

Jackie Robinson's Biopic '42' Knocks It Out of the Park

Baseball movies are a special breed. Either a film has "it," or it doesn't.

Example: *Field of Dreams*, *Eight Men Out*, *The Natural*, *The Rookie*, *Major League*, *61 and Bull Durham* all have it. *Fever Pitch*, *Little Big League*, *Mr. Baseball*, *The Scout*, *Angels in the Outfield* and *Rookie of the Year*, simply do not.

42, a new film by Warner Brothers about the early years of Jackie Robinson's baseball career, has "it."

The life and saga of Jackie Robinson—the first black man to play in the Major Leagues—is compelling enough. Anyone who is a fan of the game is well aware of the racial and human injustices he had to endure in the Brooklyn Dodgers' minor league system and his first couple of years in the majors.

That includes the time during spring training when he literally was run out of Sanford, Fla., due to bigotry.

But, much more than the *Jackie Robinson Story* in 1950, *42* goes beyond the baseball field to reveal the extraordinary character and integrity Robinson possessed as a man. Not only did he break the color barrier in baseball, but he also helped to change the hearts and attitudes of his teammates and fans throughout the league who began to see the man inside, not to mention the talents of an outstanding ballplayer.

Don't think Robinson wasn't human, however. There were times, as the movie showed, when he wanted to vent his anger and take on the entire world. But, he never showed that side of himself in public; only one reason that members of the Brooklyn Dodgers organization and the fans began to slowly embrace him.

It was the beginning of a methodical process—one that took far too long—that has seen life and attitudes completely change in America. First Lady Michelle Obama, who recently viewed the film with her husband, President Barack Obama, during a private screening, told the Associated Press that the Obamas were “struck by how far removed that way of life seems today.”

One of the film’s most compelling scenes was when the Dodgers traveled to Cincinnati. The organization was warned that there would be trouble if Robinson traveled with the team, but Robinson made the trip. After taking the field, all types of racial slurs were hurled his way.

It wasn’t until Dodgers shortstop Pee Wee Reese, a native of the Cincinnati area, came over and put his arm around Robinson and told him he was proud to have him as a teammate that fans began to see Robinson in a different light.

Robinson’s first year might have been rocky, but he was soon joined by other African-American players, including the Dodgers’ Roy Campanella in 1948 and Don Newcombe in 1949. In 10 seasons with Brooklyn, Robinson batted .311, hit 137 home runs, drove in 734 runs, stole 197 bases and led the Dodgers to the 1955 World Series championship. He was a six-time all-star and was inducted into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., in 1962 and passed away at the age of 53 in 1972.

Chadwick Boseman, who made his feature film debut in Gary Fleder’s 2008 drama *The Express*, captured the essence of Robinson’s gentle nature with an outstanding performance as the lead character. Expect to see Boseman in many other major motion pictures in the future.

The role of Dodgers General Manager Branch Rickey was a major departure from the swashbuckling characters such as Han Solo and Indiana Jones that we’re used to seeing from Harrison Ford. However, Ford nearly stole the show with a dead-on

portrayal of Rickey, including his voice and facial mannerisms that gave the film a very enjoyable humorous side.

The film is rated PG-13 due to some rough language scattered throughout, and a mild bedroom scene involving highly colorful Dodgers manager Leo Durocher. Otherwise, it is a family movie that most non-baseball fans can embrace.

The film released nationwide in theaters on Friday, April 12. Major League Baseball celebrated its annual Jackie Robinson Day on Monday (April 15). Every player on every team wore the No. 42 in honor of Robinson that day.