
TONI STONE (Marcenia Lyle Alberga)

1921-1996 Second Base; *San Francisco Sea Lions, 1949; New Orleans Creoles, 1949-1952; Indianapolis Clowns, 1953; Kansas City Monarchs, 1954*

Toni Stone may be one of the best ballplayers that you've never heard of. As a teenager she played with the local boys' teams, in St. Paul, Minnesota. During World War II she moved to San Francisco, playing first with an American Legion team, and then with the San Francisco Sea Lions, a black, semi-pro barnstorming team—she drove in two runs in her first at-bat. She didn't feel that the owner was paying her what they'd originally agreed on, so when the team played in New Orleans, she jumped ship and joined the Black Pelicans. From there she went to the New Orleans Creoles, part of the Negro League minors, where she made \$300 a month in 1949. The local press reported that she made several unassisted double plays, and batted .265. (Although the All American Girls Baseball League was active at the time, Toni Stone was not eligible to play. The AAGBL was a "whites only" league, so Toni played on otherwise all-male black teams.)

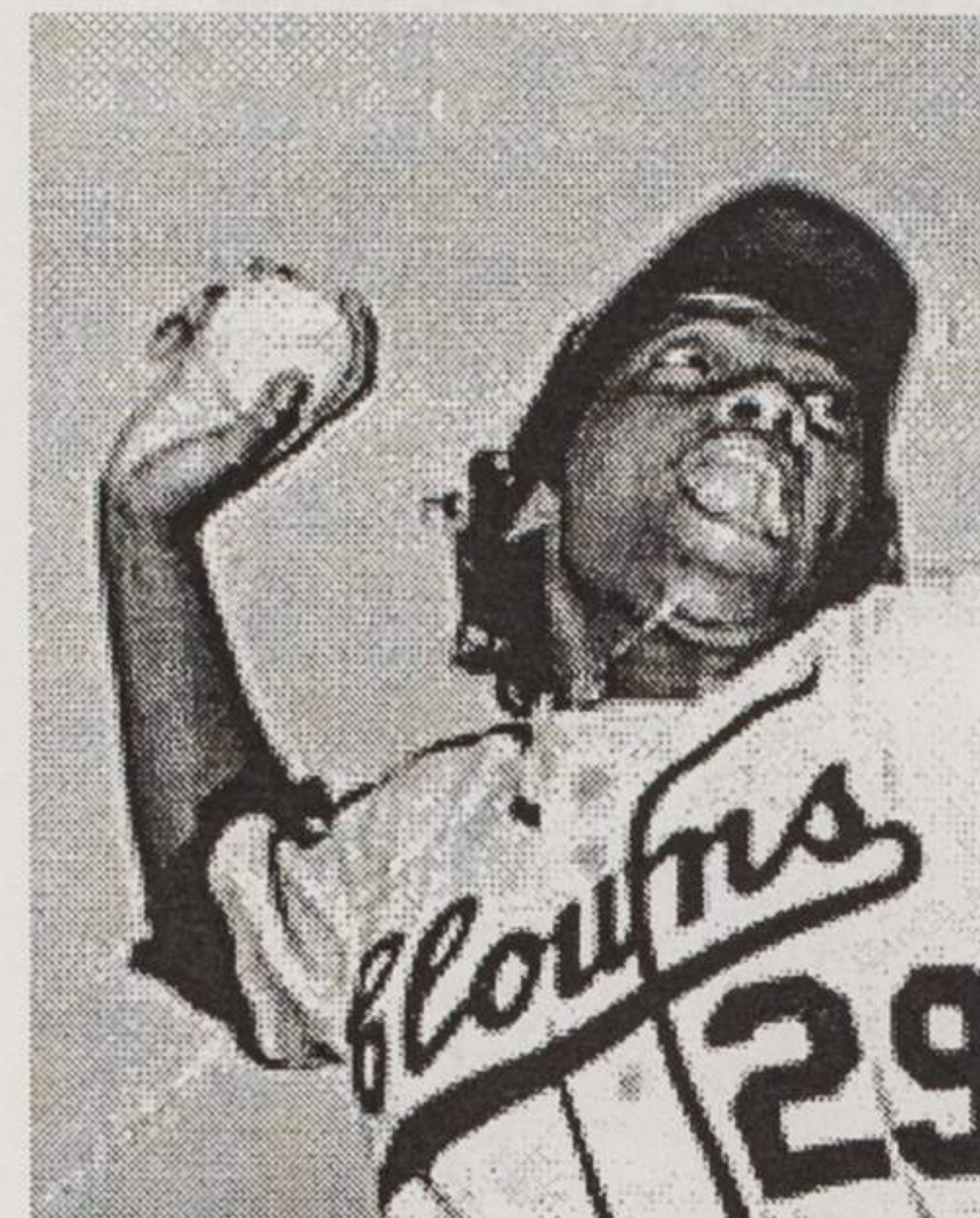
In 1953, Syd Pollack, owner of the Indianapolis Clowns, signed Toni to play second base, a position that had been recently vacated when Hank Aaron was signed by the Boston (soon to be Milwaukee) Braves. Toni became the first woman to play in the Negro Leagues. The Clowns had begun as a gimmick team, much like the Harlem Globetrotters, known as much for their showmanship as their playing. But by the '50s they had toned down their antics and were playing straight baseball. Although Pollack claimed he signed Toni Stone for her skill as a player, not as a publicity stunt, having her on the team didn't hurt revenues, which had been declining steadily since Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the majors, and many young black players left the Negro Leagues.

