

## RANKING THE NEGRO LEAGUE CARDSET

One of the joys of simulation baseball is realized when a sophisticated replay project is complete and one compares a “replay” result with an “expected” result. Did the best team win? Did some also run over achieve? Such comparisons are easy with season replays (just check the standings) and relatively easy with a Great Teams of the Past set (consult any number of books ranking historic baseball teams). However, the Twenty Greatest Negro League Teams card set and season disk that the APBA Game Company released in 1994 is unlike all other card sets in that respect. After a replay involving all 20 Negro League teams over a 154 game schedule, it is not as easy, indeed arguably it is not possible, to truly identify which teams performed as expected. Sure, we know which teams performed well in our replay project, but it is difficult to truly know how good these teams were in relationship to each other in the period between 1910 and 1948.

On July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1999, I had the privilege of addressing the APBA MiniCamp on the subject of ranking the Negro League teams. In order to rank the teams I requested assistance of the following three APBA players who also happen to know a little about the Negro Leagues:

Jim Riley, President, Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) and Director of Research at the Negro League Museum in Kansas City;

Dick Clark, Co- Chairman, SABR’s Negro League Committee and Co-Editor of The Negro Leagues Book; and

David Lawrence, APBA Journal Columnist and Negro Leagues buff.

In addition to the above experts, I utilized the recent poll of the SABR Negro League Committee membership in which they identified the greatest Negro League players of all-time. I ranked each team in order of how many ranked players were on each team.

The composite ranking of these three experts (and SABR N.L.C. poll) is depicted below:

### Chart One

<b>Negro League Team</b>	<b>Riley</b>	<b>Clark</b>	<b>Lawrence</b>	<b>SABR N.L.C.</b>
Pittsburgh Crawfords 1935	1	3	6	1
Homestead Grays 1931	7	7	1	2
Hilldale Club 1925	4	1	5	11
Homestead Grays 1938	2	9	3	9
New York Lincolns 1913	6	2	13	3
St. Louis Stars 1930	8	10	2	5
Kansas City Monarchs 1924	5	4	4	13
Chicago Lelands 1910	9	6	9	7
Kansas City Monarchs 1942	3	8	12	8
Cole's American Giants 1933	11	15	8	4
Chicago American Giants 1917	14	5	16	6

Newark Eagles 1946	10	12	7	12
Baltimore Black Sox 1929	13	11	10	14
Chicago American Giants 1921	12	13	18	15
Indianapolis ABCs 1916	19	18	14	10
Chicago American Giants 1927	15	16	15	16
Cleveland Buckeyes 1945	16	17	11	18
Birmingham Black Barons 1948	20	14	17	20
Atlantic City Bacarrachs 1926	18	19	19	17
Birmingham Black Barons 1943	17	20	20	19

As illustrated in Chart 1, in the panel's opinion, while other franchises (in Chicago or Kansas City) may have had longer or more stellar lifetime achievements, the three greatest single season teams in the history of Negro League play are all from Pennsylvania. Capsule descriptions of each follows:

#3 - Hilldale Club of 1925 – Not only did this club have the best record in blackball in '25 but it triumphed over the defending champion Kansas City Monarchs in the second contestation of the Negro League World Series after dropping the initial Series the year before on a muffed pop-up. The Daisies were Dick Clark's pick for number one and their composite statistics (i.e. Production and Weighted Pitching Average) were the best of the 20 teams in the set. This club featured Hall of Famer Judy Johnson (ranked 15<sup>th</sup> best Negro League player of all-time in the SABR N.L.C. poll), Biz Mackey (17<sup>th</sup>), Clint Thomas (80<sup>th</sup>), Nip Winters (60<sup>th</sup>), Manager/Owner Ed Bolden (67<sup>th</sup>) with Louis Santop (22<sup>nd</sup>) in a career ending supporting role. (btw, Harrisburg Giants 2<sup>nd</sup> behind only Hilldale in 1925 Eastern Colored League play and 2<sup>nd</sup> in composite ECL standings from '23 through '27).

