



# MILES & THE MONARCHS

By Carolyn Mueller | Illustrated by Philip Goudeau

## CHAPTER THREE

Miles and his dad bumped down the dirt road in their old, blue truck. They were running low on gas, but his dad had said that they needed to stop at the right place. Miles wasn't quite sure what that might mean.

"Dad?" Miles asked. "Did you ever see Rube Foster play?"

Miles' dad shook his head, glancing at the gas gauge and then glancing at the map.

"No, son, sadly I never did get to see Rube Foster play. But I have been lucky enough to see a lot of the greats."

"Like who?"

"I've seen the best of the best!" his dad answered. "Like Josh Gibson."

"Oh!" Miles declared. "I've heard of him! I heard he could hit the ball a whole mile out of the park."

"I believe it!" Miles' dad said. "Josh Gibson is one of the greatest players to ever play the game. He plays catcher, but his hitting is what's made him famous. In fact, there's a pretty great story about how Gibson got his start."

Miles watched the cornfields fly past on the sides of the road and turned toward his dad as he began to speak.

"Gibson was just a spectator in the crowd during a game for the Homestead Grays. It was a night game, which was a new thing at the time, and the Grays' catcher, Buck Ewing, missed a pitch because of the low light. He was injured. Gibson had already made a bit of a name for himself as a hitter in semipro games, so the Grays' manager just pulled him out of the crowd and subbed him in for Ewing! And that's how Gibson got started!"

"Wow," Miles muttered, imagining what it would be like if the Monarchs decided to pull him out of the crowd later that day and he got to hit the home run that won the World Series.

"And the rest is history," his dad said. "Legend has it, Gibson once hit a ball 580 feet."

"I can believe that!" Miles said, imagining such a feat. "How many homeruns has he hit?"

"Well, that's a bit harder to know," Miles' dad answered. "The Negro Leagues may be popular, but players often switch teams and move around a lot of the time. So, statistics have been hard to keep. No one really knows exactly how many home runs Josh Gibson has.

But it's got to be a formidable number. I'd like to say close to 800!"

Up ahead, Miles saw a run-down gas station. A black man stood near the pumps. He gave their blue truck a small, friendly wave.

"Ah, this is it," his dad said, glancing down once more at his well-worn map. "This is the place."

Their blue truck pulled into the station. Miles' dad hopped out and shook the man's hand just before the attendant began to pump their truck full of gas.

Miles sat quietly in the cab, snacking on sunflower seeds. A few moments later, his dad slid back into the driver's seat and pulled onto the country road. They were on their way.

**Newspaper Connection: Miles' dad tells him about some of the great Negro League players. Use your local newspaper to make a list of great athletes in your community, from any or all levels.**

