

Harry Kono Recruits an African American Baseball Player

The Dai Tokyo* baseball club of Japan enters into a contract with American baseball player James E. Bonner in 1936. The American agent for the transaction was Harry Kono of Alameda, CA.

Bonner was the first African American to play baseball professionally in Japan, 11 years before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball.

Bonner received free transportation to Japan and back for the one year life of the contract and was paid 400 yen per month in salary. Japanese players averaged 140 yen.

THIS CONTRACT made this 8th day of September, 1936,
by and between *Dai Tokyo Baseball Club*, hereinafter
called First Party, and JAMES E. BONNER, hereinafter called
Second Party,

W I T N E S S E T H:

That whereas First Party is an organization engaged
in producing professional baseball games in Japan, and

(1) Whereas, Second Party is a professional baseball
player of the age of *and Party* years,

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY AGREED by and between
the parties hereto as follows:

(1) That Second Party will play professional baseball
for First Party in Japan at any and all baseball games required
by First Party for the period of one (1) year.

(2) That First Party, for and in consideration of the
playing of baseball games by Second Party, will pay to Second
Party the sum of four hundred (400) yen per month, payable on
or about the tenth day of each month as follows; one-hundred and
sixty (160) yen to be paid in hand to Second Party; two hundred
and forty (240) yen to be deposited to the credit of Second Party
in the Yokohama Specie Bank, Yokohama, Japan, for conversion
into dollars and transmission to the credit of Second Party in
the Bank of America National Trust and Savings Association,
Oakland Main Office, Oakland, California. Said First Party
further agrees to give to Second Party a duplicate deposit tag
showing the deposit of 240 yen in the Yokohama Specie Bank as
aforesaid.

(3) That First Party agrees to pay for the transporta-
tion of Second Party from the City of San Francisco to Japan, and
at the termination of this contract, the transportation of Second

*later the Shochiku Robins

PRO BASEBALL IN JAPAN

The names of the seven recently organized professional baseball teams of the All-Japan League are the Tokyo Giants, Dai Tokyo Club, Tokyo Senators, Osaka Tigers, Nagoya, Nagoya Kinko Club, and the Osaka Hankyu Club.

“I think that Kono was respected, and given [his] role as a scout... reconfirms the important role that Japanese-Americans play because they understand the language and the customs of both countries,” baseball historian Bill Staples said. “So they play an important role behind the scenes in negotiating contracts and organizing chores. To me, that’s one of the more important stories of Jimmy Bonner.”

Harry Kono remained very busy in 1936, bringing the Waseda University baseball team to America on May 14. In June they would play the team that Harry managed, the Alameda Taiikukai (ATK).

Bonner’s career didn’t last long in Japan. He arrived on October 5, 1936 and played several positions, batting .458 in 24 at bats. But his defense was lacking and he generally did not play well. He was dismissed from the team by mid November. He returned to the states and worked for the Pullman company while also playing semi-pro baseball.

He died in 1963, mostly forgotten. Right after WWII ended, Harry moved his family to Selma, CA. He never returned to Alameda and like Bonner, is largely forgotten.

Three Japanese Nines To Play Waseda In June

Harry Kono Books Teams For Visitors

The Waseda university baseballers, fall champions of the Tokyo Big Six league, will face three Japanese teams in Northern California on their barnstorming tour of the United States, according to Harry H. Kono, prominent Alameda florist and sportsman, who is in charge of scheduling the Japanese games in Northern California for the Waseda nine.

Scheduled to arrive here May 14 aboard the Tatsuta Maru, the Wasedans will not play in Northern California until just a few days before their departure for home.

The Stockton Yamaicos will be their first Japanese opponents, the game being booked for Saturday, June 27. The Wasedans will then travel to Fresno for their next game on Sunday, June 28. On the 29th of June, they will go on a sightseeing trip to Yosemite, returning the following day, Tuesday, June 30, for their final game against the Alameda Taiikus on the transbay diamond.

Above: Nichibei Shinbun • May 1, 1936

Bill Staples quote courtesy of japanball.com

<https://japanball.com/articles-features/japanese-baseball-historical-profiles/breaking-barriers-black-ballplayers-in-japan/>

Party from Japan to the City of San Francisco. Said transportation to be paid by furnishing said Second Party with one special third-class ticket aboard the N.Y.K. line.

(4) It is hereby agreed by and between the parties hereto that this contract shall remain in full force and effect for the period of one year, unless terminated sooner by First Party as hereinabove provided.

(5) First Party agrees to pay for all traveling expenses of Second Party. Second Party agrees to pay for all his living expenses, including the purchasing of lodging, food and clothes.

(6) It is hereby agreed by and between the parties hereto that payment to Second Party under this contract, as hereinabove provided, shall commence on the 10th day of September, 1936.

(7) Second Party agrees that under no conditions will he play baseball with anyone for the period of one year, commencing September 10, 1936, except with the consent of First Party.

(8) IT IS FURTHER AGREED by and between the parties hereto that should Second Party not prove satisfactory to First Party, said First Party reserves the right to terminate and cancel this contract at any time, anything herein contained to the contrary

State of California)
County of Alameda) ss.



On this 8th day of September in the year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Thirty-six before me, _____ a Notary Public in and for the County of Alameda, State of California, residing therein, duly commissioned and sworn, personally appeared Harry Kono authorized agent of Dai Tokyo Baseball Club, and James E. Bonner

known to me to be the persons described in and whose names are subscribed to the within instrument,

and they acknowledged to me that they executed the same

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my Official Seal, the day and year in this certificate first above written

Notary Public

In and for said County of Alameda, State of California