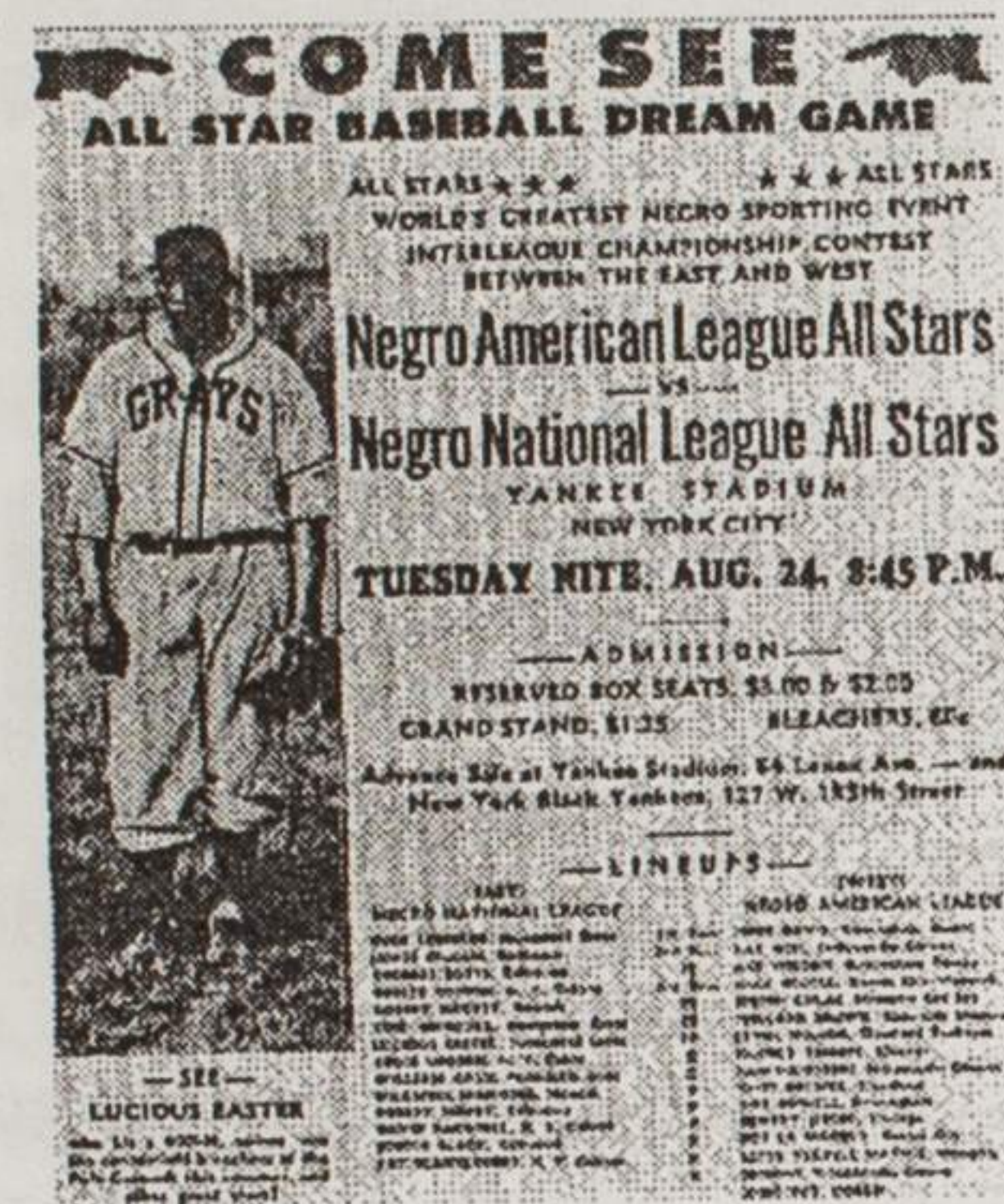


The Negro Leagues

From the 1880s to 1950 literally hundreds of all-black, professional and semi-professional baseball teams played throughout the United States. While at times black baseball at its top levels enjoyed the benefits of organized league structures, most teams played in loosely organized circuits or as independents. In the common parlance all are referred to as "Negro League" teams. Over 2,600 African-American and Hispanic men and women played in eight organized leagues on more than 200 teams from 1920 through 1955. (*Negro Leagues Baseball Museum website; Negro League Baseball website; Black Baseball website*). For more on the history of local baseball or the Negro leagues, we suggest the following sources.

