

# This Day in History... December 13, 1923

## Birth of Larry Doby

Lawrence Eugene Doby was born on December 13, 1923, in Camden, South Carolina. Doby was the second black player in Major League Baseball, the first in the American League, and the first to make it directly to the majors.

Doby spent most of his childhood in South Carolina, raised by his grandmother and aunt. He started playing baseball for the Boylan-Haven-Mather Academy and received lessons from Richard Dubose, who had managed his father's team years earlier. Doby and his friends loved the game, and usually played with old broom handles for bats and tin cans for bases.



*Imperforate Doby stamp*

Doby moved to Paterson, New Jersey, to live with his mother when he was 14. In high school, he was a sports star – playing baseball, basketball, football, and track. He played with a black semi-pro team during the summer and briefly was an unpaid substitute player for a professional basketball team. In 1942, he joined the Newark Eagles in the Negro National League, where he had a .391 batting average.

Doby joined the Navy in 1943 and served in the Pacific Theater during World War II. After he was discharged in 1946, Doby returned to the Newark Eagles, who won that season's World Series. Many in the league believed that Doby might be the first to break the color barrier into Major League Baseball (MLB). Jackie Robinson beat him by just three months, making his major league debut on April 15, 1947. Robinson had been signed to the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers's farm team, in 1945, and spent the 1946 season with that minor league team. Doby, on the other hand, was scouted directly from the Negro league to the Cleveland Indians MLB team, without first playing in the minor league. Doby had his MLB debut on July 5, 1947, making him the first black player in the American League (Robinson played in the National League).

Before the game, Doby was introduced to his team. Only a few shook his hand, and two turned their backs on him. He entered the game as a pinch-hitter in the seventh inning and struck out. After the game, he had to stay at a separate hotel from the rest of the players, which would become the routine throughout his career. Doby fared better the following day, getting his first major league hit and Run Batted In (RBI). That was the only game Doby started that season. He and Jackie Robinson spoke on the phone often, encouraging each other to stay positive and not cause trouble, reasoning that it would hurt other black players.



*Doby faced the same obstacles as Robinson, but "the media didn't want to tell the same story twice" he said.*

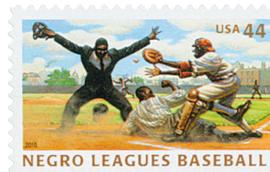
In the off-season, Doby became the first black player to join the American Basketball League, playing for the Peterson Crescents. He impressed his teammates during spring training, and had a good 1948 season, hitting .301 with 14 home runs and 66 RBIs. At the end of the season, Doby hit the first home run by a black player in the World Series and led the team with a .318 batting average, winning the team's first championship since 1920. After the game, a photo was snapped of Doby and pitcher Steve Gromek hugging cheek-to-cheek in sheer joy, with ear-to-ear grins. The picture appeared in major newspapers across the country and has been called "a signature moment in the integration of Major League Baseball."

Doby played in his first All-Star Game in 1949. By 1950, he was considered the best centerfielder in baseball and was the first black player selected as the Cleveland Baseball Man of the Year by local sports writers. Doby was plagued by injuries over the next few years, leading his numbers to slump, but he found training that helped significantly. He appeared in every All-Star Game through 1955, and hit the first home run by a black player in the All-Star Game in 1954.

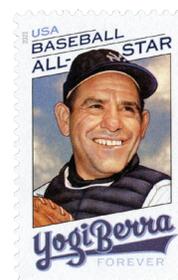
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*From the 2012 Major League Baseball All-Stars issue*



*Doby played in the Negro League from 1942-44 and 1946-47.*



*Doby and Berra were neighbors in their later years, and the Yogi Berra Museum has a Larry Doby Wing. Berra was also one of the first opposing players to talk to Doby.*

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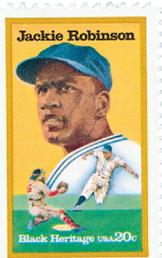
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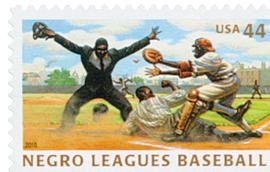
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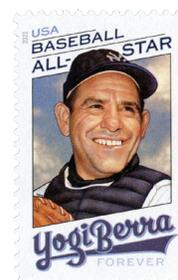
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