

Photo by Joan Marcus

TONI STONE



**ROUNDBOUT
THEATRE
COMPANY**

UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of

**EDUCATION AT
ROUNDBOUT**

UPSTAGE SPOTLIGHT



TONI STONE

By **Lydia R. Diamond**

Directed by **Pam MacKinnon**

Based on *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by **Martha Ackmann**

Toni Stone is an encyclopedia of baseball stats. She's got a great arm. And she doesn't understand why she can't play with the boys. Lydia Diamond's new play knocks it out of the park with an intensely theatrical glimpse into the world of the first woman to go pro in the Negro Leagues. Obie Award winner April Matthis leads a bullpen of players crossing age, race and gender in this vibrant look at how we stay in the game and play our own way.

A NOTE FROM **ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TODD HAIMES**

For all the barriers she broke down, Toni Stone remains a relatively unknown figure in history. But, as the first woman to play professional baseball in the Negro Leagues, Toni Stone needs to be remembered – not only because her achievements pushed an entire sport forward, but because she fought throughout her career for the freedom to live her life on her own terms. To her team owner, she was a publicity stunt. To her teammates, an unwelcome disruption. To her opponents, a favorite target. Must she surrender her identity to play the game she loves?

In celebrating the resilience of the pioneering Toni Stone, Lydia R. Diamond sheds a vivid light on the sacrifices so often demanded of women of color who dare to blaze a trail. I am so happy to be premiering this incisive play—a Roundabout commission—with choreographer Camille A. Brown and Tony Award®-winning director and Roundabout Associate Artist Pam MacKinnon at the helm. They have created an extraordinary production charged with true-to-life grit...and larger-than-life theatricality.

WHEN

1920s – 50s

WHERE

Various locales in Toni's life

WHO

Toni Stone: highly personable, athletic, and quirky

Alberga: Toni's eventual husband

Millie: Toni's female confidant

Spec, Jimmy, Woody, King Tut, Elzie, and Stretch:

Toni's teammates on the Indianapolis Clowns



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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT LYDIA R. DIAMOND

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with playwright Lydia R. Diamond about her work on *Toni Stone*.

Ted Sod: Is it true your family thought you would become a musician? When and how did you decide to become a playwright?

Lydia R. Diamond: I grew up in a family of educators and musicians. My mother was a musician, flute and piano. It was a given that you would study an instrument. I played violin for 11 years, horribly. In high school I finally, convincingly made the case that my creative development would be better served making theatre.

I studied theatre at Northwestern and found playwriting in the beginning of my junior year. As an undergraduate, I wasn't exposed to plays from the African Diaspora. I just didn't know how limited the "canon" I was being introduced to was (keep in mind there was no Google then). So I wrote monologues to audition with, and eventually full-length plays and one-woman shows. Upon graduation, I acted professionally and was writing and producing my own plays. It took about 10 years, not until my first regional theatre production (*The Gift Horse*, produced by Chicago's Goodman Theatre), to understand that I was happier and more adept at writing plays than being in them.

TS: Did you have any teachers who had a profound impact on you?

LD: So many! At Northwestern I met Charles Smith (not to be confused with Chuck Smith, resident director at the Goodman and a dear friend and mentor). Not only was Prof. Smith a great teacher and writer, he was my only African American professor in the Theatre Department. Now I get emails from students who say, "I'm so grateful. You showed me that I'm a writer," or "I auditioned for grad school with a monologue from your play." It's humbling and inspiring and why I teach (University of Illinois at Chicago).

TS: Your play *Toni Stone* was commissioned by Roundabout—correct?

LD: In the mid 2000s, my life got overwhelming and my commissions stacked up, including one from Roundabout. Separately, Samantha Barrie, an independent producer, and Pam MacKinnon, the director, both avid baseball fans, had optioned a biography of Toni Stone by Martha Ackmann. They approached me to write a play about her. I was saying no to commissions at that time, but I couldn't say no to this one. I was shocked that I hadn't known of her, and felt that people should. We connected with Roundabout, and the commission they originally offered me became this play.

TS: How important was Martha's book to your version of the story?

LD: The book was everything. Martha has written the definitive biography of Toni Stone, *Curveball*. The depth and breadth of research she did to create that biography is mind-blowing. She spoke to so many people who were associated with the Negro Leagues. This play is not an adaptation of that book, but without Martha's definitive biography, and generous championing of this project, there most certainly wouldn't be a play. I didn't really know baseball well; so that was scary. Martha, Pam, and Samantha's unbridled enthusiasm for the sport was contagious. The exciting creative challenge in writing *Toni Stone* was finding the arc of the story that needed to be on the stage.



Lydia R. Diamond

TS: What would you say the play is about?

LD: First and foremost it's about Toni Stone. This remarkable woman is such an important part of our history, and prior to Martha's book, she wasn't sufficiently recognized and celebrated. Toni had rigor and a singular focus. Baseball is what she wanted to play, and she made it happen. Despite Jim Crow, institutional racism, and sexism, Toni fought to play ball with a tenacious singular focus that didn't leave room for being told what she couldn't do. Ultimately, this is a story about perseverance and bravery and reaching for what you want.

TS: Are there characters in the play—like Alberga and Millie or some of the members of the team—who are your invention?

LD: Alberga, Toni's husband, is not my invention, nor are many of the characters, though Millie, Toni's best friend, is an invention, inspired by real relationships Toni did have with sex workers. When the team found themselves in towns without hotels for African Americans, women who worked in brothels would often put her up. So a character like Millie is not outside the realm of possibility. As far as creating the players on the team, I did do a lot of research. Starting of course with Martha's book. The members of the team in the play are composites of sorts. There are two characters in my play who definitely existed and who I used aspects of: King Tut and Spec Bebop. King Tut was one of the most famous comedians in the Negro Leagues and Spec, who was a little person, was his sidekick.



TS: Did the Negro Leagues overlap with Jackie Robinson's breaking the color barrier?

LD: The Negro Leagues preceded the integration of the white leagues. By the time Toni Stone began playing, the Major Leagues were just starting to integrate. During the Second World War, men were going to fight, and the white leagues were tapping the Negro Leagues for players. That made a little bit of room for Toni in the Negro Leagues, though she certainly got in on her own merit. She had been playing in male leagues for as long as she'd been playing baseball.

TS: The Negro Leagues remind me of the Harlem Globetrotters.

LD: Absolutely. There is not an institutional connection, but it's very much in the same tradition. There was a piece of it that was a minstrel show. Keep in mind that some of these clubs were owned by whites, but the majority were black-owned enterprises. Just like the Globetrotters, there was a high level of athleticism and there was also a comedic performative element. The show acknowledges how problematic that tension could be.

TS: I understand that April Matthis, who is playing Toni, is the only woman in the cast, and the rest of the actors will be playing everyone else, including white characters and women.

LD: The American theatre has finally started to address gender parity in earnest; still, we have such a long way to go. With this in mind, I labored over the decision to cast only one female and eight men. Ultimately I decided that Toni really was the only woman and that's a stunning visual statement that I wanted. I fell in love with the image of this one Black woman surrounded by Black men. These men hold her up and support her in the telling of the story. I also love that the ensemble members play a multitude of characters, including women, children, and white people.

TS: It will be fascinating to watch a man portray the tenderness between Millie and Toni.

LD: Kenn E. Head, who plays Millie, has been with us through many workshops. He's a Chicago actor whose work I've admired forever. The relationship that Millie and Toni have is heartbreakingly beautiful.

TS: How many workshops did you do?

LD: There were several at Roundabout. So grateful to Roundabout and to Samantha for making them happen. I was also able to do some development work at The Kinetic Arts Festival in Door County, WI, at The Radcliffe Institute at Harvard, Arena Stage, and Chicago Dramatists. I work best in the room with actors; that's where I'm happiest and most inspired.

TS: Do you anticipate rewriting once you see it in front of an audience? What motivates a rewrite for you?

LD: I'm rewriting now [two weeks prior to the first rehearsal] and probably will be until the morning of the first rehearsal. With every pass, I make connections that help tighten and streamline the storytelling. I'll make changes through the rehearsal process. For at least the first two weeks in the room, new pages are rather abundant. Once in previews, I will be informed by how it plays in front of an audience and make small adjustments.

TS: What do you look for when collaborating with a director on a new work?

