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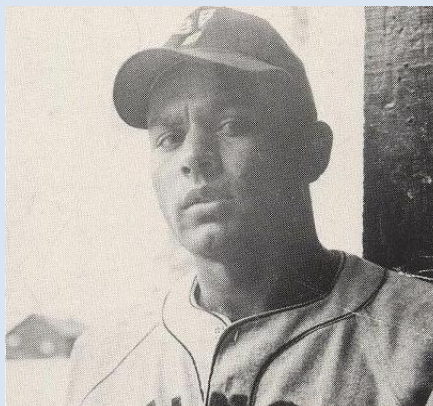
Jim Zapp



After this big, hard-hitting outfielder slugged 11 homers with the Negro Southern League's Atlanta Black Crackers in 1947, he attracted the attention of the Birmingham Black Barons and won an outfield position with the team the following spring. His bat helped Birmingham nail down the Negro American League title when, in the fifth game of the league championship series against the Kansas City Monarchs, he homered in the bottom of the ninth inning to tie the ball game, opening the door for another Black Baron tally in the last frame to win a 4-3 thriller and give Birmingham a 1-game edge in the playoffs.

During the regular season, Black Barons' manager Piper Davis had given Zapp a rest and inserted a teenage rookie named Willie Mays in his left-field spot for the second game of a doubleheader. Later in the season, when center fielder Norman Robinson broke his leg, Mays stepped into the breach and used the opportunity to demonstrate his defensive skills on an everyday basis. Although Mays had trouble hitting a curve and was not a significant offensive factor, his fielding earned him the starting position in center field. When Robinson eventually returned to the lineup, he was inserted into left field to utilize his speed and glove, and Zapp was displaced from the starting lineup for a short time. Fortunately, he returned in time to deliver the big blow in the playoffs. After securing the pennant, the Black Barons lost the World Series to the Negro National League champion Homestead Grays.

In 1954 Jim played with the Elite Giants and the Black Barons during the last month of the season after returning from organized ball. By then, however, the Negro American League was no longer a major league operation.



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