Further Reading:

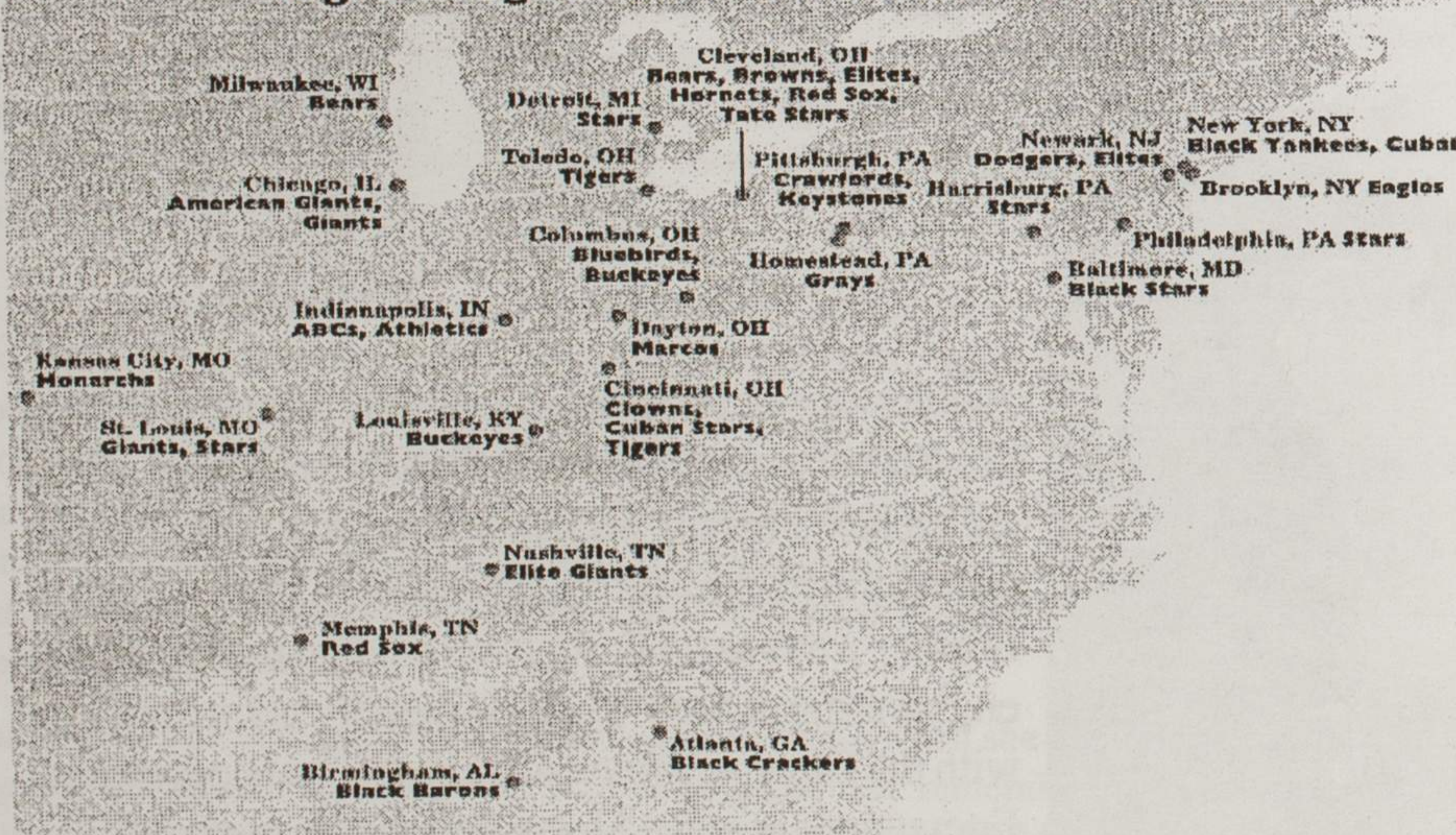
- Leagues Baseball Museum website, <http://www.nblm.com/s/team.htm>
- Negro League Baseball Players Association website, http://www.nlbpa.com/the_teams.html
- Negro League Baseball website, <http://www.negroleaguebaseball.com/history101.html>
- Black Baseball website, <http://www.blackbaseball.com/>
- <http://www.negro-league.columbus.oh.us/>
- The All-Time All Stars of Black Baseball*, James A. Riley, 1983
- Hill City Athletics Baseball: A Decade of Champions, 1950-59*, Scott Parker, 1996.
- The Negro Baseball Leagues*, David K. Fremon, 1994
- "Negro Leagues Baseball," *Footsteps: African American History*, March/April 2000.
- When the Game was Black and White*, Bruce Chadwick, 1992.
- The Story of the Negro League Baseball*, Wm.Brashler, 1994.