LD: I have had the privilege of working with wonderful directors who begin with a respect and appreciation for the language. That's so important. Arguably most important. Then of course there's stewardship. Like Toni Stone, Pam MacKinnon is a badass, an elite athlete playing at the highest level. Pam's rehearsal room is very much hers, and still she so generously and deftly invites collaboration. A big part of this process has been the work of Camille A. Brown, the choreographer, who is absolutely amazing. Pam has created an environment in which we all work in concert. She empowers people in a way that brings forth their best work.

TS: Who are your favorite playwrights?

LD: There's Shakespeare. And I mean that seriously. Before I ever knew I was a playwright, I liked reading Shakespeare out loud. It feels good in your mouth. The first African American playwright I was introduced to was Lorraine Hansberry, and that meant everything. For years I auditioned with Beneatha's monologue from *A Raisin in the Sun* where she talks about the boy who was sledding and hurts himself and she realizes she wants to be a doctor. So many writers, peers, mentors, friends, who I've admired and have been inspired by: Lynn Nottage, Pearl Cleage, Paula Vogel, Dominique Morisseau, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, José Rivera, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Kia Corthron, Charles Smith, David Henry Hwang, Derrick Wolcott, J.T. Rogers, Kirsten Greenidge, Emily Mann. I really love Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out*, which has the single most amazing monologue ever written about a baseball fan's appreciation of the game. It's an impossible list to make, there are so many others. I love playwrights and I love plays, and always behind me is a bevy of young brilliant writers I'm just not cool enough to know yet.

TS: Do you have any advice for a young person who says they want to write for the theatre?

LD: There's the obvious piece of advice: WRITE. See everything, read everything, if you can, go to school, and write. Care little about outside affirmation and the size and import of the venue...care that you're telling well-written stories that matter, entertain, and inspire. And have fun. What's the point if we're not having fun? •



The company of Toni Stone

FINDING TONI STONE



The fact that Toni Stone's story is now being told at Roundabout is thanks largely to writer Martha Ackmann, whose 2010 book *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* provided the primary source for Lydia R. Diamond's play.

"I write about American women who did remarkable things that nobody has ever heard of," explains Ackmann. "These stories say something about how women have shaped our country and the obstacles they were up against." Her first book, *The Mercury 13*, recounts how, in 1961, a group of talented women pilots were tested to become America's first female astronauts, but then dismissed by NASA and Congress. (The book is currently in development for a television miniseries.)

Next, Ackmann wanted to explore women's athletics, recalling writer David Halberstam's quote that "behind every great sports story is a story of a nation." Raised as a Cardinals fan (she now also roots for the Red Sox) who loved playing softball as a child, Ackmann started with the smallest kernel of Stone's life. "I had always heard this one phrase: the woman who replaced Henry Aaron. That's all I knew about her story."

Approaching any new book, Ackmann first ensures there's a compelling narrative to keep a reader turning the page. Next, she asks what the story tells us about our nation. Finally, what does the story tell us about ourselves as human beings? Stone's experience provided a window on life for African Americans during Jim Crow America, as well

as the challenges of being a woman in that time. On a more universal level, Toni Stone's story asks, "What do we do when life gives us one imperfect chance to live our dreams?" Ackmann reflects. "She knew [playing with the Clowns] wasn't perfect, but she also knew it was the best chance she'd ever get. It's about those moments when we're faced with almost getting what we want most in the world. Even facing the compromises and discrimination, she took that chance."



Martha Ackmann
Photo by James Gehrt

Researching Stone's career was a challenge because most archival material about Stone has been lost. Racism has much to do with the erasure of black athletes from history. The Negro League was not covered by the mainstream white press, and the discriminatory conditions for black teams playing and travelling through the Jim Crow south made it harder to retain accurate documentation and statistics. Searching like a detective, Ackmann gathered inside information through interviews with older players and umpires who knew Stone. She was fortunate to have captured their oral histories before many of these men passed away. Stone's family and friends were also an important source, especially for understanding Stone's later years.

Ackmann is excited about theatre's ability to dramatize Stone's life in ways that nonfiction cannot. "I always feel a great responsibility to get it right, or as right as you can." Using dramatic license, the play echoes a core theme in Ackmann's work: "The question of why so many American women are erased from history is a particularly urgent one. Who gets to write history? Who doesn't? Who's in? Who's out? All of those questions interest me." •



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TONI STONE

Based on *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by Martha Ackmann. Available [HERE](#).

■ Toni Stone's Life ■ World Events

1920s

- **1920:** 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote
 - 1st Negro National League formed in Kansas City
- **1921:** Marcenia Lyle Stone is born in Bluefield, WV
- **1925:** The Ku Klux Klan has 3 million members during its heyday

1930s

- **1931:** Stone family moves to Rondo, a mostly black neighborhood in St. Paul, MN
 - Father Charles Keefe persuades "Tomboy" Stone's parents to let her play on the church baseball team
- **1932:** Approximately half of black Americans are out of work due to the Great Depression
 - Black athlete Jesse Owens becomes the first American to win four gold medals in one Olympics

1940s

- **1940:** Stone drops out of high school without a diploma, works odd jobs, and plays ball where she can
- **1941:** U.S. enters World WWII. During wartime, women find employment in manufacturing and labor jobs previously reserved for men
- **1943:** Stone moves to San Francisco, CA, to live with her sister and becomes a dockworker. Renames herself "Toni" and subtracts 10 years from her age in order to play on American Legion teams
 - Toni meets entrepreneur and political mover Aurelious Pescia Alberga, who was then 60 years old
- **1947:** Jackie Robinson breaks the color barrier as the first black player for the Brooklyn Dodgers, beginning integration of MLB and decline of the Negro League teams

1940s

- **1948:** Toni plays in the semi-pro Peninsula League
- **1949:** Toni joins the San Francisco Sea Lions (West Coast Negro Baseball League) and begins barnstorming across the country
 - Louis Armstrong is the first African American man to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine*. His appearance in black face in a Mardi Gras parade causes controversy and critiques of minstrelsy
- **1949–50:** Stone plays with the New Orleans Creoles and travels through the Jim Crow South

1950s

- **1950:** Toni marries Alberga. At his request, she does not play in the next season
- **1953:** Toni is offered a spot on Negro League team the Indianapolis Clowns, after Hank Aaron leaves for MLB. She barnstorms with the Clowns through the season
- **1953:** During an exhibition game, Toni hits a single off a fastball pitch delivered by legendary Satchel Paige, later recalling this as "the happiest day of my life."
- **Mid-1950s:** Throughout the south, Jim Crow laws enforce segregation in public spaces, such as bathrooms, at recreational activities, movie theaters, etc.
- **1953–54:** Toni is offered less money and is informed that Mamie Johnson and Connie Morgan (both 19) will join the Clowns, but only one woman will play in the starting lineup
- **1954:** Toni signs with Kansas City Monarchs. After one demoralizing season, she loses her joy for the game
 - Supreme Court ruling on *Brown vs. Board of Education* prohibits racial segregation in public schools
- **1955:** Toni returns to Oakland to care for Alberga. Although surrounded by her sisters and mother, she lacks a sense of purpose

1960s–70s

- **1960s:** Toni coaches baseball for teen boys and plays on recreational teams
 - Known as "Miss Tomboy Stone," she works in hospitals and as a home health care provider
 - Last Negro League teams fold
- **1964:** President Lyndon B. Johnson signs Civil Rights Act, preventing employment discrimination due to race, color, sex, religion, or national origin
- **1970:** Small mention of Toni appears in Robert Peterson's *Only the Ball Was White*, first history book about the Negro League
- **1972:** Title IX Education Amendment mandates equal funding for female sports programs in publicly-funded schools

1980s–90s

- **1988:** Alberga dies at age 103
- **1990:** Toni revisits St. Paul and is celebrated at "Toni Stone Day"
- **1991:** Toni attends recognition ceremony for former Negro League players at the National Baseball Hall of Fame & Museum in Cooperstown, NY
- **1993:** Toni is inducted into Women's Sports Hall of Fame on Long Island
- **1994:** Negro League Museum opens in Kansas City, displaying photos of Toni Stone
- **1996:** Toni dies of heart failure in Alameda, CA

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR APRIL MATTHIS

Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with actor April Matthis about her work on *Toni Stone*.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated?

April Matthis: I was born in Texarkana, TX—the birthplace of Scott Joplin and Ross Perot. I graduated from The University of Texas at Austin as an English Major with a minor in French.

