



# Playing Through

# African American Baseball in Dunn County, Wisconsin

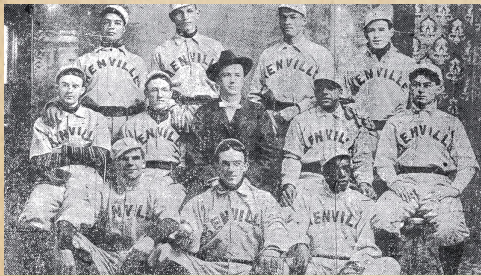


## Project Overview

This project looks at African American history in Dunn County, Wisconsin through the context of barnstorming baseball. Current research on African American baseball history generally consists of Jackie Robinson and the *reintegration* of professional baseball. While this span of African American baseball history is important, there is much more out there that needs to be studied. In my research, I concentrate on the years of the *Barnstorming Era* (1890s-1940s) which precedes Jackie Robinson. During these years, I look at the importance of African American barnstorming baseball teams on the communities they traveled to and played against. To accomplish this, I concentrated on Dunn County, Wisconsin and their rich history of barnstorming baseball.

## Barnstorming Baseball

Once African Americans were banned from playing professional baseball, they found other ways to play the game. In 1904, the Menomonie Blue Caps traveled to Renville, Minnesota to play the racially-mixed All Stars (photo below). The following year they hosted the All Stars. Later that year, the Blue Caps faced the racially-mixed Chippewa Falls Gotzians at home. In the nearly 50 years that followed, African Americans continued to compete barnstorming baseball games in the county



The 1904 Renville All Stars (above) played a series against the Menomonie Blue Caps in Minnesota. In 1905, the All Stars traveled to Menomonie to become the first racially mixed opponent of a Dunn County team.

## Barnstorming Teams in Dunn County

Dunn County teams hosted numerous barnstorming opponents. These barnstorming teams included men and women on their rosters, as well as Native Americans and Latinos. A partial list of teams includes:

- Chicago Spauldings [sic] – 1888
- Lady's Denver Club (IL) – 1892
- Green's Nebraska Indians – 1901
- Renville All Stars – 1905
- Chippewa Falls Gotzians – 1905
- University of Hawaii
- Minneapolis Keystones - 1908
- (Chinese team vs. Stout Institute) – 1913
- Illinois Colored Giants – 1921
- California Owls – 1930
- St. Paul Monarchs – 1931
- St. Paul Colored Gophers – 1931
- Piney Woods Giant Collegians – 1932
- Gilkerson's Colored Union Giants - 1933
- Van Dyke's Colored House of David – 1934
- Twin City Colored Giants – 1938



This photo of the Menomonie Blue Caps was taken c.1904. The identity of the African American gentleman at left is unknown. It is believed he was the owner or manager of a barnstorming baseball team that played against the Blue Caps. This is the only known image of a Dunn County baseball team including an African American.

## Importance of the Topic

From 1840 to 1960, Dunn County's highest African American population in a census year was 12. There were limited opportunities for Dunn County residents to interact with African Americans with so few living in the area. This makes these barnstorming teams even more important. Some questions that came from my research were why did so many black teams come to a location with so few African Americans? Was any racism shown toward the barnstorming teams?

## Newspaper Coverage

Newspaper coverage of black barnstorming teams was spotty at best. It was not until black newspapers emerged that black baseball received consistent coverage. When white-owned newspapers covered games, racial stereotypes often were very visible.



Racial stereotypes, such as seen in this game advertisement, were often times perpetuated throughout the coverage of black teams by white papers.

COLORADO GOEPHERS VS. AUSTIN WESTERNS-SUNDAY

Even the *Dunn County News* was not entirely free of discriminatory phrases in their coverage of black baseball teams (below). The author of this article praised the Gotzians team, but waited until the end of the baseball page for a racial comment about George Wilson.

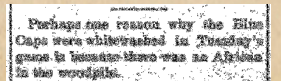
Chippewa played ball and good luck stayed with them. Though they made but four hits off Meade, it was timely work with the slab and registered tallies on the score sheet. Meade passed five to first and sent two to the bench on strike outs. Four errors were chalked against them.

The teams lined up as follows:

Menomonie.	Chippewa.
Bostotts	of
Gray	2b
Barnes	3b
Edeberg	ss
Neugebauer	lf
Landrum	8b
Schwelm	cf
LaPointe	rf
Meade	p
	Halley
	Barnson
	Porter
	Hille
	Wilson
	Clark
	Ristor
	Morris
	Seldon

Score by innings:  
 Chippewa— 4 2 0 0 0 1 0 0-7  
 Menomonie— 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0-0  
 Umpire—E. P. Trautman.

Wilson played left field for the Chippewa Falls team, as seen above. After commenting on a separate game between two different teams, Wilson's membership on the Chippewa team was mentioned.



Perhaps one reason why the Blue Caps were white-washed in Tuesday's game is because there was an African in the outfield.

## Notable Barnstorming Players

### Toni "Tomboy" Stone

Marcenia Lyle Alberga, better known as Toni Stone, was the first female to play in the Negro Leagues. In 1938 she was a member of the Twin City Colored Giants team that played in Dunn County. At the age of 17, Stone was just starting her baseball career. The *Dunn County News* article at left points out she was a substitute in the eighth inning. Notice that a young Andy Pafko was the centerfielder for the Connorsville team opposite Stone.

### GIANTS DEFEATED BY CONNORSVILLE

#### David W. Wilson Plucks Five for Ball for the Whites.

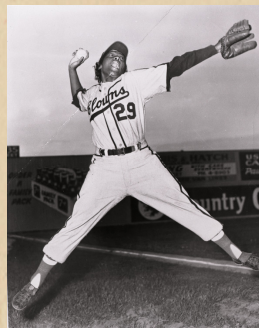
Connorsville, Wis., June 10.—The game between the Chicago Union Giants and the Connorsville Whites was played in the afternoon at the local ballpark. The Whites won by a score of 5 to 0.

In the eighth the Whites put on the winning run. The Whites won by a score of 5 to 0.

The Whites:

Player	AB	R	H	E
Wilson	4	1	5	0
Gray	4	0	0	0
Barnes	4	0	0	0
Edeberg	4	0	0	0
Neugebauer	4	0	0	0
Landrum	4	0	0	0
Schwelm	4	0	0	0
LaPointe	4	0	0	0
Meade	4	0	0	0
Pafko	4	0	0	0

Stone went on to play for the Indianapolis Clowns the year after Hank Aaron left. She was traded a year later to the Kansas City Monarchs before



retiring. Stone faced a lot of discrimination playing a male sport. Much of it came from males also being discriminated against due to the color of their skin.

### Alex Irwin

In 1904 Alexander Charles Irwin began playing baseball in Chicago. By 1908, Irwin was a member of the Minneapolis Keystones team that played in Dunn County. A year later in 1909, Irwin was a member of the Menomonie White Sox and the Menomonie Skidoos. By playing for these two teams, Irwin became the first and only known African American on a Dunn County team during the Barnstorming Era.



As a member of the 1905 Chicago Union Giants (above, far left), Irwin started to make a name for himself on the field. Irwin also made a name for himself in the Twin Cities after his baseball career (below).

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