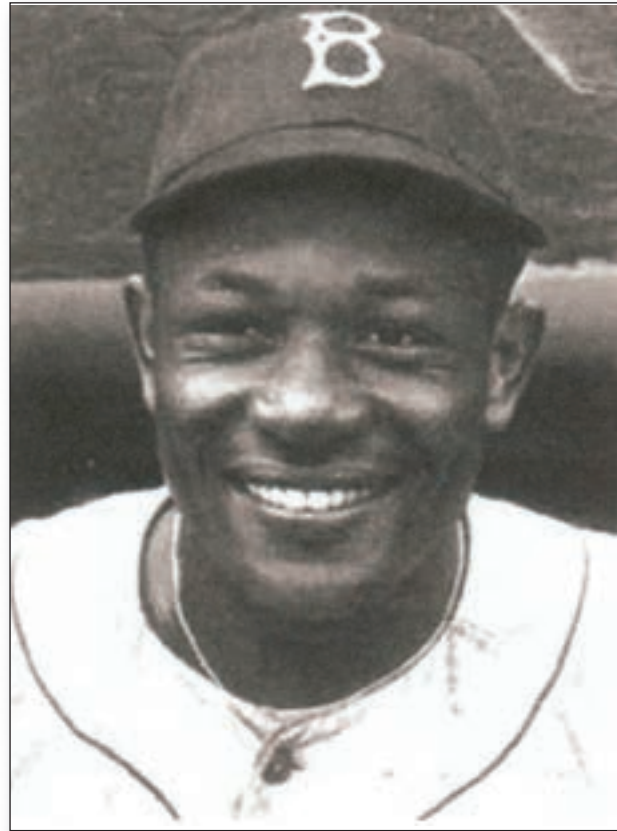


## DANIEL ROBERT “DAN” BANKHEAD

**T**HE 2015 PROFESSIONAL  
BASEBALL SEASON  
MARKED THE 68TH

anniversary of the breaking of the Major League’s color barrier. At the onset of the 1947 season, Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers, thus becoming the first black Major League player. On August 25, 1947, Daniel Robert “Dan” Bankhead of Empire became the first black pitcher in Major League history.



Dan was born in Empire, Alabama, on May 3, 1920, to Garnett and Ara Bankhead. His parents had moved to Empire from Mississippi so that Garnett could find work at the local mines. As a youngster, Dan played for the local team against other coal mining camp teams. In 1940, he was signed by the Black Barons and was converted to a pitcher and compared to Satchell Paige and Bob Feller. At the beginning of World War II,

Dan enlisted in the Marine Corps as part of the first group of blacks ever inducted into the Marine Corp. Dan spent the majority of his time in the Marine Corp playing ball for the Montford Point Corps Base team. He was released from the service in 1946 as a sergeant. Following the war, he pitched for the Memphis Red Sox and made the roster for the East-West All Start Game played at Chicago’s Comiskey Park. Dan was the winning pitcher in two of the three games in which he participated.

In August 1947, Brooklyn General Manager, Branch Richey, flew to Memphis to scout Bankhead as he faced his old Back Baron team. Dan struck out eleven Barons and the Dodgers purchased his contract for a reported \$15,000. Two days after his signing, Dan was placed in a relief role and was pounded for eight runs and ten hits. However, in his first at bat, he hit a home run and became the first National League pitcher to homer in his initial trip to the plate. Dan pitched very little the remainder of the year and was placed in the minors where he had two successful seasons.

Dan returned to the Dodgers in 1950 and was having a great success until a mid-season shoulder injury hampered him. Dan was again placed in the minor leagues. Eventually, Bankhead migrated to the baseball leagues in Mexico and throughout the Caribbean, where he either managed or played with numerous teams. Dan passed away in Houston, Texas, on May 2, 1976.