TS: When did you decide to become an actress? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

AM: I feel like I've always been an actor. I knew I wanted to do it when I was 5 years old, but never thought about it as a real career until after college. I had taken a performance studies class that was cross-referenced with Women's Studies and English, called "Actual Lives." It was taught by deaf, queer performing artist Terry Galloway, and it opened up for me the possibilities of what performance could be, and how we perform ourselves in the world every day. That experience encouraged me to audition for my first play in community theatre in Austin, and I've been doing it ever since.

TS: What was your initial response after reading Lydia Diamond's play *Toni Stone*?

AM: I was struck by Lydia's highly theatrical approach to biography. I've admired her voice for years and felt a connection to Toni's peculiar brilliance. I got excited by how much there was to play in that.

TS: What do you feel the play is about?

AM: To me, it's about the relationship one has to one's life's work, which is intimate, essential, and personal. It's about choosing to believe and honor that calling in order to be fulfilled.

TS: Will you give us some insight into your process as an actress? What kind of preparation or research do you have to do in order to play the title role of Toni?

AM: In addition to diving into the Ackmann biography [*Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone, the First Woman to Play Professional Baseball in the Negro League*], right now I'm working on getting all these baseball stats under my belt.

TS: Are you a fan of baseball?

AM: I have never really followed professional team sports, but I have great respect for the physical skill, mental focus, and strategy required. I'm interested in the philosophy and psychology of the game, and its historical context for black people in America. These ideas feel like questions the play is exploring, too.

TS: When a play is about a real person, does that make your work harder or easier?

AM: I think it's harder, because there's the responsibility to do right by the subject, as opposed to inventing a character from scratch.

TS: How is the character of Toni relevant to you personally? I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your initial thoughts about who Toni is with us? What makes her tick?



AM: I'm hesitant to say what makes Toni tick this early in the process, as I'm sure the answer will keep changing for me. I'm excited to explore her in the rehearsal room with the rest of the team. What I can say I am discovering at this point is that while she may seem naïve at times, she's a good BS detector and a great advocate for herself and her abilities. I find her drive—contrasted with a certain lack of self-awareness—delicious to explore.

TS: Can you share some of your initial thoughts about the relationship between Toni and her husband, Alberga?

AM: I think there's a profound seeing of each other they share, which unlocks new feelings in Toni that she can't quite articulate or fully grasp. I'm curious to discover this in the rehearsal process with the wonderful Harvy Blanks, whose work I admire greatly.

TS: How do you understand the relationship between Toni and Millie at this point in your process?

AM: I think Millie's a woman who lives in her body in a way Toni avoids. She knows the costs of earning a living using her body in a way Toni doesn't, but they both have literal scars from what they do. I think she learns a lot about navigating the space of a cis female body from her.



TS: What do you look for when collaborating with a director?

AM: Someone who respects actors and the intellectual rigor of the craft of acting, and doesn't dismiss us as needy or dramatic. Someone with a clear vision of what the piece we're building is, and who can communicate that clearly and adeptly across disciplines, so that the design team, cast, stage management, and production team are all on the same page and complement each other. I've known Pam's work for years, and I am honored she's invited me to tell this story with her. I trust her insight and vision for this piece.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

AM: I'm curious about the world, about human behavior. And looking at the world as an artist helps me make sense of it. I find inspiration everywhere in my life in New York. The theatre scene has so many fascinating voices, stories, points-of-view that challenge and feed me. I'm also a fan of visual and performance art and dance—that work really sharpens my aesthetic sensibilities and gives me new ways to approach my work. My family and my connection to them and home are an endless source of inspiration, inquiry, and exploration.

TS: Students coming to see the play will read this interview and will want to know what it takes to be a successful actress — what advice can you give those young people who say they want to act?

AM: Be weird. Do weird stuff. Write. Make dumb videos. Consume less popular culture. Get really interested in yourself and what you like, even if you're the only one around you with those interests. Take your ideas and interests seriously. Take chances and take advantage of the many resources for young actors here. Be kind to yourself. Observe human behavior without judging it. Why do people do what they do? What's the story there? Stay very curious, and put yourself out there. Share with people who get you and are supportive. Don't open your art to people or teachers that make you feel bad. Let yourself be wrong, be embarrassed, and then do it again. If you stay in touch with your own creativity, the right work will find you. •



(L-R) Eric Berryman, Jonathan Burke, April Matthis, Daniel J. Bryant, and Ezra Knight in *Toni Stone*

THE NEGRO LEAGUES



Have you ever heard of the New York Black Yankees? What about the Homestead Greys, Baltimore Black Barons, or Cincinnati Tigers? From the 1880s until the 1950s, there were two professional baseball systems in the United States: one for white people, and another for African-Americans. Both contributed to the development of the modern game and baseball industry.



SEGREGATING BASEBALL

African Americans played baseball throughout American history, likely even back in 1792, the year of the first written mention of the game. The sport gained popularity after the Civil War, when men from around the country had played together while serving in the military. Teams, some integrated and some not, formed around the nation, and began to professionalize. In 1867, the National Association of Amateur Baseball Players issued a recommendation “against the admission [to the association] of any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons.” By 1900, baseball, like the country, was segregated—although several African Americans, including brothers Fleet and Weldon Walker, had played in the league before the ban on non-white players took effect.

BARNSTORMING

Soon, professional all-black teams were formed. The first of these was the Cuban Giants, established in 1885, who played to packed crowds on Long Island during the summer and in Cuba during the winter months. Other teams followed the same pattern of heading south to play in the winter, sometimes to Latin America, where baseball was always integrated. (Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Latinos played on American all-black teams and white

professional teams, while African Americans played on integrated teams in Latin America.)

These teams would play local baseball clubs, regardless of skin color, on diamonds ranging from major or minor league stadiums to small-town fields. Most drew large crowds. But without their own stadiums, teams were dependent on white booking agents for access to venues, and they couldn't set their own schedules. Booking agents also determined how much of the revenue from games was paid to team owners.



THE NEGRO NATIONAL LEAGUE

In 1920, Andrew “Rube” Foster organized a meeting of owners of professional black baseball teams. Foster, a retired pitcher and owner of the Chicago American Giants, the city's best black baseball team, sought to “create a profession that would equal the earning capacity of any other profession...[and] keep Colored baseball from the control of whites... [and] do something concrete for the loyalty of the Race.”

Modeled on Major League Baseball, Foster envisioned a black professional league that would rival white Major League teams. The other owners agreed, and the Negro National League kicked off the 1920-21 season with seven teams from the Midwest. Soon, the Southern Negro League and the white-owned Eastern Colored League were formed in their respective regions.

Despite financial challenges, the leagues held together through the 1920s. From 1924 through 1927, each season culminated in the Negro World Series, sometimes known as the World's Colored Championship. This nine-game series was played in different neutral cities, which allowed



the leagues to grow their fan base and take advantage of wherever a large stadium was available.

Negro League baseball teams had their own style of play: fast, aggressive, and with a bit of showmanship. Some teams, like the Indianapolis Clowns, deliberately incorporated entertainment—ball tricks, juggling, dancing, and slight-of-hand moves—into their games. Watch [HERE](#).

THE EAST-WEST ALL STAR GAME

The Great Depression hit black professional baseball hard. Most teams, as well as the Negro National League and the Eastern Colored League, folded between 1929 and 1932. Gus Greenlee, owner of the Pittsburgh Crawford as well as Greenlee Field, the only black-owned baseball field in the country, revived the Negro National League the following season.

Greenlee, a businessman who had made his fortune running illegal lotteries, brought his marketing acumen to the league. He established the East-West All Star Game, modeled on Major League Baseball's All Star Game. But instead of having sportswriters vote on the best players in the league, as Major League Baseball did, Greenlee opened up voting to fans. The idea was a hit, and the East-West Game drew baseball fans and black celebrities from around the country. The East-West Game drew more fans than the MLB's All Star Game ten times in the 29 years it was played.

INTEGRATION

After WWII, when soldiers of all races were critical to victory, pressure grew to integrate American institutions, including baseball. Jackie Robinson, a shortstop who began his career with the Kansas City Monarchs, was signed to play for a minor league team affiliated with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1945. After a season with their farm team, Robinson "broke baseball's color line" when he walked onto the field at Ebbets Stadium in Flatbush, Brooklyn on April 15, 1947.

As black players joined Major League teams, black fans—and their money—followed. The Negro National League folded in 1948. Its rival, the Negro American League, hung on through the 1950s, attempting to draw crowds by including women on their teams.