Above: The winners of the Negro American League played the winners of the Negro National League in a Negro World Series game.

From: Atlas of African American History.

Negro League Teams and Their Locations



From: Atlas of African American History, James Ciment, 2001.

A Brief History of the Game

In 1845, Alexander Joy Cartwright, Doc Adams and others were early members of a group of young professionals who made up the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club. The Knickerbockers began the process of formalizing the rules (e.g. bases set at 30 paces or 90 feet apart, establishing foul territory, etc.) in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Establishing clear foul territory was a major improvement as it allows spectators to get up close enough to the action to become interested in the game. By the mid to late-1850s, more than a dozen teams had formed in New York City and Brooklyn to play the game of base ball. In 1858, the National Association of Base-Ball Players was formed. By 1860, the number of teams playing skyrocketed as teams formed in other cities like Philadelphia and Washington.

The Knickerbockers modeled their club after the gentlemen's clubs that had been organized in cricket. The Knickerbockers seemingly had more team rules and regulations about gentlemanly behavior than the game itself. But the popularity of the game, and the prospect of charging admission (first done in 1858) lured some working-class clubs into the game like the powerful Brooklyn Atlantics whose main interest was to win.

After a brief lull during the Civil War, interest in the game of base ball was rekindled in the post-war years. As the popularity grew, still more professionalism crept into the game. Eventually, Harry Wright's Cincinnati Red Stockings fielded the first, openly all-professional team in 1869. In 1876, the National League was established, and the rest is history.

What is Vintage Base Ball?

Vintage Base Ball (yes, it was two words originally) is played by the rules and customs of any earlier period. Ballists wear old-style uniforms, either the early long trouser and shield shirt, or a later style lace shirt and knickers, and recreate the game based on rules and research of the various periods of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Some groups consider vintage base ball to be a new sport, but at its core, vintage base ball is a reflection of how baseball existed at an earlier time.

Most vintage base ball clubs in the VBBA play the game of base ball as it was played in the late 1850s, 1860s and 1880s. Many clubs in the Midwest have adopted the rules recorded in the first Beadle's Dime Base Ball Player, published in 1860, which recounted the third meeting of the National Association of Base Ball Players.

The mid-nineteenth century game was considerably different than today's game. Most ballists played with bare hands until the mid-1880s, but starting in the late 1860s a few catchers with raw hands needed to wear thin buckskin gloves to keep on playing. Until 1865, fair or foul balls caught on one bound were outs, but the best players always attempted to catch it "on the fly" which eventually made the rule unnecessary. More vintage base ball clubs play the late 1860s style "fly game." Balls are considered fair by where the ball first touches the ground. That is, a ball hit in front of home plate that then spins into foul territory is still a fair ball. Talented strikers take advantage of this rule and use the bat to swat at the ball, creating what is known as a "fair-foul" ball, which first lands fair and spins foul, forcing either the first or third baseman off the base. This technique was abused, forcing the fair ball rule to be changed for 1877. There are numerous other differences in all-amateur games prior to 1869, but modern spectators will still recognize our game as base ball.