"MAYBE I'LL PITCH FOREVER"
by LeRoy (Satchel) Paige as told to David Lipman
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993 (First published in 1962)
Reviewed by Al Figone, Humboldt State University

By today's standards Paige's herculean performances as a pitcher would take on mythic proportions were it not for the man himself describing his extraordinary exploits in this autobiography. "Maybe I'll Pitch Forever" was first published in 1962 before baseball historians began to seriously set the record straight regarding Negro baseball and published again in 1993. The latest publication includes an introduction by John Holway, which chronicles Paige's career, and an Afterword by David Lipman. The latter section describes Paige's life after he completed his active playing career and his reactions in 1971 as the first Black player elected to the Hall of Fame. Black ballplayers, unlike their fellow vagabonds, the great black musicians, left few monographs, pictures, or film and an outline of this enterprise is only traceable in the black press. The oral history of one of its legends as presented in this book is a significant contribution in understanding Negro baseball phenomena and one of its vibrant personalities and dominant playing figures.

How good was Satchel Paige? For those fortunate to have seen him pitch during the 1920's, 30's, and 40's there is little doubt in their minds that this legend ranks as one of the all time great pitchers. For those baseball enthusiasts who did not see Paige perform during his incredulously long career (in 1965, at the age of 59 he pitched three innings for Kansas City), this book will bring to life the essence of Satchel Paige as he recounts his career with writer David Lipman.

Soon after beginning his career of professional baseball in 1924 at the age of 18, Paige became a black folk hero and by the 1940's had been elevated by the white press to a pedestal alongside fighter Joe Louis and Olympic champ Jesse Owens. His power and glamour were derived primarily from the durability, resiliency, and power of his right arm which produced a fastball which many of his contemporary players—black and white—said rivaled that thrown by Walter Johnson, Dizzy Dean, Bob Feller, and Negro legend Smokey Joe Williams. Paige's penchant for showboating and minstrel one liners ("Don't look back, something might be gaining on you") were also significant factors responsible for his enormous gate appeal.

During the late 1930's and early 1940's Paige dominated Negro baseball as Babe Ruth had dominated the Major Leagues earlier—and for similar reasons. Both displayed awesome abilities on a baseball field, but they had something more. There was an aura of excitement about them that drew
thousands of fans through the turnstiles. These men were expected to perform the extra-ordinary as a matter of course.

Fortunately, for baseball aficionados, the legend of Ruth has been recounted by many writers and records of his era were meticulously kept. Statistics on Satchel Paige's extraordinary accomplishments were rarely recorded with the same accuracy of a major leaguer. In this book many of Paige's amazing feats—also retold in part by other writers (Robert Peterson, "Only the Ball Was White"), Donn Rogosin ("Invisible Men: Life in the Negro Leagues"), John Holway ("Voices From the Great Baseball Leagues," and "Josh and Satch: The Life and Times of Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige")—are reconstructed and described with indelible clarity and detail.

No book describing Negro baseball or its legends would be complete without describing the impact and meaning of segregation and integration to black players and black people. For black people, Paige became the symbol of competence and achievement. Because he provided joy and excitement in his dramatic quest for victories and Negro league pennants, he enriched life in black America and, when his victories came against white opponents, he undermined segregation itself. Paige's exploits transcended the world of sport as black America crushed by segregation desperately needed role models to emulate; and they required men and women who cast large shadows, large enough to make known the truth of black talent. Satchel Paige had more money, more attention, more lasting fame, and a richer life than almost all the rest of his contemporaries. This book will reinforce what many baseball historians have long believed—had he been white he would have reached the major leagues long before he was 42 years old.

Serious scholars of Negro baseball who read this book will find it noticeably lacking in statistics except those presented by Paige and Lipman. Since the Macmillan Encyclopedia now lists all the wins, losses, strikeouts, and walks of Paige's career, inclusion of them would have significantly filled this numerical void. Those who will want to probe a part of Paige's personality that the public least understood, may be disappointed after reading this book. Some writers have reported that Paige was a lonely man, not particularly beloved by teammates and friends, and resented by the better Negro players because of the attention he received and 10 to 15% of the gate he commanded. And, of course, his undependability as a Cleveland Indian during the 1949 and 1980 seasons may have been largely responsible for his release from that team. In the words of Pittsburg Courier writer Ric Roberts, "he was more undependable than a secondhand pair of suspenders." Although Paige does address some of the above aspects of his career, many