RECOGNITION

The contributions and achievements of Negro League baseball teams are often overlooked, but not forgotten. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, works to preserve the story of African American baseball in the United States, and thirty-five Negro league players, executives, and managers are now recognized in the National Baseball Hall of Fame, including Effa Manley, co-owner of the Newark Eagles and the first woman inducted. •



The 1943 Homestead Grays line-up included several future Hall of Fame players, including Cool Papa Bell, Josh Gibson, and Buck Leonard.

ON THE ROAD WITH THE CLOWNS



For Toni Stone, her teammates on the Indianapolis Clowns, and all other black baseball players in the early- and mid-1900s, the only way to professionally play the sport they loved was to endure the grueling schedules and pervasive discrimination of a career in the Negro Leagues. What was life on tour like for Toni Stone and her fellow ballplayers?

A RELENTLESS SEASON

While everyday life for Negro Leaguers depended greatly on the financial situation of their particular team owner, all players' daily schedules were nonstop. Each year, pre-season **barnstorming** games would begin for Negro League teams as early as February, with their regular season starting in April and ending in September. Negro League teams would, if possible, play a ballgame every day—sometimes even three or four—in order to keep the teams themselves in business and make the players enough money to live on. In between games, teams would travel up to hundreds of miles from town to town, sometimes overnight, on buses or in touring cars that could be uncomfortable and prone to breakdowns.

THE NEGRO LEAGUES AND JIM CROW

Negro League teams generally sought to forge connections with the local communities that they visited. Some towns welcomed players, but in many others, Negro League teams would have to contend with the discrimination of **Jim Crow laws**—statutes in existence from the end of the Civil War to the end of the Civil Rights Era that instituted racial segregation on the state and local levels and denied rights to black citizens.



Negro League teams like the Clowns were often prohibited from white-owned hotels in the towns and cities where they spent the night. For lodging, then, players would stay at black-owned hotels, or with black homeowners—generally Negro League fans—who opened their doors to them. Finding a meal could be a challenge, as white restaurants frequently wouldn't serve Negro League teams or required players to take their food at the back door.

CLOWNING AND MINSTRELSY: PERFORMANCE ON THE FIELD

A Clowns game featured much more than standard baseball. In addition to playing a regular game, the team would incorporate bursts of "clowning"—that is, a performance of a sort of "imaginary baseball" using exaggerated physicality, comedic timing, and feigned foolishness. While these tricks were impressive, team owner Syd Pollock's influence often caused them to verge on **minstrelsy**—a kind of performance founded in false and negative racial stereotypes, designed to make others laugh at the expense of marginalized people.

Minstrel acts first gained widespread popularity in 1830, when white actor Thomas Rice performed in New York as the character Jim Crow (after whom Jim Crow laws were later named), an offensive caricature of a disabled black stable groom. Darkening his face with makeup, Rice sang and spoke with an exaggerated accent and slowness, reinforcing negative stereotypes about enslaved black people. Rice and his peers helped make minstrel acts the most popular form of entertainment in the United States in the years preceding the Civil War.

The popularity of minstrelsy waned in the early 1900s, but television, film, and radio programs featured white actors portraying black people well into the 20th century. And when black actors were cast, their characters also contained offensive stereotypes. But for countless black actors, performing in these roles was the only way to gain access to Hollywood.

As the Indianapolis Clowns' experience attests, some white owners of 1930s and '40s-era Negro League teams designed those teams with minstrelsy in mind. Owners assigned teams derogatory names like the Coconut Grove Black Spiders and the Florida Colored Hoboes. The



Fans gather to watch the Oak Ridge Bombers, a Negro League Team, in 1948.
Photo by Ed Westcott, U.S. Department of Energy

Indianapolis Clowns themselves started as the Zulu Cannibal Giants (later the Ethiopian Clowns), who were made to wear costumes of stark white face paint, clown wigs, and grass skirts. When Syd Pollock bought the team in 1937, he renamed them the Indianapolis Clowns.

Though Pollock replaced the grass skirts with ruffled collars, the white greasepaint remained, and Pollock capitalized on the “novelty” of his players’ blackness and talents. He aggressively advertised their slapstick routines, and when black sportswriters critiqued his team management, he’d rent space in the papers to write angry op-eds defending his choices. By 1943, however, when the Clowns were officially incorporated into the Negro American League, much of the belittling costuming and overt minstrelsy ended, in accordance with League regulation. And while physical comedy remained a hallmark of the Clowns’ reputation, the team began to play by-the-book baseball.

ON THE ROAD AND ON THE FIELD AS THE “GAL GUARDIAN”

As the only woman on her team—and in the Negro Leagues overall—Toni Stone faced added targeting every day. It was in the advertising for the Clowns where Stone felt most “capitalized on.” Syd Pollock scouted Stone as an answer to lagging ticket sales, marketing her gender over

her athleticism when he dubbed her “the Gal Guardian of Second Base” in 1953.

A first clash between Pollock and Stone came with the question of her uniform: when told she’d be wearing a skirt-and-shorts combination, Stone refused: “I wasn’t going to wear no shorts.” As some male sportswriters responded negatively to a woman on the field, Pollock relied on promotional pieces to soften Stone’s image, often enlisting black-owned publications to promote her as demure and unthreatening. A spread in *Ebony* magazine showed her applying makeup in a mirror. One caption read: “Stone is an attractive young lady who could be somebody’s secretary.” Others commented on her size, the shape of her figure, and whether or not she was good “wife material.” Stone resented these sexualizing comments, feeling displayed “like a goldfish” and wanting to represent herself on her own terms.

Through all the unique challenges of a life in the Negro Leagues, Toni Stone and her fellow ballplayers drew strength from each other and from their love of the game to return to the field again and again. In remaining dedicated to their game, they paved the way for the racial integration of the Major Leagues in the mid-20th century. •

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PAM MACKINNON



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with director Pam MacKinnon about her work on *Toni Stone*.

Ted Sod: Why did you want to direct *Toni Stone*, and what is the play about for you?

Pam MacKinnon: This project has been in my life for over six years. I was approached by an independent producer, Samantha Barrie, who used to work at Roundabout and had just optioned the biography *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by Martha Ackmann. I devoured it. It's about this amazing woman who knew what she was—a baseball player—and manifests that for herself in spite of her status in the world. Toni Stone was a middle-class black American girl. She was the daughter of a barber in the Twin Cities, and she demanded that the world see her as a baseball player. She wound up being the first woman to play professional baseball at the tail end of the Negro Leagues. She played second base for the Indianapolis Clowns and had a career batting average of .256. This team was barnstorming in the Jim Crow South in the late 1940s and early 1950s. That was exactly when the "professional leagues," aka the white leagues, were starting to integrate. Interestingly, when the white leagues started to integrate, the Indianapolis Clowns felt they needed a gate attraction, and Toni Stone as a woman player was a novelty. Some teams bought an elephant; the Indianapolis Clowns signed a woman.

The play is not just about one woman's ambition. It deals with self-recognition and the work that goes into polishing raw talent with both force and charm. It's also about racism in America—something that we as a country don't talk about enough. This story hits that reality front and center, and that was very important to me.

TS: How did you and Samantha decide that Lydia Diamond was the playwright to adapt Martha's biography for the stage? Who else has been vital to the process of developing this work, and how has it been developed?

PM: Six years ago, when we started this collaboration, Lydia Diamond's play *Stick Fly* was being produced on Broadway. I also knew Lydia's adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. We hadn't worked together before. We knew each other socially and had mutual respect for each other's work. When Samantha and I approached her, she said, "Let me read the book. I know nothing about baseball." She, too, fell in love with this story. The first thing that she put down on the page was that amazing first monologue, which hasn't changed in more than five years. It sets everything in motion. From there, we did workshop after workshop. Lydia did workshops on her own at Harvard because that is where Martha Ackmann works, and workshops were also held at Arena Stage in D.C., where the play will be produced later. More recently with Roundabout, we started to work with actors in a room around a table over the course of a week. Lydia and I would discuss what we thought we wanted to have different by the end of the week. We would hear things and Lydia would go away, then we'd get new pages and we would hear it again.

About two years ago, we brought choreographer Camille A. Brown into the process to focus on physical elements. In the Negro Leagues, it



wasn't just that you had to be an athlete, there was also a fair amount of minstrelsy. Camille, Lydia, and I are in discussion about the tricks and the "cooning" that was part of it. We did one movement workshop, not with actors, but with dancers to generate some baseball-based movement. Camille worked with a company of six dancers who she knew well. I attended the final day of the workshop and, at the end of it, I asked everyone to circle up and relate what they had felt over the days. A couple of people said they felt they had to toggle back and forth between absolute confident joy and oppression. We're telling Toni's story ostensibly 80 years after it happened. Camille, the choreographer, said, "Why is it that African American women have to work so goddamn hard to be recognized?"

