

Tukufu Zuberi: Our first story examines the racial integration of America's favorite pastime. In the 1930s, baseball lifted the spirits of a nation battered by the Great Depression, and two of the sport's greatest stars were Satchel Paige and Dizzy Dean. Paige thrilled crowds with his blistering fastball, while strikeout king Dizzy Dean demolished sluggers across the country with pinpoint accuracy. But Dean was white and Paige African American, and strict color line in baseball ensured that the two legendary players never played together in a major-league game. But a man in Washington believes that World War II may have brought his father together with these two legendary athletes.

Joe Miles: I remember this story my father used to always tell me about playing in this game with Satchel Paige and Dizzy Dean during World War II. He gave me this baseball, he found out in the shop that says "Dizzy Dean" on it, but my father now suffers from Alzheimer's, and he just really doesn't recall the details.

Tukufu: I'm Tukufu Zuberi. Elyse Luray and I are headed to Kent, Washington, to meet Joe Miles.

Joe: Come on in out of the weather!

Tukufu: Thank you.

Elyse Luray: So, what do you got?

Joe: I have this World War II baseball my father gave me.

Elyse: Huh. "Dizzy Dean, Louisville, Kentucky, July 12, 1944."

Tukufu: Interesting.

Elyse: What do you want to know?

Joe: I'd like to know if it's true if my father played as a catcher with Dizzy Dean and Satchel Paige, and if so, how that came about.

Tukufu: Satchel Paige, he was the Muhammad Ali of baseball in the '30s and '40s. Many people consider him the greatest pitcher ever to play the game.

Elyse: Now, was your father a professional ball player?

Joe: No, he played ball in high school and college, but never professionally.

Elyse: Is there any other information about your dad?

Joe: I know he was stationed at Freeman Field in Indiana before he was shipped to Europe to work as a mechanic on B-24s.

Elyse: So we'll go see what we can find out.

Tukufu: We'll get back to you.

Elyse: I'm not sure what to make of Joe's story, but the ball certainly looks promising. Right away, I can tell you that the ball's old. You can tell just by looking at it. The leather looks right, but the signature -- if it was Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, right away, I would be able to tell you if it's authentic. I haven't seen a lot of Dizzy Dean's signatures. So I'm going to need an expert to look at the signature. The date on the ball is 1944, one year before the end of World War II. Over 16 million Americans enlisted or were drafted during that conflict. Among them were over 4,000 of baseball's minor-league players and over 400 major-league players. Star pitcher Bob Feller was the first major-leaguer to enlist. He was followed

by Joe Di Maggio, Hank Greenberg, and nearly every other major-league player. With the Major Leagues in desperate need of qualified players, it would seem the perfect opportunity to draw on the talent of the segregated Negro Leagues, home to dozens of players like Josh Gibson, Hilton Smith, Sam Jethro, and Satchel Paige, but the racism of the day prevailed, and the Major Leagues in wartime remained a whites-only club.

Tukufu: But there were places during the war years where black and white players competed. Exhibition, or barnstorming, games were big business as far back as the late 1800s, attracting of thousands of fans in towns across the country and providing a chance for African American players to show off their major-league talents. For nine innings, these games allowed blacks and whites to play by the same rules. However, when the games ended, life for the African-American players was rough. Restaurants and hotels would seldom serve them, forcing them to make the bus their home on the road. These unofficial traveling games were the only ways that African-American and white players could play against each other and earn a little bit of money on the side. It's certainly possible Paige and Dean played in one of these games, but I have no proof, and Elyse has spotted another problem. It seems very unlikely that Paige and Dean were playing in a game with Joe Miles, who wasn't even a professional player. I agree, and we have a lot of work on our hands.

Elyse: Joe's father was stationed on a military base. I want to find out what kind of games were being played on bases during the War. Seems it wasn't just civilian baseball that saw big changes. With so many major-league players joining the war effort, the standard of baseball teams at military bases rose to a new level. Competition even broke out between base commanders trying to lure star players to their teams. At first, I wonder if Dean and Paige had been lured to the same military base during the War, and that's how they might have played with Joe Miles. But my research quickly dismisses that theory. Although Dean was drafted, he was later rejected because of a perforated eardrum, and at the age of 37, Satchel Paige was never called up to war. Perhaps these guys never played together. I wonder what Tukufu is finding out.

Tukufu: I'm meeting with Phil Dixon, a baseball historian. Before we get started, I'm hoping he can tell me a little bit about these two players. I'm working on a story in which Satchel Paige and Dizzy Dean played in a wartime game with a non-professional Joe Miles, who's our guy. Phil tells me that during the 1940s, Satchel Paige was a megastar. He was certainly the biggest attraction outside the Major Leagues, and he appeared in countless exhibition games.

Phil Dixon: You know, he could come out, and he would get a tiny matchbook. While other people were warming up over the giant home plate, he would put that matchbook down, and he would rear back 100 miles an hour, and he would throw right over the top of that matchbook because he had that excellent control and that blazing speed, and he'd take that windmill windup -- man, it was one of the most beautiful things -- kick that leg up, and he would just lay them in there like you've never seen before.

Tukufu: What about Dizzy Dean?

Phil: Dizzy Dean comes on the scene 1929, turning pro. He's custom-made for the Depression. He has the great rags-to-riches story: kid from the backwoods who comes into the big leagues. He's the premiere strikeout pitcher in major-league baseball.

Tukufu: Could these two megastars have played together? Phil gives our investigation a break. He says Dean and Paige were great admirers of each other and that they did occasionally play on the same field.

