

Various Barnstorming Tours Including:

The House of David

Women

Satchel Paige and Bob Feller

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig

Sandlot Stats

Chapter 6

*The topic for the interesting facts for **Chapter 6** deals with the expansion of baseball through barnstorming tours.*

Barnstorming

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, we have the following definition of barnstorming:

Function: *verb*

Date: 1883

intransitive verb

- 1** : to tour through rural districts staging usually theatrical performances
- 2** : to travel from place to place making brief stops (as in a political campaign or a promotional tour)
- 3** : to pilot one's airplane in sight-seeing flights with passengers or in exhibition stunts in an unscheduled course especially in rural districts *transitive verb* : to travel across while barnstorming
- 4** : to travel around an area appearing in exhibition sports events, especially baseball games

According to Hall of Fame records, the first formal barnstorming in baseball took place in 1860 when the Brooklyn Excelsiors played games around New York.

From the files of the Baseball Hall of Fame documents we can present the following timeline for baseball barnstorming.

- 1874 : Red Stockings and Athletics tour Great Britain

- 1875 : Blondes vs. Brunettes, first female barnstorming tour
- 1888-1889 : Albert Spalding takes Major Leaguers on world tour
- 1890-1899 : Bloomer Girls teams begin touring
- 1913-1914 : The New York Giants and Chicago White Sox tour the world
- 1915 : House of David barnstorming tour
- 1921 : Babe Ruth and Yankees barnstorm, violating Major League Baseball rules
- 1927 : Bustin' Babes and Larrupin' Lous tour America
- 1929 : Kansas City Monarchs tour with portable lighting system
- 1934 : Major Leaguers with Babe Ruth tour Japan
- 1946 : Bob Feller's All-Star tour against Satchel Paige's Negro All-Stars
- 1994-1997 : Colorado Silver Bullets women's team tour against men's teams
- 2010 : Los Angeles Dodgers go to Taiwan on goodwill tour

In what follows, a brief discussion is provided for some of the above barnstorming tours.

House of David Barnstorming Tours

Being of Jewish descent, I found the story of the House of David touring baseball team fascinating.

The House of David was founded as a religious community in 1903. The House of David began playing organized baseball in 1913. Their reasons for playing baseball were to raise money for their community and to recruit new members for their sect.

The basic beliefs of the House of David included physical labor, refraining from haircuts or shaving, and a vegetarian diet.

Because of their long hair and beards and distinctive uniforms, the team was a unique barnstorming team.

To increase the competitive nature of their team, in the 1920s, the team began to recruit non-Jewish players. Two such players were Grover Cleveland Alexander and Satchel Paige. All

recruited players were required to either have a beard or they were provided with a false beard. In 1933, they recruited Jackie Mitchell, a 19-year old female who was credited with striking out Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig in a 1931 exhibition game. Jackie was signed to a professional contract at \$1,000 a month, a significant amount for the times. By the way, Jackie was not required to have a beard. As a publicity stunt, she volunteered to wear a false beard in some games.

The House of David touring team played against major league players, minor league teams, and Negro League teams. Due to religious differences the colony split into several factions. Each faction had their own team. Of course most of the players were now non-Jewish. The House of David teams toured throughout the Northeast. The teams finally disbanded in the early 1950s.

Women Barnstorming Tours (1875 and 1890s)

Male promoters realized as the game of baseball became more popular that customers would pay to see unusual baseball games. This led to the birth of women barnstorming teams. The first tour consisted of the two teams “The Blondes” and “The Brunettes” . These two teams were created in 1875 and they toured together. The girls who played were recruited from the streets or from orphanages. Many of the girls had very little training or ability and the games became a sideshow.

In the late 1800s the Bloomer Girl teams were formed. The contribution of Amelia Bloomer is discussed at the end of Chapter 19. Unlike the earlier barnstorming women’s teams, the Bloomer Girls teams consisted of skilled players. It was known, in order to increase the competitive nature of their teams, young males were dressed up to impersonate female players. In fact, Rogers Hornsby got his start with a Bloomer Girls’ team.

Bloomer Girls’ teams were disbanded in the early 1930s. However, these barnstorming womens’ teams set the stage for the professional women’s league established in 1943. This league is discussed at the end of Chapter 19.

Babe Ruth's Barnstorming Tours of 1921 and 1927

What I find interesting about this tour was the involvement of Judge Keneshaw Landis, who was chosen as the first Commissioner of Baseball to handle the Black Sox scandal of 1919. This scandal is detailed at the end of Chapter 9. Ruth and other Major League players violated Section 8B of Article 4 of the Major League code, passed in February of 1921. This rule stated that any player who performed in the World Series was not allowed to take part in any exhibition games after the end of the World Series.

Ruth and other players defied this rule. Landis suspended these players from the beginning of the 1922 season until May 20th of that year. Ruth stood up for his right to earn money in the off season. He protested the fact that players who were not on World Series teams could barnstorm.

The barnstorming rule by which Ruth was suspended was removed by July 22, 1922. However, players on World Series teams were still forced to obtain the permission of the club owner and the commissioner of baseball before joining a tour.

Later, in 1927, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig formed teams that took part in a barnstorming tour. As will be discussed next, the Ruth and Gehrig barnstorming tour in 1928 had a great impact on Bob Feller.

Bob Fellers' 1946 Barnstorming Tour with Satchel Paige

As a nine-year-old boy in Des Moines, Iowa, Bob Feller attended a barnstorming game between Babe Ruth's team and Lou Gehrig's team. Feller explained he bought an autographed baseball for five dollars at the game. He explained he raised the money by being paid ten cents each for catching 50 gophers. He referred to this ball as his "first gopher ball".

After returning from World War II in August of 1945, Feller made nine starts for Cleveland. In October, 1945 Feller pitched against a Negro League team formed by Satchel Paige in Des Moines, Iowa. Feller's team consisted of such great players as Rogers Hornsby and Johnny Mize. The result of that game was a 4 to 2 victory by the Negro League stars.

A mutual admiration and friendship developed between these two great pitchers. This led to their barnstorming tour of 1946. Feller and Paige started most of the games on the tour. Feller pitched at least two innings in 26 consecutive games on the tour. Eventually, Feller and Paige became teammates for the Cleveland Indians in 1948. Paige was a 42 year old rookie in 1948. He pitched in the majors until the age of 58. Can you imagine the number of total pitches he threw in his career, especially when in the Negro Leagues he basically pitched every game?

Satchel Paige was considered the “king of barnstorming” because of the number of years he barnstormed as a full-time job, unlike the major leaguers who barnstormed as a part-time job after October.

African American players such as Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell, Josh Gibson, Larry Doby, and of course Jackie Robinson showed their baseball ability by winning about half the games on these tours.

Many baseball historians believe it was these barnstorming tours which helped to pave the way for the admission of African American players into the major leagues.

A good movie depicting the Negro Leagues’ barnstorming tours is entitled “*The Bingo Long Travelling All-Stars and Motor Kings*”. This movie starred Billy Dee Williams, James Earl Jones, and Richard Pryor. In this movie the character Bingo Long, portrayed by Williams, is based on the barnstorming of Satchel Paige.

Baseball barnstorming tours not only impacted baseball history but also influenced the history of the United States.

We conclude the interesting facts section by presenting a timeline for the evolution of professional baseball leagues.