When you develop a project over such a long period of time, to finally get to do a full production feels so rich.

TS: As a director, how do you make suggestions to a writer about rewriting?

PM: I've been living with this text for a long time. You want to really dig into the writer's intent. At the center of this play is a woman who is a force of nature, who knows certain things about herself. She is also completely naïve about other things when it comes to social behavior and love. She navigates a difficult world and ultimately does so really well. Lydia and I have discussed that it's a big play on American



themes. A few weeks ago, we met for auditions, and afterward, we sat together in a small room and read act two aloud with each other. We talked about the points where it feels like it's going into "plot points land" and questioned things. For example, when Alberga proposes, does he have to talk about it? Probably not. He can get down on one knee, there can be a movement gesture, and then we can segue into the next chapter of Toni's life. We also talked about how we want to make sure that Toni and her husband have a rip-roaring fight. We don't want her husband to be the one who gives her permission to go back and play baseball. So, we asked each other, "What is that scene?"

TS: How do you see Toni's relationship with her husband Alberga at this point in your process?

PM: I think he just finds her really sexy. She's independent, she's an athlete. There's this great black-and-white photo of them – I think it might have been in an early *Ebony* magazine – and he's giving her a massage. He wasn't a politician himself, but he told people who to vote for. He was a politico. In real life and in the play, he's an exceptional man. He's a compelling figure. I think he really believes in Toni. I'm hoping to put on the stage that these are two complementary misfits. He's older and he has stature in the Fillmore district of San Francisco. Both Toni and Alberga were superstars in this African American and very important political district in the Bay Area around World War II. All of that is based on truth.

TS: You have mentioned in an article I read that you are attracted to plays about people who are isolated. Is that true with this play?

PM: Absolutely. Toni is a woman on an all-male team. If you're on a bus barnstorming through the Jim Crow South, where do you stay? The men can sleep on the bus, so the females wound up sleeping in brothels. In this play, Lydia has invented the character of Toni's first female friend, Millie, a prostitute, who schools her in some of the finer ways to be a "girl." Their relationship starts out with Millie being charmed by the fact that she is hosting this person who she's heard a lot about, and ultimately they become very sisterly.

TS: Were there specific traits you were looking for in casting?

PM: This is an African American baseball play, so it's nine African American actors including April Matthis, who plays Toni Stone. April is the only woman in the cast. The other eight male actors play members of the team, white men, black women, Alberga and Millie. The team keeps reinventing the world around Toni while she negotiates her way through it. In casting, I always look for a sense of humor. Lydia's language on the page is deceptively hard. It's really tricky for some actors, and for others it sits well in their mouths. There is a very particular Diamond-patois. Over these years, with a lot of actors cycling into readings and workshops, we both know when they can and can't do it. So one essential quality is, does the language actually fit in the actor's mouth? The cast also has to be seemingly athletic. There are a lot of actors who've been with it for years and who will be in this company. It's quite a mixture of NYC- and Chicago-based actors because that's Lydia's stomping ground.

TS: Have you worked with all of the designers in the past?

PM: Both Riccardo Hernandez, the set designer, and Dede Ayite, the costumer, are new to me, but I've been a big fan of their work. I really value that this is an African American story and, as a white woman, I don't want the burden to be on my actors to teach me things. I also want my designers telling me what they think. I definitely wanted a diverse team. Both Allen Lee Hughes, the lighting designer, and Dede are black. I've done several projects with Allen, including *Clybourne Park* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, so I wanted him to be with me on this one. In putting together a design team, I really love that combination of people I've worked with frequently as well as a few new people. I have worked with Broken Chord Designs a lot. They are a sound team made up of Aaron Meicht, who will do original music, Daniel Baker, who does sound effects, and Phillip Peglow, who works purely on the technical aspects. They work as an amazing team, and I'm so happy to work with them again after collaborating on *The Parisian Woman*, which was on Broadway last season.

TS: How has it been being the artistic director at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco?

PM: It has been incredibly exciting to me. With great help from my associate artistic director, Andy Donald, we put together the current season. We also just announced the coming season a few weeks ago. I've had a 25-year freelance career, but now I'm thinking in bigger terms, making artistic marriages by being able to invite directors that I have respect for. We've also already programmed *Toni Stone* for next season as a co-production with A.C.T. and Arena Stage, which I feel is the exciting power of an artistic director. I get to say, "I'm not waiting for a kiss on the forehead from reviewers. I believe in this play, I believe in this writer, I believe in the director, who happens to be me." •



April Matthis and Toney Goins
in *Toni Stone*

BARRIER BREAKERS IN SPORTS

Toni Stone was the first female professional baseball player. Her contributions to the sports industry were supported by many who broke barriers before her, just as she paved the way for those who came after.

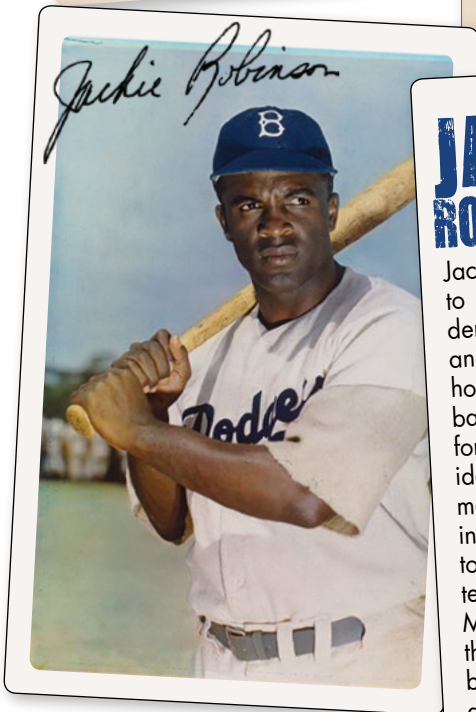


TIDYE PICKETT

Home: Englewood, Chicago, IL
Born: November 3, 1914
Known for: First African-American woman to compete in the Olympics

It was not until 1928 that white women were permitted to compete in track and field events in the Olympics. Women of color were forced to wait even longer. Both Tidy Pickett and Louise Stokes qualified for the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, but they were pulled from their races and replaced by white runners with slower qualifying times. Athletic excellence and persistence over prejudice won out, and both women competed in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, where Pickett was finally allowed to run the 80-meter hurdles.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).



JACKIE ROBINSON

Home: Cairo, Georgia
Born: January 31, 1919
Known For: First African-American to play Major League Baseball (in the modern baseball era)

Jackie Robinson was the first college athlete to letter in four sports, but due to financial demands, he left UCLA before graduating and enlisted in the U.S. Army. After being honorably discharged, Robinson began his baseball career in the Negro Leagues playing for the Kansas City Monarchs. He was identified by the Brooklyn Dodgers general manager, who was specifically interested in integrating the league, and was drafted to play for the Dodgers' minor league farm team. Robinson played just one season on the Montreal Royals before he was moved up to the major leagues. Like Toni, he played second base. Despite enduring persistent heckling during games and threats off the field, Jackie Robinson won the Rookie of the Year Award and went on to win the National League's Most Valuable Player award two years later.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).

RACINE BELLES

Photo courtesy of National Baseball Hall of Fame Library



Home: Wrigley Field, Chicago

Established: May 17, 1943

Known For: First World Champions of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL)

During WWII, Major League Baseball team owners created women's teams because male baseball players were being drafted into the military, and the owners worried that they would have too few players to field teams and draw in fans. The trailblazing Racine Bells, as well as the other three teams that made up the AAGPBL, faced continued sexism throughout their professional careers. Despite the fact that they were playing by Major League rules, they were nearly stripped of their right to call themselves baseball players in favor of the term "softball." Their uniforms were short, flared dresses with shorts underneath, which were not conducive to sliding or squatting. Each player received a beauty kit they were expected to use. They were also required to attend evening charm school classes. None of the trustees who created the league or determined the rules were women.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).



Home: New York City, NY
Born: August 19, 1934
Known For: First transgender player accepted into a professional sports league

Renée Richards had a notable tennis career long before she broke a major barrier for trans athletes. In 1953, she played in the U.S. Men's Nationals and was ranked 13th nationally in the men's 35-and-over division. After completing her transition, Richards entered the 1976 U.S. Women's Open but was denied entry when the United States Tennis Association required a chromosome test for women entries for the first time in history. She refused to take the test and sued the USTA for discrimination on the basis of sex. Richards won her case and competed in the 1977 U.S. Open, making it to the final round in doubles.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).

