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Tom Baird to Fresco Thompson regarding Branch Rickey, Jackie Robinson, and Negro Leagues. January 20, 1949

Tom Baird

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January 20, 1949

Mr. Fresco Thompson
c/o Brooklyn National League Baseball Club
215 Montague Street
Brooklyn, 2, N.Y.

Dear Sir:

In reading a recent Associated Press article I noticed that you were quoted as follows: "In the past the Dodgers paid the Memphis club for the contract of Pitcher Sam Bankhead and the Cleveland Buckeyes for the release of Sam Jethroe, outfielder with Montreal last season. It is my impression we also paid the Kansas City Monarchs for the release of Jackie Robinson."

I feel that I should advise you that you were definitely under the wrong impression because Mr. Rickey never paid one cent for Jackie Robinson. Rickey was not even gentlemen enough to answer or acknowledge my many letters I wrote him with reference to Jackie Robinson. The owners of the Newark Eagles and the Baltimore Elite Giants state that Rickey never paid one cent for either Don Newcombe or Roy Campanella.

Rickey's acquisition of Negro baseball players reminds me of the fellow who found a rope and when he got home there was a horse on the end of it. I have been informed that Mr. Rickey is a very religious man. If such is true, it appears that his religion runs toward the almighty dollar.

In the same Associated Press article above mentioned Mr. Rickey is quoted as follows: "If, as Mrs. Manley asserts, Irvin is under any contract or reserve clause, the Brooklyn baseball club is not interested in the player. It was our understanding from published newspaper reports quoting Mrs. Manley that her club was disbanding. If what Mrs. Manley says is true, Irvin will be released from his contract to join the St. Paul club of the American Association, a Brooklyn-owned chain affiliate."

Why didn't you or Mr. Rickey find out whether Irvin was under contract to Mrs. Manley or were trying to pull another "Rickey" and get another good ball player for nothing regardless of ethics as the Brooklyn club seems to have done in the past?

In 1947 Mr. Jack Fournier, scout for the St. Louis Browns, contacted me personally in Kansas and scouted Willard Brown and Henry Thompson of the Kansas City Monarchs. After scouting these players, Mr. Fournier asked my permission to speak with the players which I gladly gave. Mr. Bill DeWitt, Vice President of the St. Louis Browns, called me shortly thereafter and a deal was made for Thompson and Brown. Mr. DeWitt stood by all of his commitments 100%. Mr. Bill Veeck, President of the Cleveland Indians, has acquired several Negro ball players from the Negro Leagues and has paid the Negro leagues for the players releases. Why can't the Brooklyn baseball club do business this way?

There is no doubt that Mr. Rickey should be given credit for removing the barriers and allowing Negro ball players to get into Organized baseball. However, it appears that his unethical methods of obtaining Negro players does not meet with the approval of the public.

Very truly yours,

Tom Baird
President, Kansas City Monarchs