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THE PLAY

It's 1953 and a barrier in baseball is about to be broken. **Toni Stone** is a skilled player with an encyclopedic knowledge of baseball. When she is signed by the Indianapolis Clowns, a Negro League team (see article), she becomes the first woman to play professional baseball on a big-league team.

Although it looks like just a publicity stunt to draw crowds, Stone's baseball talent and abilities are undeniable. Despite her talent, Stone is subjected to racism from the fans in the stands and sexism from some of her teammates in the dugout.

Although relentlessly focused on baseball, Stone catches the eye of **Alberga**, a successful businessman who tries to sweep her off her feet. Stone knows baseball, but love is another story. Her friend **Millie** is her confidante as she navigates the world outside the ballpark.

Through it all, Stone defies expectations and the odds against her as she reaches to do the thing she loves most: play baseball.

*Photo of Santoya Fields as Toni Stone
by Tony Powell.*

ARENA STAGE, IN ASSOCIATION WITH
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER, PRESENTS
ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY'S PRODUCTION OF

TONI STONE

WRITTEN BY **LYDIA R. DIAMOND** | DIRECTED BY **PAM MACKINNON**

CHOREOGRAPHED BY **CAMILLE A. BROWN**

IN ASSOCIATION WITH **SAMANTHA BARRIE**

KREEGER THEATER | **SEPTEMBER 3 – OCTOBER 3, 2021**



**“I play with ‘the big boys.’ Only ever did play
with the boys, even when I was a little girl.”**

— Toni, *Toni Stone*

Toni Stone was commissioned by Roundabout Theatre Company and Samantha Barrie. Sponsorship for *Toni Stone* and Arena Stage is generously provided by Beth Newburger Schwartz. Supporting Sponsorship for *Toni Stone* is generously sponsored by AT&T, Susan and Steve Bralove, Exelon and Sue Henry and Carter Phillips.

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

Lydia R. Diamond was born in Detroit, Michigan. Diamond was born into a family of musicians and educators. She was expected to learn an instrument and played the violin for 11 years. After feeling like she was a horrible violinist, Diamond carved her own path and discovered a love for theater after joining her high school drama club.

Diamond pursued a degree in acting at Northwestern University. As a college student, she was not exposed to theater written by or about Black

people. When she went to audition for shows, instead of taking lines from plays she read in school, she wrote her own. After she graduated, she decided that she was much happier writing plays than performing in them.

Throughout her career, Diamond has written award-winning plays including *Harriet Jacobs*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *Voyeurs de Venus*. In 2011, Diamond's play *Stick Fly* was produced on Broadway by R&B artist Alicia Keys and ran for three months. From winning

the Lorraine Hansberry Award for Best Writing to being named a W.E.B. DuBois Institute non-resident fellow, Diamonds work continues to earn her national recognition and acclaim. She was a 2013/14 Arena Stage resident playwright.



LYDIA R. DIAMOND

TONI STONE BIOGRAPHY

“A woman has her dreams too... a woman can do many things.”

– Toni Stone

Marcenia Lyle “Toni” Stone was born July 17, 1921 in Bluefield, West Virginia. Stone grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. Her father was a barber, and her mother ran a beauty shop. In the biography *Curveball*, Martha Ackmann writes Stone “was an astonishing athlete who seemed to excel at everything she attempted: swimming, golf, track, basketball, hockey, tennis, ice skating. She was even the most feared kid in the neighborhood when it came to playing red rover.”

When Stone was 10, the priest at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church saw her potential as a baseball player and recruited her for the church's all-boy baseball team. After dropping out of high school, Stone moved to San Francisco to live with her sister and focus on playing baseball. She changed her childhood nickname from “Tomboy” to “Toni.”



Santoya Fields as Toni Stone. Photo by Ryan Maxwell Photography.

Stone was determined to find teams that would allow women to play. Early in her career Stone played on several barnstorming (exhibition) and pre-professional teams across the country, including the Twin City Colored Giants, San Francisco Sea Lions, and New Orleans Creoles. Along the way, she dropped 10 years off her age.