Stone recalls that most of the men shunned her and gave her a hard time because she was a woman. She reflected that, "They didn't mean any harm, and in their way they liked me. Just that I wasn't supposed to be there. They'd tell me to go home and fix my husband some biscuits, or any damn thing. Just get the hell away from here." The team publicized Toni Stone in interviews, on posters, and on the cover of the Clowns' program. And she got to play baseball, appearing in 50 games in 1953, and hitting .243.

In 1954, Pollack sold her contract to the Kansas City Monarchs, an all-star team that had won several pennants in the "Colored World Series," and for whom Jackie Robinson and Satchel Paige had both played. She played the 1954 season for the Monarchs, but she could read the handwriting on the wall. The Negro Leagues were coming to an end, so she retired at the end of the season. She was inducted into the Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1993. She is honored in two separate sections in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown; the "Women in Baseball" exhibit, and the Negro Leagues section.

Toni Stone's most memorable baseball moment came when she played against the legendary Satchel Paige in 1953. "He was so good," she remembered, "That he'd ask batters where they wanted it, just so they'd have a chance. He'd ask, 'You want it

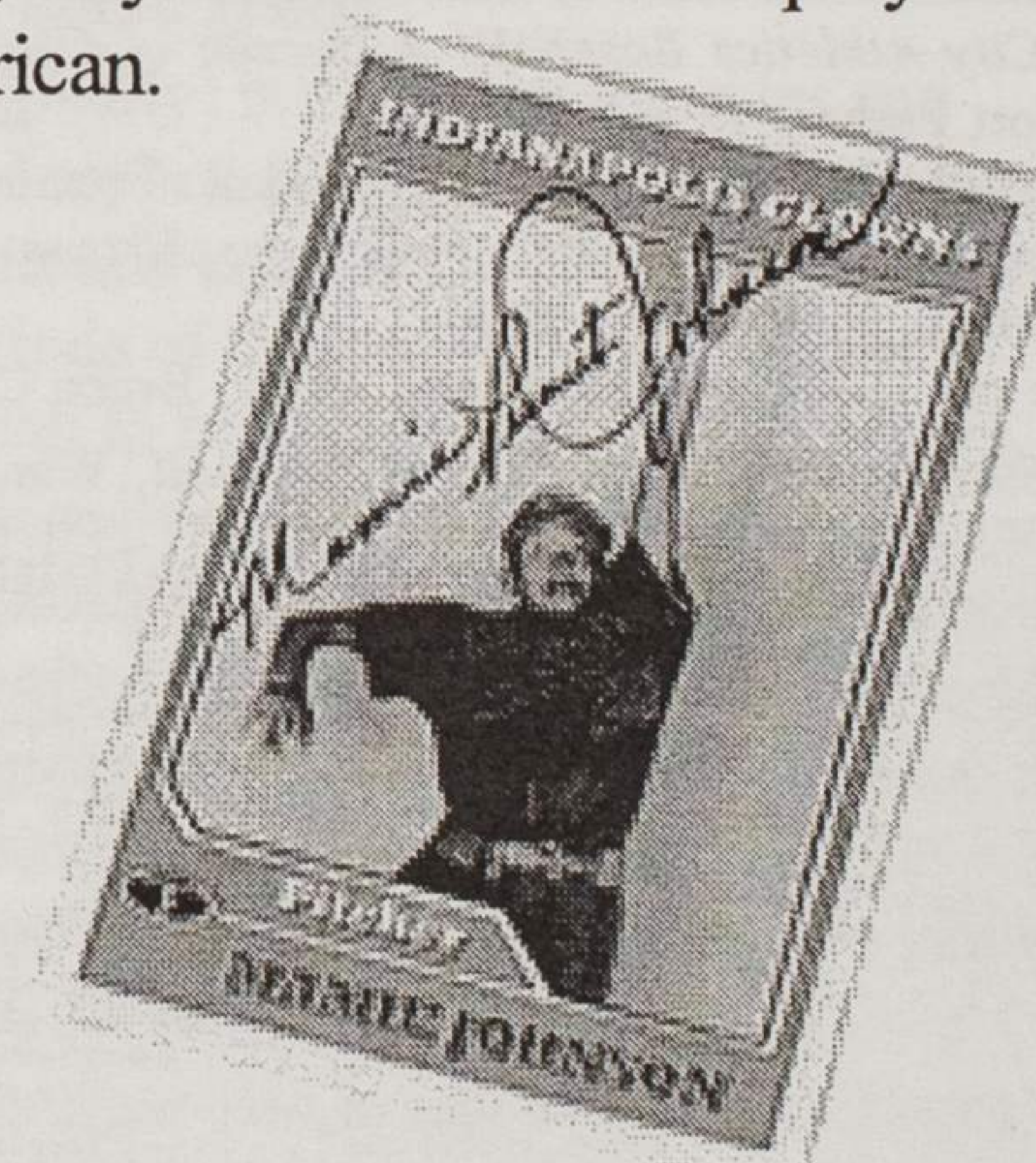
high? You want it low? You want it right in the middle? Just say.' People still couldn't get a hit against him. So I get up there and he says, 'Hey, T, how do you like it?' And I said, 'It doesn't matter, just don't hurt me.' When he wound up—he had these big old feet—all you could see was his shoe. I stood there shaking, but I got a hit. Right out over second base. Happiest moment in my life."



Toni Stone

All photographs courtesy of The Buck O'Neil Collection, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Kansas City.

Toni Stone, Connie Morgan, and Mamie "Peanuts" Johnson played on men's professional teams in the Negro Leagues; they weren't allowed to play in the AAGPBL because they are African American.



A utility player and pitcher, Mamie "Peanut" Johnson played but a single year for the Clowns, 1954. They called her "Peanut" because of her small size, but she threw as hard as many male pitchers. A groundbreaker in other ways as well, Johnson studied medicine and engineering at New York University before signing with the Clowns. James A. Riley, "The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues."