Phil: In 1934, Dizzy has led the St. Louis Cardinals to victory in the World Series. With the victory under his belt, Dizzy hit the road on an exhibition tour. In Cleveland, Ohio, he faced off against Satchel Paige and the Pittsburgh Crawfords. Satchel easily won the game, striking out 13 players.

Tukufu: But how does Joe Miles fit into this picture? Phil tells me that in the early days of barnstorming, Negro-league teams were routinely beating the white major-league teams. So in the late 1920s, Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis banned major-league teams from playing Negro-league teams. From then on, white teams in barnstorming games were an oddball assortment of major- and minor-league players plus talented locals picked from the town where

the games were played. So could Joe Miles have been one of those talented locals? Phil's next bit of news throws Joe's story into doubt. It seems that by the war years, Dizzy Dean's barnstorming career was over.

Phil: Dizzy Dean, he had a very short professional career. 1937, he was injured, and by 1941, he's out of the game and takes on a new life in baseball as a broadcaster. so with Dizzy Dean, it's highly unlikely that he would be pitching in a game against Satchel Paige in 1944.

Tukufu: So it didn't happen.

Phil: I've never heard of that game.

Elyse: While Tukufu heads to Indiana, I want to see if the signature is real. Mastronet in Chicago is one of the country's leading sports auction houses. I'm meeting Brian Marin, a sports memorabilia expert. My first question is: do you think this ball is a period ball?

Brian Marin: Looking at it, yes, it's absolutely period. It's a goldsmith label, obviously is pre-1946 because they merged with MacGregor in '46.

Elyse: So we know it's definitely before 1946. But was it a Dizzy Dean signature? Brian doesn't think so. He showed me an authenticated Dizzy Dean ball so I could compare.

Brian: It's absolutely not Dizzy Dean's signature.

Elyse: They're not even close, huh?

Brian: Not even close.

Elyse: So who would have signed this if it wasn't Dizzy Dean?

Brian: It could be a fan who caught a foul ball, wants to note that Dean was actually pitching that day.

Elyse: Well, that's disappointing, but thank you.

Tukufu: Is there any truth to Joe's story? I want to find out where Joe Miles was on July 12, 1944. Was he even in the country, or had he already shipped off to Europe? I'm heading to Freeman Field, where Joe was stationed during World War II. I'm meeting Ted Jordan, director of the military museum. I know this is the base where Joe Miles was stationed during World War II. Can you tell me a little bit more about Freeman Field?

Ted Jordan: Freeman Field was a multi-engine training base mainly for bomber pilots. They trained over 4,200 of them here who went on to fly in Europe.

Tukufu: Ted tells me that Freeman Field's bomber pilots had some of the most dangerous assignments of the war. Over 8,000 bombers that went out would never come home. He also told me that for a short period, the Freeman Field housed the famed Tuskegee airmen, highly trained African-American fighter pilots.

Ted: Though the U.S. military was segregated, these deadly bombing missions brought white and black airmen together. While the white pilots flew their treacherous cargo into enemy territory, African-American fighter pilots flew ahead, protecting white airmen from enemy attack.

Tukufu: Ted tells me that as a mechanic, Joe Miles' job would be to make sure these bombers were fit and ready for their dangerous missions. He was certainly witness to some fascinating history, but exactly when did he ship out for Europe? Was he still here and playing baseball on July 12, 1944? Seems Joe didn't ship out to Italy until March 17,



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1945, eight months after the date on the ball and buried in the files is what may be a crucial piece of evidence. Joe Miles did play baseball at Freeman Field, and here's the photo of the Freeman Field Blue Devils, the air base ball team. And right in the middle is Joe Miles. This is a great piece of evidence, and Louisville, Kentucky, the location on the ball, is just 50 miles from Freeman Field. I've asked Elyse to do some digging in old newspapers and find out if there's any mention of Dean or Paige in Louisville on July 12, 1944. It may be our last chance to find out if there's any truth to Joe Miles' story.

Elyse: I'm searching sports pages around that time, but I'm not finding anything. But then in the Louisville Courier Journal, I find an article that gives our story a new twist. We're heading back to Joe Miles's house to tell him what we found.

Tukufu: Elyse and I tell Joe that his ball is from the correct period, but that the signature is not Dizzy Dean's. It seemed at first as if the story was fiction, but Elyse has made a startling discovery.

Elyse: What we found out next really flipped this story. The courier journal article says on July 12, 1944, Satchel Paige travelled to Louisville to play with a Negro-league team, the Louisville Black Colonels. Dizzy Dean had the day off from broadcasting. He also headed to Louisville. Seems he wasn't quite ready to retire from pitching. He took to the field, pitching several innings with Joe Miles' team the Freeman Field Blue Devils. It was a classic wartime barnstorming game.

Tukufu: We don't know who signed Dean's signature, but nevertheless, his father's story is true. I tell Joe that what his father's team took part in that July day was far more than just a summer ball game. With servicemen like Joe Miles being called to fight fascism in Europe, integrated games like this with guys like Paige and Dean pointed out the contradictions of American racism in sport and the military. The war proved a catalyst for change. In just three years Jackie Robinson would integrate Major League baseball. And a year later, President Truman would integrate the armed forces. To add to all of that, I don't know if you've ever seen this photo, but this is a picture of the Freeman Field Blue Devils, and your father is in it.

Wow, this is really special.

Joe: I -- I thank you for this.

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