



MILES & THE MONARCHS

By Carolyn Mueller | Illustrated by Philip Goudeau

CHAPTER SIX

“Cool Papa Bell,” Miles said. “That’s got to be the best name ever.”

Miles’ dad laughed.

“You’re right about that son! But ‘Cool Papa’ is just his nickname. His actual name is James Thomas Bell.”

“Well,” Miles said. “Why does everyone call him Cool Papa?”

The pair were getting close to Philadelphia. The long stretches of cornfield were giving way to a more urban landscape as their truck bounced along, making its way to the Kansas City Monarch’s game.

“They say it’s a nickname dating back to his early days as a pitcher. He pitched left-handed and he could throw lots of different pitches—curves, knucklers, screwballs. Through it all he was always very calm on the mound, even in stressful situations. That’s why they call him ‘Cool Papa,’” Miles’ dad said.

“Cool Papa Bell,” Miles repeated, enjoying the crisp sound of the name on his tongue. “Does he still pitch?”

“No, son, he plays centerfield now. But Cool Papa Bell is probably the fastest player in the game—black or white,” Miles’ dad told him. “He can steal bases better than anyone else out there.”

“Is he a great hitter like Josh Gibson?”

“Cool Papa is a good hitter, but that’s not what he’s known for,” his dad answered. “But that doesn’t matter because he can take an extra base more often than any of the other players. In fact,” he laughed. “Satchel Paige once said that Cool Papa Bell is so fast, he can ‘flip the light switch and be in bed before the room gets dark.’”

“Now that is fast!” Miles said, mentally making a note to try and do that when he got home.

“Cool Papa Bell played for the St. Louis Stars when I was a boy, but right now, he plays for the Chicago American Giants.”

“He sounds like an incredible player, Dad,” Miles said. “I hope I get to see him play one day.”

“He is an incredible player,” Miles’ dad answered. “But even more than that he’s known as a pretty great guy off the field too. I’ve heard that Cool Papa Bell has a reputation for being honest, kind, and a real gentleman. It’s pretty neat to be great at baseball, Miles,” his dad said. “But remember, those things are important too.”

Miles nodded.

PHILADELPHIA a sign read, up ahead.

“We’re here!” Miles shouted excitedly, bouncing in his seat.

After listening to his dad tell him all about the stars of the Negro League, he could hardly stand his excited anticipation of being able to really see them play, and not just in any game but in the World Series.

Miles’ dad parked their truck on the street and the pair hopped out, Miles grabbing his baseball glove and tucking it underneath his arm. Miles’ dad carefully folded his map and slid it into the pocket of his dress coat. The two walked up the street, Miles practically skipping with excitement, toward a large baseball stadium.

A big sign outside read SHIBE PARK.

Newspaper Connection: Honest and kind are character words. What character words do you find in your local newspaper?

