

Hank Aaron: Major League Powerhouse!

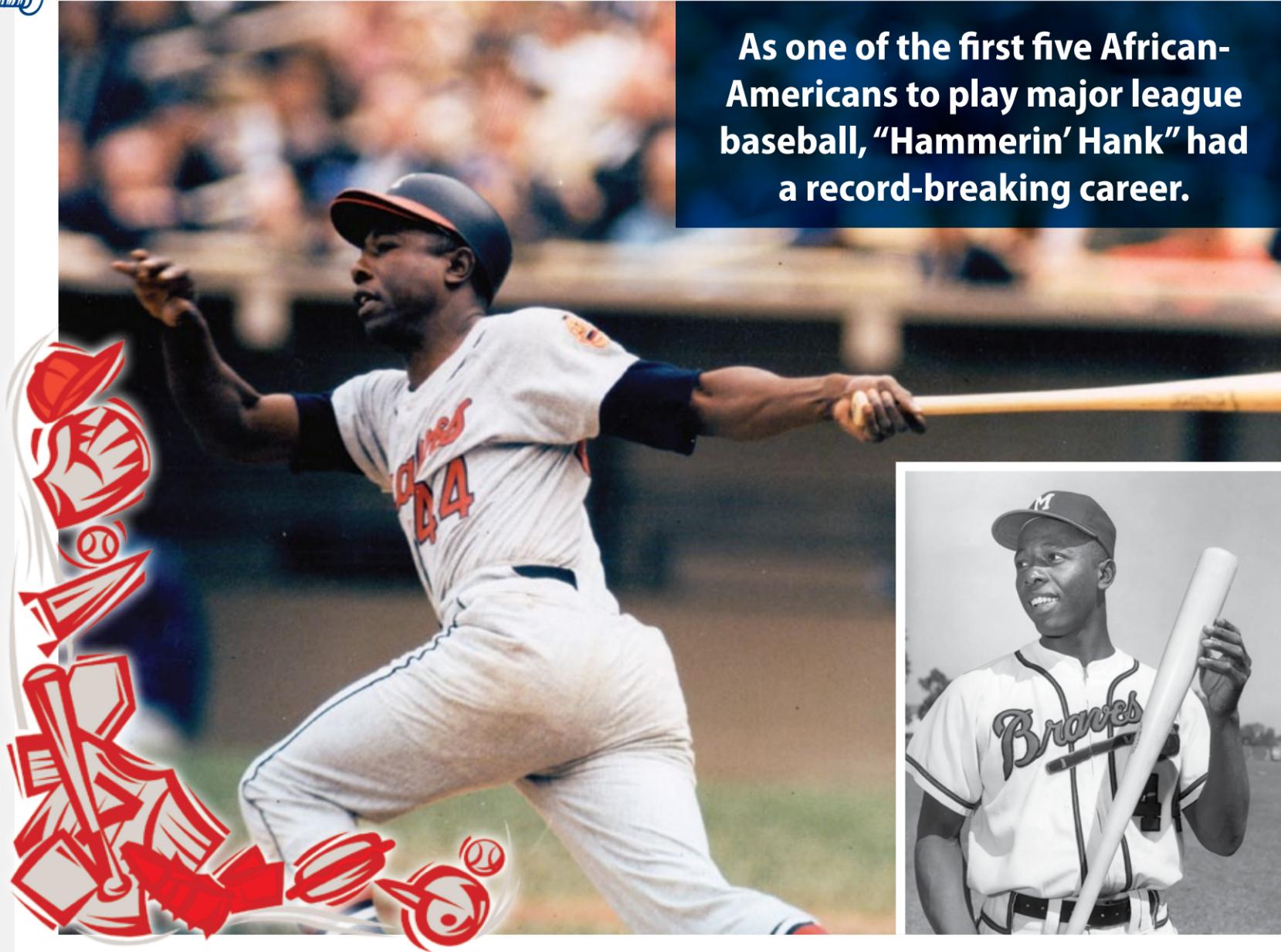


Early Life and Career

Henry Louis Aaron was born in Mobile, Alabama, on February 5, 1934. His family was poor and couldn't afford baseball equipment, so Hank practiced by hitting bottle caps with sticks. In high school, he played outfield and third base and became known as a power hitter. In 1949, when he was only fifteen years old, Hank tried out for a spot with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He didn't make the team, but he kept at it, and by 1951 he was playing in the Negro leagues. In 1952 the Milwaukee Braves (which became the Atlanta Braves) signed him to a farm team and then, on April 13, 1954, Hank Aaron made his major league debut. It was the beginning of a career that would shatter three of baseball's biggest records and earn him a place in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Man of Many Names

Throughout his baseball career, Henry Louis Aaron was a magnet for nicknames. The Braves' public relations director was the first person to call him "Hank" publicly, and the nickname quickly caught on. He



As one of the first five African-Americans to play major league baseball, "Hammerin' Hank" had a record-breaking career.



was also known as "Hammerin' Hank" by his teammates and "Bad Henry" by the pitchers on opposing teams. Although Aaron answered to all of these nicknames, his close friends and family continued to call him Henry.

Baseball in the Segregated South

During the early years of Hank's career with the Braves, racial **segregation** (the practice of separating people according to race) still existed in much of the United States, especially in the South. This meant that he was often separated from his team and sometimes had to make his own travel arrangements. Later, when he was about to break Babe Ruth's homerun record, Aaron received death threats and hate mail from people who didn't want to see a black man beat Ruth's record. However, most people supported him and, when the record-breaking moment finally came, Hank received a standing ovation from the stadium crowd.

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Hank's Greatest Hits: A Timeline History

1954

Makes major league debut

1957

Wins NL MVP Award

1969

Breaks Mickey Mantle's home run record

1972

Breaks Willie Mays' home run record

1974

Breaks Babe Ruth's home run record

1976

Last MLB appearance