

“Colored Championship” Series

Over the course of the history of black baseball in the United States, there has always been the need for there to be a “number one” team or to have a “champion” of colored baseball. Championship series in colored baseball have been played as long as there have been two teams to vie for the distinction and title of being the “Champion of Colored Baseball.”

It is important not to confuse a “Colored Championship” with a Negro League World Series Champion. Many if not most “Colored Championship” series were played between two self appointed teams, while the Negro League World Series was played against the champions from two different formalized leagues. From 1924 to 1927 the Negro League World Series was a post season championship series that was played between the Negro National League champions and the Eastern Colored League champions. Then in latter years, there was also a Negro League World Series played from 1942 to 1948 when the champions of the Negro American League (NAL) met the champions of the Negro National League (NNL).

The following summaries represent some (definitely not all) of the “Colored Championship” series that have been played over the years.

“Colored Championship” Series (1867-1899) (Summaries)

1867 Brooklyn Uniques vs Philadelphia Excelsiors

The first recognized “Colored Championship” game occurred in October of 1867 when the Brooklyn Uniques played the Philadelphia Excelsiors. The game was played at the Satellite Grounds in Brooklyn, New York. The one game championship contest was called in the seventh inning because of darkness. Philadelphia won the game by a score of 42-35 and gained the distinction of being the first “Colored Champion” of black baseball in the United States. It is important to note that there were at least three different scores (42-35, 42-37 and 37-24) reported for the game, but all three accounts have the Philadelphia team as the winner.

“Colored Champions” – Philadelphia Excelsiors

1869 Chicago Uniques vs Philadelphia Pythians

In 1869 Octavius Catto who ran the Philadelphia Pythians baseball club along with Jacob C. White, Jr. promoted a baseball game he dubbed the “World Colored Championship” between his club and the Chicago Uniques. The Philadelphia Pythians won the game by a score of 9-1. The victory also allowed the Philadelphia Pythians to finish their season with an undefeated record of 11-0.

“World Colored Champions” – Philadelphia Pythians

1887 Cuban Giants of Trenton vs Gorhams of New York (Philadelphia)

In 1887 a game was played in Newburgh, New York to determine who would be called the “Champions of Colored Baseball.” The two teams that met were the Cuban Giants from Trenton (NJ) and the Gorhams of New York from Philadelphia (PA). An interesting side note to the game was that the Gorhams of New York had originally been called the Cuban Giants before their name change. The Cuban Giants were managed by S.K. Govern and the Gorhams were managed by Benjamin Butler. The starting batteries for the two teams were:

Gorhams of New York

John Nelson	Pitcher
Bob Jackson	Catcher

Cuban Giants of Trenton

George Parego	Pitcher
Clarence Williams	Catcher

With the game tied 3-3 going into the final inning, Oscar Johnson (outfielder for the Gorhams) scored the winning run on an infield hit. His collision at home plate with Clarence Williams (Cuban Giants) jarred the ball loose from the catcher’s mitt and gave the Gorhams a 4-3 victory.

“Colored Champions” – Gorhams of New York

1888 Tournament – Cuban Giants, Pittsburgh Keystones, New York Gorhams and Norfolk Red Stockings

J.M. Bright (part owner of the Cuban Giants) proposed a tournament to be held to determine the 1888 “Colored Championship” and donated a silver baseball as the grand prize to go to the winning team. Four teams were selected to play for the title. They were Cuban Giants, Pittsburgh Keystones, New York Gorhams and Norfolk Red Stockings. The surprise team of the tournament was the Pittsburgh Keystones who were the only team who were not considered professional. Pittsburgh was managed by Walter S. Brown. On the field the Keystones were led by Weldy Walker (brother of Moses “Fleetwood” Walker) and Sol White (member of National Baseball Hall of Fame). Over the course of the tournament, the only two games that the Keystones lost were to the Cuban Giants who would win the tournament. The final standings for the tournament were:

Tournament Standings (1888)

Cuban Giants	1 st Place
Pittsburgh Keystones	2 nd Place
New York Gorhams	3 rd Place
Norfolk Red Stockings	4 th Place

“Colored Champions” – Cuban Giants

1889 Cuban Giants (Trenton) vs New York Gorhams (Philadelphia)

Over the two previous baseball seasons the Cuban Giants and New York Gorhams had dominated the competition. The Gorhams had won the title in 1887 and the Cuban Giants won the title in 1888. The two teams met again in 1889 to decide the “Championship of Colored Baseball.” The teams played a two game series for the championship. The starting pitchers for the two games were:

New York Gorhams	Cuban Giants
Frank Miller	William Malone
John Nelson	William Whyte

To bolster their line-up for the 1889 season, the New York Gorhams signed Sol White from the Pittsburgh Keystones. The Cuban Giants fielded a strong squad that included Frank Grant and George Stovey. The starting lineups for both teams were as follows:

New York Gorhams		Cuban Giants	
Benjamin Butler	Mgr	S.K. Govern	Mgr
Chamberlain	1B	George Williams	1B
Sol White	2B	Frank Grant	2B
Ross Garrison	SS	Abe Harrison	SS
Andrew Jackson	3B	Ben Holmes	3B
Bill Jackson	C	Clarence Williams	C
Frank Bell	OF	Ben Boyd	OF
Oscar Jackson	OF	Harry Johnson	OF
John Nelson	OF	John Nelson	OF
Frank Miller	P	William Malone	P
John Nelson	P	William T. Whyte	P
Fred Collins	P	George Stovey	P
		William Selden	P

The Gorhams won both games of the series by identical score of 4-3 to claim the championship.

