

MLB records now reflect Gibson's excellence



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Babe Ruth has long been considered the greatest player in baseball history, with arguments made for Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ty Cobb, Stan Musial, Barry Bonds and even Shohei Ohtani.

Well, there's now a new player entering the debate: Hall of Fame catcher Josh Gibson.

Gibson, and all the former Negro League players, will have their statistics officially incorporated into Major League Baseball's historical records, according to a person familiar with the announcement. The person spoke to USA TODAY Sports on the condition of anonymity since the official announcement is scheduled for Wednesday.

It's been 3½ years since MLB officially elevated Negro Leagues' statistics to "Major League" status in December, 2020.

Gibson, who spent his entire career in the Negro Leagues from 1930, 1933-40 and 1942-46, will now be considered the greatest catcher of all-time, and arguably the best player of all-time, according to the official historical records after an independent committee reviewed them.

Gibson is MLB's new all-time career leader in batting average (.372, moving ahead of Ty Cobb), slugging percentage (.718, moving ahead of Ruth), OPS (1.177, ahead of Ruth), and holds the all-time single season records in each of those categories.

"When you hear Josh Gibson's name now, it's not just that he was the greatest player in the Negro Leagues," Sean Gibson, Gibson's great grandson, told USA TODAY Sports, "but one of the greatest of all time. These aren't just Negro League stats. They're major-league baseball stats.

"This means so much for not only the Josh Gibson family, but representing the 2,300 men in the Negro Leagues who didn't get the opportunity to play [in the Major Leagues]."

Major League Baseball wasn't integrated until 1947 when Jackie Robinson



A statue of Josh Gibson is seen in the outfield concourse before a 2012 game between the Nationals and Phillies at Nationals Park. KEVIN JAIRAJ/USA TODAY SPORTS FILE

broke the color barrier with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

But now, for the first time, the Negro League stats from 1920-1948 are incorporated into the official Major League Baseball stats.

Gibson's .446 batting average for the 1943 Homestead Grays is now the best in MLB history, eclipsing Hall of Famer Hugh Duffy (.440) in 1894, who dropped to third. Fellow Negro Leagues star Charlie "Chino" Smith is now second with his .451 batting average in 1929 for the New York Lincoln Giants.

Gibson's .974 slugging percentage in 1937 shatters Bonds' .863 mark in 2001. Bonds dropped from first to fifth with Mule Suttles (.877), Gibson (.871, 1943) and Smith (.870, 1929) ahead of him.

Gibson's OPS of 1.474 in 1937 and 1.435 in 1943 now rank as the top two single season marks ahead of Bonds' 1.421 in 2004.

Gibson also moves into third place in the all-time single season on-base percentage category with .564 in 1943, behind Bonds' .609 in 2004.

While Gibson's Hall of Fame plaque reads that he hit nearly 800 home runs,

his actual total is 238, still the highest in Negro Leagues history. That's because statisticians counted exhibitions and barnstorming tours to his total.

"You hear about all of the home runs," Sean Gibson said, "but when the stats came in, he's not in the home run conversation, but all of the other conversations about what a great all-around player he is. The numbers don't lie."

Now that these available new statistics validate Gibson's greatness, Sean Gibson is hoping that the Baseball Writers Association names the league's Most Valuable Player Awards in Gibson's honor.

The MVP award used to be named after former MLB commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, but his name was stripped off the plaque in 2020 after former MVP winners Barry Larkin, Terry Pendleton and Mike Schmidt voiced their discomfort. Landis was MLB's first commissioner from 1920 to 1944 and baseball was not integrated until three years after his death.

"How ironic would it be for Josh Gibson to replace the man who denied more than 2,300 men the opportunity to play

baseball in the major leagues," Sean Gibson said. "I'm hoping with these stats that we can change it to the Josh Gibson MVP award. These stats make a great case for it to be named in his honor."

The integrated statistics also enhance the numbers produced by several Hall of Famers who played in the Negro Leagues like Mays, Jackie Robinson, Larry Doby, Satchel Paige, Monte Irvin, Roy Campanella, Willard Brown and Minnie Minoso.

Paige now has the third-best single season ERA at 1.01 in 1944 for the Kansas City Monarchs, with his career victory total jumping from 28 to 124.

Mays now has 3,293 career hits from playing in 1948 with the Birmingham Black Barons, which could increase once his numbers are verified from his time playing in the Negro Leagues in 1949 and 1950.

Robinson now has 49 more hits after playing for the Kansas City Monarchs in 1945, giving him a total of 1,567 hits.

Minoso's 150 hits with the New York Cubans puts him over the 2,000-hit threshold with a total of 2,113.

Others who jumped into the top 10 of MLB's career leaderboards:

- **Batting average:** Oscar Charleston (.363), Jud Wilson (.350), Turkey Stearns (.348) and Buck Leonard (.345).

- **Slugging percentage:** Mule Suttles (.621), Stearnes (.616), and Charleston (.614).

- **On-base percentage:** Leonard (.452), Charleston (.449) and Wilson (.434).

- **OPS:** Charleston (1.063), Leonard (1.042), Stearnes (1.033) and Suttles (1.031).

- **Earned run average:** Dave Brown (2.24 ERA), who ranks eighth.

"This is a great day for all of the Negro League players," Gibson said. "We're so excited by this. Hopefully, one day, we can have a national Negro Leagues Day where every MLB player will wear a Negro Leagues uniform."

Gibson has requested the date to be May 2, commemorating the first Negro Leagues games in 1920.

"It's not to take anything away from Jackie Robinson Day," Gibson said, "but it would be nice to celebrate all Negro League players and not just one person."