



MILES & THE MONARCHS

By Carolyn Mueller | Illustrated by Philip Goudeau

CHAPTER TWO

Miles' dad tore open a sack of sunflower seeds. He reached in and cracked the salty seed with his teeth, spitting the husk neatly out the window. Miles helped himself to the snack, enjoying the breeze on his face as he and his dad made their way toward Philadelphia to see the Monarchs play in the Negro League World Series.

"How did the Negro League get its start?" his dad repeated Miles' question. "Well, son, that was all thanks to a man named Rube Foster."

"Rube Foster?" Miles said. "I think I've heard of him."

"I know you love baseball," Miles' dad said. "So, I'm sure you've heard of him! Rube was both a manager and a pitcher. He started pitching back in the late 1800s."

"Whoa," Miles said. "That was a long time ago."

Miles' dad laughed.

"Well, not so long ago. You see, black baseball players have been a part of the sport for a long time. Way back in the day—as you say, a long time ago," Miles' dad chuckled. "There was no Negro League, but black athletes still played the game. They formed teams and traveled around the country barnstorming."

"Barnstorming?" Miles asked, "What's barnstorming?" Just then they happened to be passing a big, cherry red barn. He imagined a group of baseball players storming toward it.

"Barnstorming means the teams would travel together from town to town organizing games and attracting new and different audiences. Usually rural, country towns. That's why it was called barnstorming."

Miles knew that the Nationals played in Griffith Stadium.

"So, they didn't really have a home stadium?"

"Nope," Miles' dad answered. "They played all over the place. Rube Foster was a part of the barnstorming. He was a talented pitcher, but more than that he was also an excellent manager and a really smart guy. In 1920..."

"That long ago!" Miles interrupted, teasing his father.

"Not that long ago, in fact when I was only a little older than you, Rube Foster decided to organize black baseball, so he created the first Negro National League."

"He just started it?"

"Well, he modeled the system after white Major League Baseball, which was already going on. There were a lot of talented black players and the Negro National League offered the players competitive salaries, so it just took off.

Plus, it was entertaining! You'll see when we get there. Negro League baseball is something a little different—daring, exciting, controlled but yet played at an almost faster pace than what you've seen in the Major Leagues. You'll love it."

Miles' dad glanced down at the gas gauge.

"We're gonna' need to fill up the tank," he told his son. Miles saw a gas station! It was just up the road.

"There, Dad!" he shouted.

The pair saw a lone white man standing near the pumps.

"Not that gas station," his dad said. "We can make it a little further," he glanced down at his map, which had been marked on with pencil notes and lines. "We just need to find the right place."

Newspaper Connection: Miles' dad talks about "barnstorming." Find a picture of a place in your local paper that isn't a baseball field, and explain how you could play baseball there.

