

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

# Josh Gibson

by Guy Belleranti

Born in Georgia in 1911, Josh Gibson was often called the "black Babe Ruth". When he was 12, his family moved to Pittsburgh where his father found work in a steel mill. By the time Gibson was 16 he'd made quite a name for himself playing sandlot baseball for amateur teams in the city. A few years later in 1930, the Homestead Grays of Pittsburgh picked him up as a catcher.

Two years later he was in the Pittsburgh Crawfords. Over the next few years he became one of the great pitchers of his era.

Gibson then led the long run of Negro League teams of the team called Grays for four years of following.

Josh Gibson collected several Negro League batting titles.

measure home runs (many over 500 feet) at an unbelievable rate. Gibson would often roll up his sleeves and make his biceps bulge to goad an opposing pitcher.

Records weren't the most carefully kept by the Negro League, but all place Gibson's career batting average in the high .300's. Everyone also agrees that he hit over .400 several times. As for his power hitting, Negro League history books credit him with



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smashing 800 plus career home runs.

However, Gibson wasn't just a great hitter. He ran the bases with speed and was one of the top Negro League catchers. He rifled throws with great accuracy and blocked the plate with the best of them. Fans flocked to see him play. It wasn't uncommon to see 30,000 to 40,000 people at a game.

Tragically, baseball had a color line during Josh Gibson's playing days. This discrimination prevented him from playing in the Major Leagues. However, he did often play Negro League games. Some of the best sports of the time say he hit the longest home run in the Negro League at Forbes Field and Washington's old Griffith Stadium. Some of the Negro League teams in the old New York Polo ground were the Homestead Grays and the Newark Black Yankees. Some insist that in one game he hit a home run out of the whole park.

While Gibson was never in the Major League stars in the Negro League, he did play against Major League stars in the Negro League. Sources say he hit over .400 a year. Walter Johnson was reported to have said, "I played with white boys and against Walter Johnson was as easy he might as well be in a rocking chair. Today he is a legend."

Monte Irvin, who played for the New York Giants in the Major Leagues said, "I played with white boys and against Hank Aaron. They were tremendous players, but they were no Josh Gibson. You saw him hit, and you took your hat off.... You tell people how great he was, they think you're exaggerating." Roy Campanella, Leo Durocher and others had similar things to say about Gibson's prowess.

Indeed, baseball's color line denied many great black ball players recognition alongside their Major League peers. It might have prevented Josh Gibson from being

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recognized as the greatest player of all time.

As the 1930's turned into the 1940's Gibson began suffering from frequent headaches, his catcher's knees ached more and more and he started drinking heavily. In 1943, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Yet he played on, still winning batting and home run titles.

In January of 1947, Josh Gibson died of a stroke. It was probably brought on by the tumor, but some believe it was caused by drinking, painkillers and drugs that were never been allowed in the Major Leagues. In 1944, the color barrier was finally broken and Jackie Robinson was allowed to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

In 1972, Josh Gibson was inducted into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame. In 1996, during black history month, General Mills put on a baseball game in Harlem, New York. And in 1996, Major League Baseball finally allowed black athletes to play for the Major Leagues.

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# Josh Gibson

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- 4) What in your opinion could be the most probable cause (of the causes mentioned) for Gibson's demise ? Why do you think so?

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- 5) Write a few lines to explain for what your favorite player and

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(support) player and similarities between your er.

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# Josh Gibson

- 1) Apart from making the reader well-aware of how consummate a baseball player Josh was, the author is also trying to shed some light on.
- a) ✓ How the color line cast a shadow over the careers of many great black players
  - b) True champions don't bother about the opportunities they are denied, but just focus on the ones that they have
  - c) If you have a will, you'll find a way, no matter how adverse the world around you is
  - d) The more illustrious your career becomes, the more problematic it is to deal with its challenges

2) Point out the irony in the following passage.

**One of the careers**

**heartbroken for**

**it was only a few**

**finally broken**

**Dodgers.**

**that he was**

**Major Leagues. And**

**color barrier was**

**y for the Brooklyn**

3) Josh Gibson was a powerful, compact swing that produced tape-measure home runs (many over 500 feet) at an unbelievable rate. As for his power hitting, he has been credited with a smashing 800 plus career home runs. He ran the bases with speed and was one of the top catchers. He rifled throws with great accuracy

**Josh Gibson c**

**with a career batting**

**average ranging between .300 and even .400 several times. He also had a**

**powerful, compact swing that produced tape-measure home runs (many**

**over 500 feet) at an unbelievable rate. As for his power hitting, he has been**

**credited with a smashing 800 plus career home runs. He ran the bases with**

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# Josh Gibson

**and blocked the plate with the best of them.**

- 4) What in your opinion could be the most probable cause (of the causes mentioned) for Gibson's demise ? Why do you think so?

**Answers may vary.**

- 5) Write a few lines to explain for what your favorite player and

**Answers may**

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