

Formation of the United States League

Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers was convinced that signing black ball players was in the immediate future for Major League baseball. Rickey also knew that signing the right players was crucial. In an effort to evaluate Negro League baseball talent, Rickey joined with Gus Greenlee to help form the United State League (USL) in May of 1945. John Shackelford was elected as the League President and Gus Greenlee was named the United States League Vice-President. Shackelford had played in the Negro Leagues from 1924 to 1930 with the Cleveland Browns, Harrisburg Giants, Chicago American Giants and Birmingham Black Barons. After his Negro League career, Shackelford went to Wiley College and after graduation on to the University of Michigan Law School where he received a law degree. Shackelford became a respected attorney in Cleveland. The United States League also provided Greenlee with the opportunity to get back into Negro League baseball. The United States League debuted in 1945 with the following six teams:

United States League (1945)

Team	Owner/Management	Manager	Home Field
Brooklyn Brown Dodgers	Joe Hall George Armstrong	Felix Mellix Oscar Charleston	Ebbetts Field
Pittsburgh Crawfords	Gus Greelee	Fred Burnette Tom Parker	Forbes Field
Chicago Brown Bombers	James Foster	Bingo De Moss James Foster	Wrigley Field
Philadelphia Hilldales	Webster McDonald	Oscar Charleston	Harrisburg Field
Toledo Rays	Hank Rigney Jesse Heslip	Pee Wee Spencer	American Association Park
Detroit Motor City Giants	Benjamin E. Linton Perkins		Motor City Field

In addition to these six teams, New Orleans and Indianapolis entered the league in 1945 as associate members. As associate members, New Orleans and Indianapolis paid lower franchise fees, but their games did not count in the league standings and they could not play in the all-star game nor were eligible for the league world series.

Branch Rickey gave the United States League his total support and worked out a deal whereby United States League games could be played at Ebbetts field when the Brooklyn Dodgers were out of town. It was also rumored that Rickey had provided financial support for the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers franchise. Rickey also had hoped that the United States League (USL) would be recognized by the National Association of Professional Baseball Clubs. This acceptance would make USL players eligible to be drafted by Major League baseball teams. This acceptance never came. The first indication that the new league had a significant uphill battle was when only about 2,000 fans showed up for the first USL game in New York City. The contest pitted the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers against the Philadelphia Hilldales and was played on May 24, 1945.

Hudson Baker and Stanley Glenn each hit homeruns for the Brown Dodgers as they topped the Hilldales by a score of 3-2. Hilldale was the first team to fold when they suspended operations in July 1945 due to financial reasons. Teams struggled through the first season. No All Star game or World Series games were scheduled.

The adversities from the 1945 season didn't deter the United States League from opening the season in 1946. The following individuals directed the baseball operations of the United States League for the 1946 season.

United States League (1946)

Individual	United States League Position
John G. Shackelford	President
W. A. Greenlee	Vice President - Treasurer
Sydney Smith	Executive Secretary
Haywood Jackson	Publicity Director
Hampton E. Johnson	Road Secretary

When the 1946 season opened, the following teams made up the United States League:

United States League (1946)

Team	Owner/Management	Manager
Brooklyn Brown Dodgers	George Armstrong Pete Armstrong	Oscar Charleston
Pittsburgh Crawfords	Gus Greelee	Roy "Red" Parnell
Chicago Brown Bombers	James Foster	Bingo De Moss
Cleveland Clippers	John Shackelford	John Shackelford
Boston Blues		Tom Parker
Toledo Cubs	Hank Rigney Jesse Heslip	Pee Wee Spencer
Detroit Motor City Giants	Ben Linton Perkins	

In addition to these teams, there were three other teams that were granted associate status: Newark Buffaloes, Trenton Stars and Louisville Black Colonels.

The United States League (USL) would be short lived because it failed to secure adequate facilities for games and lacked fan support. The USL also never received the support or cooperation of the Negro National League, Negro American League or Negro Southern League.

The United States League folded during the 1946 season, but it gave Rickey the opportunity to scout Negro League talent.