SHERYL SWOOPES

Home: Brownfield, TX
Born: March 25, 1971
Known For: First signed professional female basketball player

Sheryl Swoopes's basketball career took off in college when she won the National Player of the Year award in 1993 for playing a major role in getting the Texas Tech Lady Raiders to a NCAA Championship win. When the Women's National Basketball Association formed in 1996, Swoopes was the first player signed to the Houston Comets. As a testament to female athletic strength, Swoopes gave birth during her first season and returned to the court weeks later to lead her team to win the first WNBA Championship. In 2005, Swoopes also became the first professional basketball player to come out as gay. She has won every individual and team achievement she qualified for in college, professional, and international play including three Olympic gold medals, four WNBA titles, and three Most Valuable Player awards. She is also the first woman basketball player to have Nikes named after her: the Air Swoopes.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).

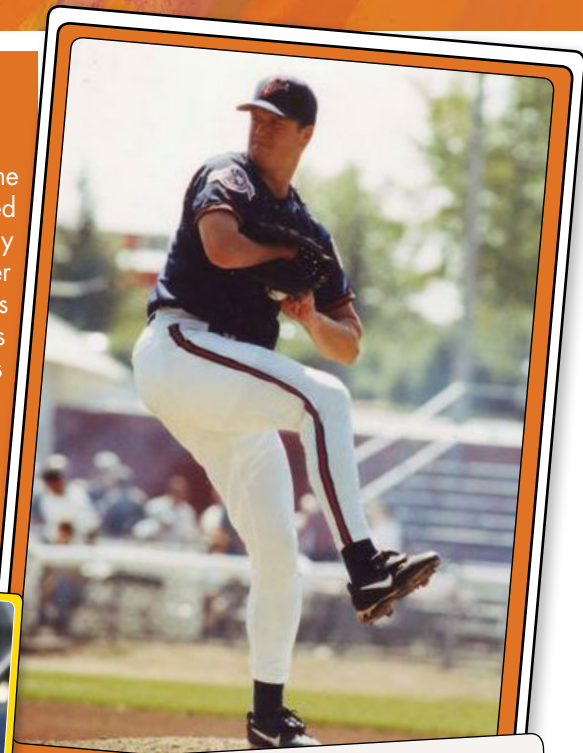


JASON COLLINS

Home: Northridge, California
Born: December 2, 1978
Known For: First openly gay male player in any of the four major American sports

Jason Collins was drafted to the New Jersey Nets in 2001 and played center in nine NBA playoffs for six different teams. It was not until 12 years into his NBA career, when he was a free agent and unattached to any team, that Collins felt comfortable enough to come out. He wrote a story for Sports Illustrated Magazine publicly coming out as the first openly gay male athlete in any of the four major American team sports – baseball, football, hockey, and basketball. Collins has become an outspoken advocate for gay rights politically and within sports, choosing to wear jersey number 98 in remembrance of the year that Matthew Shepard was killed in Laramie, Wyoming for being gay.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).

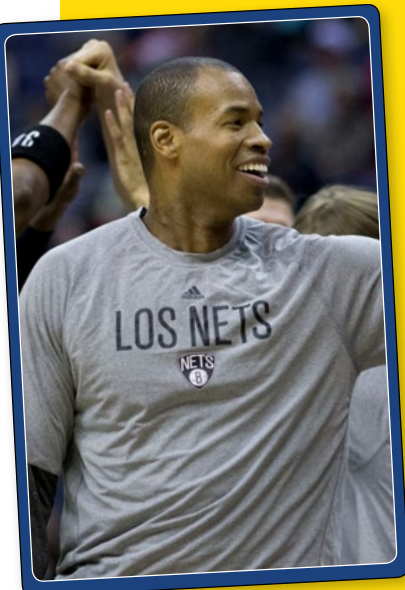


JIM ABBOTT

Home: Flint, MI
Born: September 19, 1967
Known For: Notable physically disabled player in the MLB

Despite being born without a right hand, Jim Abbott pitched his first no-hitter game in little league at the age of 11. His athletic prowess won him a Major League contract offer directly out of high school, but he turned it down, doubting his ability to match the level of professional play. Instead, he attended University of Michigan, where he was named best amateur athlete in the country. Abbott regularly faced questions as to whether he would be able to keep pace as the level of play around him increased. Abbott put these questions to rest by winning a gold medal in the Olympics before he began his professional baseball career with the Angels in 1989. Abbott regularly volunteered and donated to organizations that support children with disabilities, though he was met with criticism from teammates and team owners for not focusing on the game enough. He pitched one of the 299 no-hitter games in MLB history.

FOR MORE INFO CLICK [HERE](#).



ARTIST STATEMENTS



RICCARDO HERNANDEZ—SET DESIGN

So far this process has been a wonderful collaboration. I didn't know anything about Toni Stone when I first read Lydia Diamond's play. The deeper I got into the story, the more aware I became that this was a real person who played baseball in the Negro Leagues and was the only woman on an all-male team. After I read the prologue of the play, I immediately started looking for pictures of her. I never had an experience like that before. In designing the set for this play, my first instinct was to make sure that there be a very intimate connection to audience. I wanted the design to be somewhat presentational—so the character of Toni could be with today's audience as she's telling her story. When Pam MacKinnon, the director, talked about the Laura Pels Theatre itself becoming the stadium featured in the play, it was clear to me that we were thinking alike. It was then a matter of articulating what that feeling of the "stadium" was in model form. Roundabout produced a workshop of the script that involved the director and playwright working with a choreographer and actors, and there was one breathtaking moment from that workshop. It was when the team was in the bus. They were using two benches and it was very dance-like and ritualistic. When they sat down, you totally believed that they were on a bus, traveling. We are going to use the same kind of ritualistic transitions to create a bedroom and a tavern, in addition to creating the stadium and other locations when necessary. We might add a lamp or two or other iconic elements, but we will never lose the sense of what this ritualistic space/stadium/theatre is as we tell the story.

DEDE AYITE—COSTUME DESIGN

After reading the final words of the main character in *Toni Stone*, with adrenaline pumping and my heart full, I immediately wanted to be involved in telling this beautiful, inspiring story. What a fascinating way to learn about the real Toni Stone, to

experience her journey as an African American woman who sought to not only follow her dreams but excel tremendously at them. She was able to balance the demands of society, one's own ambitions, and the curveballs life throws our way.

As a costume designer, the first read-through is often essential, as it allows me to authentically note my reactions and feelings. Through either physical or mental note-taking, I use this time to delve deeper into the world of the play and its characters. The play *Toni Stone* is unique because we have a team of actors/storytellers/literal "players" who will play multiple roles. With the exception of Toni, our principal character, they will shift into a variety of roles to give us, the audience, a complete window into her story. The team truly serves as the foundation of the story, and they are all dressed ready to "play ball!" This is where my research begins, with a goal of capturing the details of what they wore, how it felt, and what it meant. Finding ways to express the individuality of each character and develop a language that helps the audience understand when a specific player takes on a different role to further the story telling is a large part of my role. I tend to refine my research findings, with additional layers added once fittings begin. During this time I am able to observe the actors in their garb, seeking the specific ways they are tapping into their characters, noting how they move in the uniform and the unique identities they create for each character. It's been a joy to uncover Toni Stone's story, as she seeks to uncover the space we as women occupy in this world and the balance between what we desire, the world's expectations, and how those expectations attempt to define us.

DANIEL BAKER & AARON MEICHT—ORIGINAL MUSIC & SOUND DESIGN

Toni Stone is exactly the kind of play our company, Broken Chord, loves bringing to life with sound and original music. Set in the world of the Negro Leagues in the 1940s and ranging from ball field to bus to bar, bed, and back again, sound and music helps the audience navigate not only these various physical spaces, but also the complex intellectual and emotional landscape of Toni's mind. Much of our work will be developed in the rehearsal space with the actors, director, and choreographer; however, we do begin the process with a rough map of the terrain. Toni and her eight teammates introduce us to their game of baseball with very theatrical storytelling. We'll set the scene with all the aural signatures of baseball, and the choreographed movement will be accompanied by a score that evokes the bebop of Dexter Gordon, Charlie Parker, and Bud



Costume design research for *Toni Stone*



Powell. As we move through the piece, we'll encounter Jack's Tavern, a smoky early '40s bar where Saunders King led the house band with his new brand of electric blues guitar. The play then pares down to scenes between two and three characters; an intimate interior where actors become individual characters and we invest in their personal journeys. The play modulates again and again from this compressed emotional and scenic atmosphere to the wide-open blue sky of the baseball diamond revealing moments of both utter joy and stark oppression. We'll provide the appropriate sonic mix of music and sound to help take the audience on that journey.

