

# Across The Desk By LUDLOW W. WERNER

**BASEBALL** Jim Crow got its most severe setback last week.

Branch Rickey, president of the Brooklyn Dodgers, announced that his club had signed Jackie Robinson, former UCLA star athlete, for the Montreal Club. Robinson, who was a lieutenant in World War II, goes to the Dodgers' farm where players are seasoned and either make the Big League competition or remain in obscurity.

Several months ago, I was among editors and sports writers of the Negro and white press who sat in Branch Rickey's commodious offices in Brooklyn and heard him evade questions as to why the Dodgers had not signed a Negro for their team after two Negro players had been tried out in Spring practice at Bear Mountains.

Mr. Rickey quickly ruled out of his conference the subject of Negro ball players wearing Dodgers uniforms, and proceeded to lash out furiously at Negro baseball, criticizing not only the players but also the

business ethics of the owners of clubs. In brief, Mr. Rickey said that there was no such thing as Negro baseball, and he said that there would have to be a lot of mending of ways before Negroes could gain any status of having "Leagues."

Unfortunately a lot of what Mr. Rickey said was true about Negro baseball. Several owners who were present at the conference admitted the truth of the statements. But all of the charges that the Dodgers boss made against Negro baseball were not true, as the Negro writers and a few white sports-writers pointed out.

In any event, the bombshell Mr. Rickey threw at his meeting was the announcement of the formation of the United States League—a new league of Negro clubs, which he said would try to bring Negro baseball up to the standard of the white leagues. He

declared that he had no financial interest in the new league but would be of whatever assistance he could in guiding its president.

When I left that meeting, along with others I had formed the opinion that it would be a hot day in December before Rickey would ever have a Negro wear the uniform of organized (white) baseball. I felt that his blessing of the United States League was a mere subterfuge to which he could point if and when the State Commission Against Discrimination ever got around to investigating Jim Crow in major league baseball in New York State.

Mr. Rickey's announcement last week, then, of signing up Jackie Robinson came as a pleasant surprise. The statements of baseball club owners, managers, players and officials have been equally surprising. From all parts of the country, the statements have come. Sports writers, by and large, North and South, have given Robinson good press. A few New York writers who admitted in their columns to being born in the South, did not like the idea saying it created many unpleasant problems, particularly the problem of training and traveling in the South.

But it remained for Branch Rickey, Jr., to take the bull by the horns and answer several Dodgers (born in the South) who declared that they wouldn't play with a Negro. Young Rickey went the whole hog and said that if there were any players on the Dodgers team who refused to play with Robinson as a teammate they didn't have to stay on the team. For which, bravo, Mr. Rickey, Jr.!

Jackie Robinson is entering "white" baseball with the eyes of all focussed upon him. Athlete and level-headed person that he is reputed to be, he should be a success. His is not an enviable position because there will be so many wishing to see him fail. But, knowing that should be his main source of strength. Knowing that he will have to be a "Superman" will bring out the best in him; and the best in him should prove sufficient to break up another myth that Negroes do not belong in "white" baseball.