“Colored Champions” - New York Gorhams

1896 Page Fence Giants vs Cuban X-Giants

The Page Fence Giants were formed by John “Bud” Fowler in 1895. Fowler quickly built a powerful team around Grant “Homerun” Johnson. In 1896 the Page Fence Giants challenged the Cuban X-Giants for the “Colored Championship.” Charlie Grant was added to the Page Fence Giants prior to the 1896 season and along with Grant “Homerun” Johnson, they formed the best double play combination in black baseball. The two teams played a fifteen (15) game series for the championship. The starting line-ups for both teams were as follows:

Page Fence Giants		Cuban X-Giants	
A.S. Parsons	Mgr	S.K. Govern	Mgr
George Taylor	1B	Ed Wilson	1B
Charlie Grant	2B	Sol White	2B

Homerun Johnson	SS	John Nelson	SS
William Binga	3B	Andrew Jackson	3B
Pete Burns	C	Bob Jackson	C
Chappie Johnson	OF	Oscar Jackson	OF
Vasco Graham	OF	Milton Dabney	OF
Walker	OF	Frank Miller	OF
Bill Holland	P	George Stovey	P
Fred Van Dyke	P	William Selden	P
George Wilson	P	Frank Hinson	P

The Page Fence Giants won the series by winning ten games and only losing five.

“Colored Champions” - Page Fence Giants

1897 Genuine Cuban Giants vs Cuban X-Giants

The Genuine Cuban Giants played the Cuban X-Giants in a three game series on successive Sundays for the “Colored Championship of the East.” This championship series was played on the Weehawken Grounds in Weehawken, New Jersey. The Cuban X-Giants won the series two game to one for the Genuine Cuban Giants.

“Colored Championship of the East” - Cuban X-Giants

1899 Cuban X-Giants vs Chicago Unions

The Cuban X-Giants (Champions of the East) met the Unions of Chicago (Champions of the West) for the 1899 “Colored World Championship.” Negro League Hall of Fame player and baseball historian Sol White considers this series as the first “real” championship series between teams from the East and West. The two teams played fourteen games in and around Chicago for the championship title.

The starting line-ups for the two teams were as follows:

Cuban X-Giants		Chicago Unions	
Ed Wilson	1B	Bill Wakefield	1B
Frank Grant	2B	George Hopkins	2B
Sol White	SS	William Monroe	SS
Andrew Jackson	3B	Harry Hyde	3B
Robert Jordan	C	Robert Fouts	C
William Selden	OF	Robert Jackson	C
William Jackson	OF	Bill Holland	OF
Charles Howard	OF	Mike Moore	OF
John Nelson	P	Willis Jones	OF
William Selden	P	Bill Holland	P
Bill Williams	P	William Horn	P
		Bert Jones	P

The Cuban Giants won nine of the fourteen games and claimed the championship

“Colored World Champions” - Cuban X-Giants

1899 Columbia Giants (Chicago) vs Chicago Unions

While the Cuban X-Giants and Chicago Unions were playing their championship series, the Columbia Giants of Chicago issued challenges to both the winners and losers of the series. The Columbia Giants had a very strong team in 1899. The primary reason is that the 1899 Columbia Giants team fielded virtually the same line-up as the Page Fence Giants team that had broke up after the 1898 season. Both the Chicago Unions and Cuban X-Giants accepted the Columbia Giants challenge.

The first team to play the Columbia Giants was the Chicago Unions. The two teams met in a five game series to determine the “Championship of Chicago.” The line-ups for both teams were as follows:

Columbia Giants		Chicago Unions	
Al Garrett	Mgr	William S. Peters	Mgr
George “Chappie” Johnson	1B	Mike Moore	1B
Charlie Grant	2B	George Hopkins	2B
Grant “Homerun” Johnson	SS	Bill Monroe	SS
William “Bill” Binga	3B	Harry Hyde	3B
Pete Burns	C	Bob Jackson	C
John “Pat” Patterson	OF	Willis Jones	OF
Sherman Barton	OF	Bill Holland	OF
Hill	OF	Lou Reynolds	OF
George Wilson	P	Bill Holland	P
Joe Miller	P	Bert Jones	P
Harry Buckner	P	Bill Horn	P

The Columbia Giants won the first two games of the series by scores of 4-2 and 6-0. George Wilson won game one and Joe Miller picked up the win in the second game for the Columbia Giants. Besides the two hit shut out pitching of Joe Miller, game two was highlighted by homeruns by Chappie Johnson and Homerun Johnson. The Columbia Giants then went on to sweep the next three games to be crowned “Colored Champions of Chicago.” The Unions could not even manage one victory in the series.

“Colored Champions of Chicago” – Columbia Giants

1899 Columbia Giants vs Cuban X-Giants

With their humiliating defeat of the Chicago Unions, the Columbia Giants were now ready to take on the “World Champion” Cuban X-Giants. The Cuban X-Giants traveled back out West in September of that year to play the series. The eleven game series was played in Chicago (IL) and several towns in Michigan. The Cuban X-Giants won the series by winning seven of the eleven games played.

“Colored World Champions” - Cuban X-Giants