CAMILLE A. BROWN—CHOREOGRAPHER

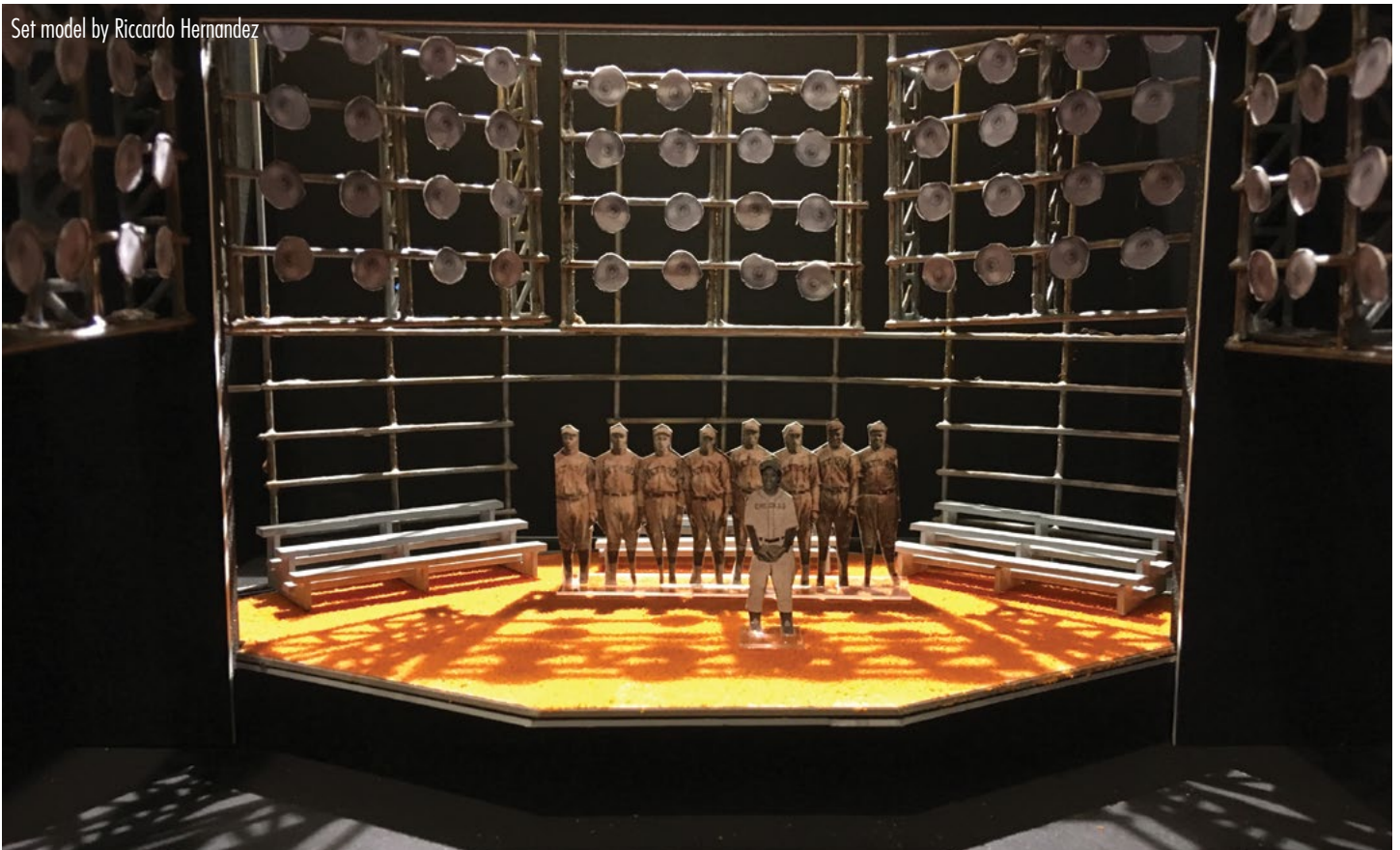
It made me terribly sad that I didn't know anything about this powerful black woman before I read Lydia Diamond's play, *Toni Stone*. Women—especially black women—have always persevered and beaten the odds, and Toni's inspiring story encourages me to push forward regardless of any obstacles. Fifty years later, the unwavering strength she needed to withstand racism and sexism is a powerful lesson for all of us. Lydia's play encourages audiences to look at contemporary

politics and attitudes toward race and grapple with how to walk into the future.

Creating the choreography for a play about the first woman to play baseball for the Negro Leagues was challenging because when you hear "baseball," the first thing that comes to mind is probably not dance. However, the gestural language of baseball players can be crafted and shaped into choreographic movements. Through this form of communication, my task is to elevate these gestures and movements, so that regardless of whether you are a neophyte or a baseball connoisseur, you can follow both the game and the storytelling.

The process with Pam MacKinnon, the director, involves a deep collaboration with constant dialogue. I am always guided by an actor's choice-making. Over time, I've learned to be comfortable with not always having the answer. A creative space should be about discovery. Pam and Lydia have created an ideal space for me to work in during the developmental workshops of *Toni Stone*. I feel supported and encouraged—which is truly a gift. •

Set model by Riccardo Hernandez



PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR
EDUCATORS

HOW DO ACTORS DEVISE TABLEAUX TO EXPLORE THE LIFE OF TONI STONE?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2)

Prior to seeing *Toni Stone*, students explore Stone's career, then develop a series of tableaux to present her story on stage.

RESEARCH Introduce students to athlete Toni Stone by reading the *Curveball* Summary, available [HERE](#). Next, read aloud the timeline of the major events of Stone's life on page 7 of this guide.

DEVISE Divide students into groups of three to five. (For this activity, it's preferable to have more small groups) Assign each group one event in Stone's life from the timeline. Students create a tableau (a frozen stage picture) representing this event. Guide them to focus on Stone's discovery or emotional reaction within their tableau. They may use dramatic license to imagine a moment before or after the event. Finally, have students give their tableau a title.

PERFORM Have each group state their title and present their tableau, moving in chronological order.

REFLECT What choices did you make in order to stage this event? How is seeing a person's story performed different from reading about them? Based on what you know about Toni Stone, can you predict what parts of her story the play may emphasize? Why?

EXTENSION You may build on these tableaux by allowing students to write dialogue for their tableaux. After seeing the play, you may also follow up with the devising post-show activity below.

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HOW DOES A DRAMATURG USE STATISTICS TO INVESTIGATE AND INTERPRET A HISTORICAL STORY?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.IC.B.5)

Before seeing *Toni Stone*, students utilize statistics skills to develop an understanding of the historical significance of specific baseball players.

LEARN In baseball, statistics are recorded and used to create a summary of a player's history. Read the Statistics Worksheet (found [HERE](#)) to learn what each statistic indicates and how to calculate average statistics.

CONTEXTUALIZE Listen to the short podcast "Negro League Stats, As They've Never Been Seen" (found [HERE](#)) to learn more about the importance of baseball statistics to understanding history.

PRACTICE Using the worksheet, students will calculate the statistics for players in the Major Leagues and the Negro Leagues.

ANALYZE What do the statistical differences that you calculated indicate? What do their statistics tell you about their careers? Thinking back to the podcast, what conclusions can you draw from those differences? Why might these statistics look the way they do?

HOW DOES AN ENSEMBLE DEVISE A THEATRICAL BIOGRAPHY OF A BARRIER-BREAKING INDIVIDUAL?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4)

After discussing how *Toni Stone* dramatizes Stone's life, students identify other athletes or prominent cultural figures and create their own stage biographies. (**NOTE:** If possible, use the devising tableaux pre-show activity before seeing the show.) This may be used as a stand-alone activity, or it may be extended into a longer project.