#2 - Homestead Grays 1931 – As you can tell by Chart 1 both the '31 and '38 teams contended for this honor. Given the independent nature of this team's schedule and the situation in blackball in '31 it is difficult to say for sure that the Grays record was the best but I know of no other team that year that exceeded it. Dave Lawrence selected this team as number one and in they finished first in the 2,964 game replay that I conducted in association with this ranking. Included on the Grays are Oscar Charleston (4<sup>th</sup>), Josh Gibson (5<sup>th</sup>), Smokey Joe Williams (13<sup>th</sup>), Willie Foster (18<sup>th</sup>), Jud Wilson (26<sup>th</sup>), Double Duty Radcliffe (32<sup>nd</sup>), Vic Harris (72<sup>nd</sup>), George Scales (80<sup>th</sup>), and Cum Posey (23<sup>rd</sup>)

#1 - Pittsburgh Crawfords 1935 – In addition to being the composite number one, Jim Riley selected the Crawfords as the greatest contingent of Negro League players ever assembled on one team. The SABR Negro League Committee concurred with the following Crawfords all ranked in the top eighty Negro League players of all-time: Satchel Paige (1<sup>st</sup>), Cool Papa Bell (3<sup>rd</sup>), Oscar Charleston (4<sup>th</sup>), Josh Gibson (5<sup>th</sup>), Judy Johnson (15<sup>th</sup>), Sam Bankhead (48<sup>th</sup>), Jimmy Crutchfield (52<sup>nd</sup>), Gus Greenlee (30<sup>th</sup>). The Crawfords enjoyed 1935's best record but had to defeat the New York Cubans in a playoff to capture the pennant. Of course, if Satchel Paige removes himself from the Crawfords playing roster for 1935, as he did in reality, then the Crawfords are not the best. In that case, pick the '32 or '36 Crawfords and they will do just as well.

Assuming the validity of the above rankings, one now has a measuring stick for comparing the results of an APBA replay. Utilizing my PC and Cap Spalding, a three man rotation, standard lineups with platooning if suggested by the lineup sheet, and adjusting the Rogan card with Wizard by reducing at bats by 100, I played each of the 20 teams against each other in a 156 game series each (2,964 game total) and have listed the results below:

**Chart Two**

<b>Negro League Team</b>	<b>Pct</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Expert</b>	.
Homestead Grays 1931	0.684	1	2	
Hilldale Club 1925	0.659	2	3	
Chicago Lelands 1910	0.623	3	8	
Pittsburgh Crawfords 1935	0.601	4	1	
St. Louis Stars 1930	0.588	5	6	
Homestead Grays 1938	0.577	6	4	
Newark Eagles 1946	0.570	7	12	
Cleveland Buckeyes 1945	0.566	8	17	
New York Lincolns 1913	0.553	9	5	
Baltimore Black Sox 1929	0.488	10	13	
Kansas City Monarchs 1942	0.468	11	9	
Indianapolis ABCs 1916	0.457	12	15	
Cole's American Giants 1933	0.445	13	10	
Birmingham Black Barons 1948	0.439	14	18	
Kansas City Monarchs 1924	0.428	15	7	
Chicago American Giants 1927	0.423	16	16	
Atlantic City Bacarrachs 1926	0.396	17	19	
Chicago American Giants 1917	0.366	19	11	
Chicago American Giants 1921	0.366	18	14	
Birmingham Black Barons 1943	0.304	20	20	

The correlation between the rank generated by the computer simulation (RANK in Chart Two) and the rank according to the experts (EXPERT) may be measured by a calculation known as a rank order correlation coefficient. Such coefficients range from -1 (a strong but negative correlation) to +1 (a strong positive correlation). The correlation of the two lists above is +0.74 which is a fairly strong positive number. Thus, it would appear that the APBA cards do a pretty good job of ranking these teams in the correct order as far as the experts are concerned.

The proof is in the play...you are invited to try for yourself. I look forward to hearing of your results.

*Ted Knorr has played APBA since 1962 and has been a member of SABR since 1979. He has been a Negro League enthusiast ever since he discovered that the Harrisburg Giants – with Hall of Famer Oscar Charleston – played their Sunday home games in the twenties at the present site of Lancaster Catholic High School, his alma mater.*