In 1953 the Indianapolis Clowns hired her to play second base in the Negro Leagues, making her the first woman to play professional baseball. She was the replacement for baseball legend Hank Aaron, who had joined the major leagues.

Stone was an undeniably skilled player. However, that was not the primary reason she was hired. After major league teams began to integrate, some Negro League teams folded due to low fan turnout. Many teams looked for creative ways to attract fans. For the Indianapolis Clowns this meant hiring a woman to be on their team.

Stone faced challenges and prejudice throughout her career. She said, “People weren’t ready for me.” She

endured harsh treatment from fans, other players and teammates. Some teammates resented her for getting more attention than them. While traveling for games, Stone and her teammates also faced overt racism, from racial slurs to the denial of services and accommodations.

Nevertheless, Stone persisted and stayed focused on playing ball. Her batting average was .243 and she hit a single off pitcher Satchel Paige, one of the greatest pitchers of all time.

Stone has left a lasting legacy in baseball history. She was inducted into the Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 1993 and has been featured at the Baseball Hall of Fame. Since 1990, March 6 has been recognized as “Toni Stone Day” in her hometown of St. Paul, Minnesota and a baseball field in her childhood neighborhood is named for her.

BATTING AVERAGE A statistic that shows how often a batter gets a hit. A batting average of about .240 is average, .300 is considered excellent and .400 and above is exceptional.



A 1950s newspaper clipping showing professional baseball player Toni Stone.

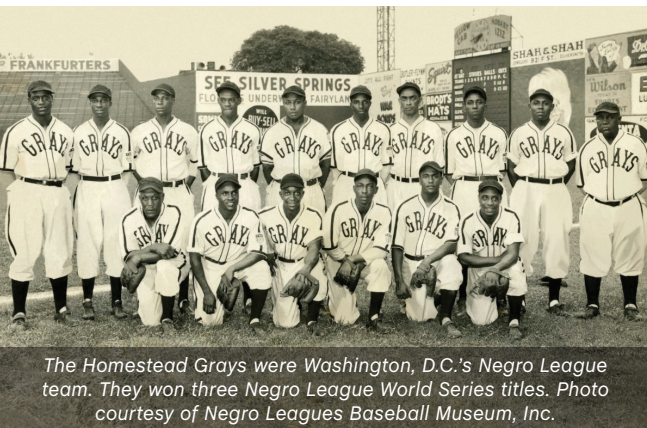
THE NEGRO LEAGUES

This abridged article was originally published in Roundabout Theatre Company's UPSTAGE Playgoer's Guide, created for the world premiere of Toni Stone in 2019.

African Americans have 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 Welday Walker, had played in the league before the ban on non-white players took effect.

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 winter months. All-Black 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 Homestead Grays were Washington, D.C.'s Negro League team. They won three Negro League World Series titles. Photo courtesy of Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Inc.

In 1920, Andrew "Rube" Foster organized a meeting of owners of professional Black baseball teams. 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 season with seven teams from the Midwest. Soon, the Southern Negro League and the white-owned Eastern Colored League were formed.

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 sleight-of-hand moves – into their games.

After World War II, 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 on April 15, 1947.

As Black players joined Major League team, 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.

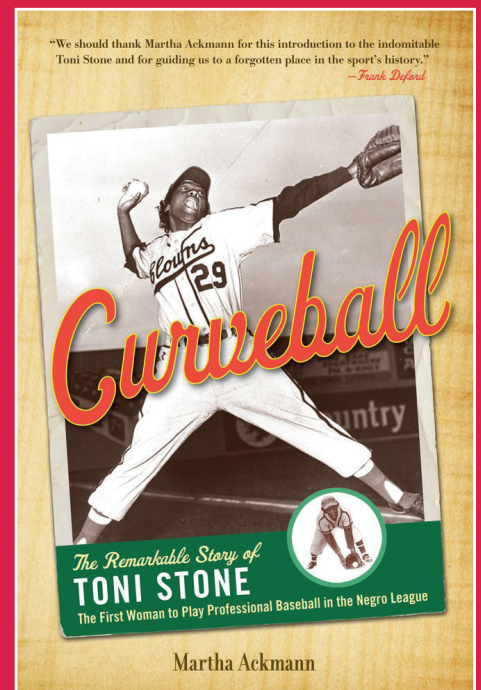
The contributions and achievements of Negro League baseball teams are often overlooked, but not forgotten. The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri works to preserve the story of African-American baseball in the United States and 35 Negro League players, executives and managers are now recognized in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.