- DISCUSS** What theatrical techniques did the artistic team of *Toni Stone* use to adapt her life into a play? (For example: focusing on key events, creating composite characters based on real people, dialogue, physical staging, actors playing multiple roles and crossing race/gender lines.) How is this play relevant to our society?
- RESEARCH** Break students into small groups. Allow students to select ONE of the barrier-breaking athletes summarized on pages 16-17. Read about them, and follow the links to learn more. (You may shift the focus to people who broke barriers in other fields, such as entertainment, music, science, etc., and have students research other figures of their choice.)
- DEVISE** From their research, students focus on ONE pivotal event in this person's life, and create a tableau (a frozen stage picture) representing this event and how the individual is acting or reacting in this moment. While holding the tableau, each character speaks one line of dialogue, or speaks aloud a thought, in relation to the central character.
- PERFORM** Have each group show their tableau with dialogue to the group.
- REFLECT** What events did you look for when dramatizing this person's story? What makes a person's story compelling on stage? What are some common themes or issues we notice across these people's lives?
- EXTENSIONS** The optional next step is for each group to write more dialogue, to expand each tableau into a scene. They may further extend the project by repeating the tableau-dialogue process to devise more scenes from their individual's life and build these scenes into longer plays.

HOW DOES A COSTUME DESIGNER USE RESEARCH TO UPDATE A HISTORICAL TEAM LOGO TO APPEAL TO A NEW GENERATION OF FANS?

(Common Core Code: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSS.IC.B.5)

Before seeing *Toni Stone*, students utilize statistics skills to develop an understanding of the historical significance of specific baseball players.

- RESEARCH** Read "The Negro Leagues," found on pages 8-9 of this guide, and access a list of Negro League teams **HERE** and **HERE**. You may also want to read the costume designer Dede Ayite's Artist Statement found on page 18. Have students, working individually or in small groups, choose one team to create a tribute uniform for. Using the websites listed above as a starting point, have students find at least one primary source photo of the team in uniform and write a one-paragraph summary of the team's history. What were their major achievements? What were they known for?
- DESIGN** Have students design a tribute logo using the template found **HERE**. What elements (color, shape, texture, line) of the original design will they preserve? What updates are they making to appeal to today's young sports fans?
- SHARE** Host a Design Presentation Meeting. Have each student or small group present their new design and explain how it honors the original team.
- REFLECT** Why is it important to remember and honor these teams? How else could we raise awareness of the contributions of Negro League teams and players to baseball and to sports in general? Where do we see their impact?

GLOSSARY AND RESOURCES



- BARNSTORMING:** originally referring to the touring practice of entertainers who “stormed” into small towns and used barns as theatres to present their acts, the term evolved to refer to the practice of sports teams that arranged and played exhibition games outside of their regular season to make extra money
The Indianapolis Clowns often would barnstorm in the south against teams outside of the Negro Leagues.
- BULLDAGGER:** highly insulting and rude slang for a masculine-presenting lesbian, which often carries a racialized meaning
Some of Toni’s teammates call her a bulldagger.
- COONING:** the act of imitating or playing into the false and hateful “coon” stereotype, which depicts a black person as lazy and buffoonish, often to please a white audience
Toni reminds the rest of the team that the top of the fifth inning is cooning time.
- ETYMOLOGY:** an explanation of where a word came from; the history of a word
Spec doesn’t use certain words because they have a troubling etymology.
- FORTITUDE:** strength and bravery that allows someone to face danger or pain with courage
Some people thought that Jackie Robinson was hired to play in the Major Leagues because his fortitude would help him endure the prejudice he would face.
- MISCEGENATION:** mixture of races, especially in marriage
Some people thought that Jackie Robinson was hired to play in the Major Leagues because his fortitude would help him endure the prejudice he would face.
- RAZZED:** to tease someone playfully or heckle someone
One of Toni’s teammate’s doesn’t get razzed because he is nice to everyone else.
- REFERENDUM:** a public vote on a specific issue
Alberga calls a city council meeting to try to get them to vote down a referendum.

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

ROUNDABOUT ARCHIVES

PEEKING THROUGH THE CURTAIN: STORIES FROM THE ARCHIVES

As we look at *Toni Stone*, based on a real-life female baseball player, we can look back at the many productions in Roundabout's past that have historical figures as protagonists.

Theresa Rebeck's *Bernhardt/Hamlet* (2018) focused on several real-life people (Sarah Bernhardt, Edmond Rostand, Constant Coquelin, and more); *Sunday in the Park with George* (2008) is a fictionalized account of the painter Georges Seurat; *Diversions and Delights* (1979) had Vincent Price portraying Oscar Wilde; and *1776* (1997) told the story in song of the Declaration of Independence and the men of the Second Continental Congress who were instrumental in securing its existence.

One production that has additional historic resonance is 2004's *Assassins*. The production explores several figures with the unique commonality of being attempted/successful assassins of U.S. Presidents. What adds to the history of this show is the fact that the production was scheduled to be staged during September 2001, but the 9/11 attacks prompted Roundabout to postpone it until a time when the country had better healed from the events. *Assassins* was finally staged three years later. •



The cast and crew of Roundabout's 1997 production of *1776*



Roundabout's 2004 production of *Assassins*

For more information on the Roundabout Archives, visit <https://archive.roundabouttheatre.org> or contact Tiffany Nixon, Roundabout Archivist, at archives@roundabouttheatre.org

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA JONES, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS COORDINATOR FOR THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become the education department's Community Partnerships Coordinator?

Olivia Jones: I was born and raised in Ventura, California—a beach suburb just North of Los Angeles. I fell into theatre by accident. My high school cancelled the choir program, so I placed into Drama to complete my art credits. There, I caught the theatre bug! I spent my summers participating in youth theatre programs at the Rubicon Theatre. I eventually went to Cal Poly Pomona to get my Bachelors in Theatre. In undergrad, I honed my arts leadership skills by becoming president of the Off-Broadway Musical Theatre Club. I spent my summers managing the theatre program at Iroquois Springs. My senior year, I found myself interning at Center Theatre Group. I later moved to Omaha, Nebraska to be a teaching artist at the Rose Theater. I helped young people to devise advocacy-based theatre, performed in theatre for young audiences, and devised theatre and lesson plans for neurodiverse audiences. I knew I wanted to coordinate education and community programs at non-profit theatres, so I applied to graduate school to deepen my understanding of the non-profit theatre field. I just received my MFA in Arts Leadership from Virginia Tech. While in graduate school I interned with Lincoln Center Education and Roundabout. The conclusion of my internship this past summer with Roundabout timed perfectly with the Education Department's expansion. I was then lucky enough to be hired as the Community Partnerships Coordinator!

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

OJ: I coordinate Roundabout Community Partnerships programs, Audience Engagement programs, and Upstage Guides. Additionally, I support Education at Roundabout programming and Relaxed Performances.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

OJ: The best part of my job is that I get to connect so many different people and further connect them to the work that is being done on and off Roundabout stages. Theatre Plus programs connect Roundabout subscribers and audience members to each of our productions. Relaxed Performances provide an inclusive and welcoming space for all theatregoers — many of them first-timers! As more and more community partnerships form, many New Yorkers who did not consider Roundabout a place for them find themselves becoming members of the Roundabout family. What's better than helping new friends find a home in Roundabout?

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

OJ: First and foremost, I love theatre! My first Broadway show was a Roundabout production. I was seated next to a student Theatre Access group while seeing *Anything Goes*. I saw the way that the students engaged with the piece, interfaced with the Teaching Artist, and utilized the Upstage Guide to deepen their understanding of the production. The experience inspired me to investigate arts education at home and eventually to find my way to Center Theatre Group. Roundabout is where it all started for me, and I'm delighted to take part in providing similar experiences. •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the restroom for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.

ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY • 2018-2019 SEASON



Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO), a not-for-profit company founded in 1965, celebrates the power of theatre by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present, and educating minds for the future. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

Commissioned by Roundabout Theatre Company and Samantha Barrie, supported by The Educational Foundation of America.

Toni Stone is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award.

This production is supported, in part, by the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

We gratefully acknowledge the Roundabout Leaders for New Works: Alec Baldwin, James Costa and John Archibald, Linda L. D'Onofrio, Peggy and Mark Ellis, Howard Gilman Foundation, Jodi Glucksman, Sylvia Golden, Judith and Douglas Krupp, K. Myers, Kathryn Patterson and Tom Kempner, Laura Pels International Foundation for Theater, Ira Pittelman, Laura S. Rodgers, Mary Solomon, Lauren and Danny Stein, Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, and The Tow Foundation.

Roundabout Theatre Company is thankful to the following donors for their generous support of \$5,000 or more to Roundabout's education programs during the 2018-2019 school year.

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This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Education programs at Roundabout are also supported, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

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