

A different facet of baseball's integration

By William C. Kashatus

The Phillies joined the rest of Major League Baseball last weekend in donning Jackie Robinson's retired uniform number, 42. It was a fitting tribute to the man who broke the game's color barrier 65 years before.

But Robinson was not the only pioneer of baseball's integration. Roy Campanella, a native Philadelphian and teammate of Robinson's on the Brooklyn Dodgers, also gained acceptance among white players in the same era. Unlike Robinson, however, "Campy" relied mainly on his exceptional ability as a power-hitting catcher, refusing to directly challenge the discrimination he faced or the systems that permitted it. His example also played an important role in integrating baseball.

Robinson and Campanella had little in common aside from race and baseball. They differed dramatically in their backgrounds, personalities, and approach to civil rights.

Robinson, the son of a Southern sharecropper who deserted the family, was raised by his God-fearing mother in Pasadena, Calif. He channeled his frustration with segregation into sports, becoming an outstanding athlete at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he starred in football, basketball, baseball, and track. While serving as a second lieutenant during World War II, he was threatened with a court-martial for refusing to sit in the back of an Army bus.

Branch Rickey, the president of the Dodgers, recognized Robinson's outstanding ability as well as his competitive fire, courage, and determination. Those strengths, along with his college and military experiences, persuaded Rickey to select him over more established Negro League stars for his experiment in integration.

In 1947, after Robinson broke the color barrier, oppos-

ing players spiked him on the base paths and showered him with racial obscenities. Off the field, he got a stream of death threats. After Rickey lifted a restriction on any retaliation by Robinson, he became increasingly combative, antagonizing opponents and umpires while speaking out for civil rights. In the process, he became baseball's top drawing card as well as its most controversial star.

Campanella was different. The son of a black mother and an Italian father, he enjoyed a stable home life in the integrated community of Nicetown. He established himself as a talent early on, quitting high school to join the Negro Leagues' Baltimore Elite Giants. During World War II, exempt from military duty as a married father of two, he worked on an assembly line making steel plates for tanks and continued to play baseball.

After the war, Rickey seriously considered Campanella as a candidate to break the color line because of his exceptional playing ability, leadership, and enthusiasm for the game. Though he ultimately opted for Robinson, he signed Campanella a year later and promoted him to the majors for good in 1948. Like Robinson, Campy quickly became a mainstay of Brooklyn's pennant-winning teams of the period.

While Robinson was openly defiant, Campanella was passively resistant, believing integration could be achieved through quiet reliance on professional ability. Predictably, the teammates became estranged, though they suppressed their differences on the field. The tragedy of their rivalry was that they shared the same goal, and the irony was that both of them did much to achieve it.

William C. Kashatus is the author of the forthcoming "Fire and Ice: Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and the Integration of Baseball."