READ

The book *Curveball* by Martha Ackmann is a comprehensive biography of the remarkable life of Toni Stone. In an interview with Roundabout Theatre Company, Lydia Diamond said, "without Martha's definitive biography, and generous championing of this project, there most certainly wouldn't be a play."

Younger readers may enjoy *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream* written by Crystal Hubbard and illustrated by Randy Duburke.



WATCH

Toni Stone was raised in the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. Watch this video of her friends and loved ones explaining the legacy she has left in Rondo and across the country.

https://youtu.be/OzjD_bagwxA

ACTIVITY

Camille A. Parker choreographed Toni Stone, blending dance, pantomime and baseball.



Players from a local baseball team, the DC Grays, came to a rehearsal to help actors make their movements authentic. How would you put a sport on stage? As a class choose a sport. List the sport's key movements and formations. Next, get up on your feet and experiment with how you could show the sport on stage. Challenge yourselves to balance being artistic and authentic.

WOMEN IN BASEBALL

The earliest records show that women have been playing baseball since 1866. According to History Colorado, from 1890-1904, teams of single young women traveled the country, playing men's teams. They were called "Bloomer teams" for the loose pants they wore.

In the early 1900s several women were recruited to play on men's minor league teams including Elizabeth Stride, Alta Weiss and Jackie Mitchell. Despite their skill level and interest, they were still barred from joining the major league teams. After Toni Stone was hired to play in the Negro Leagues, two more women, Mamie "Peanut" Johnson and Constance Morgan, soon followed behind her.

It wasn't until the 1990s that a woman, pitcher Ila Borders, played in the minor leagues again. Then, in 2010, Japanese pitcher Eri Yoshido was signed to a U.S. minor league team. In 2016, an independent minor league team, the Sonoma Stompers, signed Stacy Piagno and Kelsie Whitmore. However, a woman has yet to play for a Major League Baseball team.



A 1950s newspaper clipping showing professional baseball players Toni Stone, Mamie Johnson and Constance Morgan.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In an interview, when asked to give advice to a young person who is interested in playwrighting, Lydia Diamond said:

“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?”

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What does it take to reach a goal, especially when you are the first to do so?

2

How do you navigate expectations that others place on you?

3

What is the impact of discrimination and stereotypes on communities?

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

RESOURCES

"Bloomer Girls Baseball." History Colorado. <https://tinyurl.com/3r9fwhr4>

Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone, the First Woman to Play Professional Baseball in the Negro League by Martha Ackmann. Chicago Review Press, 2010.

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"Interview with Lydia Diamond." Roundabout Theater. <https://tinyurl.com/8t8khw97>

"Lydia R. Diamond." Harvard Radcliffe Institute. <https://tinyurl.com/374yrd8n>

Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. <https://nlbm.com/>

Roundabout Theatre's Upstage Guide for Toni Stone https://res.cloudinary.com/roundabout-theatre-company/image/upload/v1559591323/PDFs-and-FORMS/UPSTAGE/ToniStone_Upstage_Web_PostOpen.pdf

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"Toni Stone." Britannica. <https://tinyurl.com/9hp9esvn>

"Toni Stone Made Baseball History..." Sports Illustrated <https://tinyurl.com/yhs3hdd3>

"The Women of Minor League Baseball." Sports Retriever. <https://tinyurl.com/zrkbsfuw>



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