

PARALLELS

by

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One was White, the other was Black, but the two of them were more similar than probably either of them had imagined. Neither of them was from the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area, yet both of them acquired their greatest fame there. Each man was about the same size. Each was a fiery baseball player whose primary position was left field. Each batted left-handed and threw right-handed. Each played for at least 18 years in the major leagues and had a career batting average over .300, with comparable totals for hits and runs scored per 162 games. Each was a highly successful player-manager who won multiple league championships—some when there was no postseason competition—and one World Series title, which was achieved the same year as the last league championship. Each had Forbes Field as his home park for part of his career. And each was a middle child with one or two siblings who also played professional baseball at the highest level.

Who were these men? National Baseball Hall of Famer Fred Clarke, who is perhaps the only person who could have been inducted into baseball's Valhalla as both a player—his form of entry—and a manager, and Negro Leaguer Vic Harris, who deserves to be elected to the Hall of Fame (HOF) as a manager.

Because the National League of Clarke's days scheduled on average approximately two and a half times as many games as did the Negro Leagues of which Harris was a member, certain comparisons are difficult, if not impossible, to make.

However, having said that, the parallels, as shown in the following table, are remarkable.

Category	Fred Clarke ¹	Vic Harris ²
Height	5 feet, 10 and ½ inches	5 feet, 10 inches
Weight	165 pounds	168 pounds
Primary Position	Left field	Left field
Bats	Left-handed	Left-handed
Throws	Right-handed	Right-handed
Number of Seasons Playing in the Majors	21	18
Batting Average	.312	.305
Hits/162 Games	193	186
Runs Scored/162 Games	117	121
League Championships Won as a Manager	4 (1901-1903, 1909)	7 (1937-1938, 1940-1942, 1945, 1948) ³
World Series Titles Won as a Manager	1 (1909)	1 (1948)
Forbes Field as a Home Park	As one of his home parks, 1909; as his sole home park, 1910-1915, ⁴ 1925-1926 ⁵	As his sole home park, 1925-1931; as one of his home parks, 1932, 1936-1937, 1939-1948 ⁶
Birth Order	Middle child (9th of 12)	Middle child (3rd of 7)
Siblings Who Played in the Majors	1 (Joshua), as well as a brother-in-law (Charles Fraser)	2 (Cornelius and William)

Of course, there are some differences as well. Of these, the most significant are Clarke's superior numbers for on-base plus slugging average normalized, 133 to 113,

wins above average per 162 games, 2.5 to 0.8, and wins above replacement per 162 games, 4.9 to 2.8. In addition, Clarke was the better fielder with a 2.36 range factor per nine innings and a .952 fielding percentage when the National League's outfielders averaged 2.12 and .945. In contrast, Harris was 1.81 and .951 when the outfielders in the Negro Leagues in which he played averaged 1.92 and .956.⁷

But, as with Clarke, a strong argument can be made for Harris being chosen for the HOF as a manager. In 11 seasons of skippering the Homestead Grays, he led the club to seven league championships and one World Series title and was victorious in 547 regular-season games against major league African American teams. At the same time, he lost only 278 games, for a .663 winning percentage and 269 games above .500. Or if his postseason numbers are included, he was 557-293, .655, and a +264.⁸ And when all these figures are taken together, they show him to be the most successful manager in Negro League history. True, Candy Jim Taylor won more games, 955, than Harris, and Bullet Rogan had a higher winning percentage, .698. However, Taylor's winning percentage was .491 and he was 36 games below .500, with three pennants, and Rogan had 257 victories, was 146 games above .500, and captured one pennant.⁹ Thus, the combination of Harris' accomplishments puts him ahead of both men and at the top of the list for Negro League managers.

Clarke and Harris never played or managed against each other, but Pittsburgh baseball fans were doubly blessed by their presence.

⁷Information on Clarke came from "Fred Clarke," www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022); "Fred Clarke," www.retrosheet.org (accessed on March 1, 2022); "Park Directory," www.retrosheet.org (accessed on March 1, 2022); and William Howard Scarff, "The Clarke Family," unpublished material given to the author by Margaret Donahoe Burroughs.

²Information on Harris came from “Vic Harris,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022); “Vic Harris,” www.seamheads.com (accessed on March 1, 2022); and “Victor Harris,” www.ancestry.com (accessed on March 1, 2022).

³In 1939, the Homestead Grays, who Harris was managing, had the best regular-season record in the Negro National League, but they were defeated by the Baltimore Elite Giants in the playoffs to determine the league champion.

⁴Clarke played and managed in Exposition Park III for part of the 1909 season.

⁵Clarke served as the assistant to the manager for the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1925 and 1926 and helped to lead them to the World Series crown in the former season.

⁶Harris played in Greenlee Field and Hamtramck Stadium for parts of the 1932 season; in Greenlee Field for parts of the 1936 and 1937 seasons; and in Griffith Stadium for parts of the 1939 through 1948 seasons.

⁷For Clarke’s statistics, see “Fred Clarke,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022); for Harris’, see “Vic Harris,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022).

⁸For Harris’ managerial statistics, see “Vic Harris,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022).

⁹For Taylor’s managerial statistics, see “Candy Jim Taylor,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022); for Rogan’s, see “Bullet Rogan,” www.baseball-reference.com (accessed on March 1, 2022).