



# **Willie's Boys: The 1948 Birmingham Black Barons, The Last Negro League World Series, and the Making of a Baseball Legend**

*John Klima*

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## Willie's Boys: The 1948 Birmingham Black Barons, The Last Negro League World Series, and the Making of a Baseball Legend John Klima

The story of Willie Mays's rookie year with the Negro American League's Birmingham Black Barons, the Last Negro World Series, and the making of a baseball legend

Baseball Hall of Famer Willie Mays is one of baseball's endearing greats, a tremendously talented and charismatic center fielder who hit 660 career homeruns, collected 3,283 hits, knocked in 1,903 runs, won 12 Gold Glove Awards and appeared in 24 All-Star games. But before Mays was the "Say Hey Kid", he was just a boy. *Willie's Boys* is the story of his remarkable 1948 rookie season with the Negro American League's Birmingham Black Barons, who took a risk on a raw but gifted 16-year-old and gave him the experience, confidence, and connections to escape Birmingham's segregation, navigate baseball's institutional racism, and sign with the New York Giants. *Willie's Boys* offers a character-rich narrative of the apprenticeship Mays had at the hands of a diverse group of savvy veterans who taught him the ways of the game and the world.

- Sheds new light on the virtually unknown beginnings of a baseball great, not available in other books
- Captures the first incredible steps of a baseball superstar in his first season with the Negro League's Birmingham Black Barons
- Introduces the veteran group of Negro League players, including Piper Davis, who gave Mays an incredible apprenticeship season
- Illuminates the Negro League's last days, drawing on in-depth research and interviews with remaining players
- Explores the heated rivalry between Mays's Black Barons and Buck O'Neil's Kansas City Monarchs , culminating in the last Negro League World Series
- Breaks new historical ground on what led the New York Giants to acquire Mays, and why he didn't sign with the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Yankees, or Boston Red Sox

Packed with stories and insights, *Willie's Boys* takes you inside an important part of baseball history and the development of one of the all-time greats ever to play the game.

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