the mountain."

As time went on, however, Trice felt he was under too much scrutiny. The younger Trice said his father became "disgusted" with management "because other things dealing with race took precedence over the game." He just felt that playing in the minor leagues was more fun, and the salary wasn't appreciably less.

Trice played four more games with the A's in 1955 and finished his career with the Mexico City Reds from 1956-58. After he retired from the game, he worked for a steel company in Weirton.

"I lost him in '88, and I still miss that man," Trice's son said. "He is the only man's man I know."

Gate crasher won't reveal next target