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Jackie Robinson's forthcoming statue breaks new ground

- UK researchers have tracked down all of Jackie Robinson's statues ahead of a new statue being unveiled at Dodger Stadium
- Jackie Robinson currently has seven statues in his honour – more than any US sportsman or woman
- Only two of his existing statues depict him playing baseball, with the rest celebrating his social achievements or association with the statue's location

News of the impending Jackie Robinson statue at Dodger Stadium has not just captured the imagination of stateside baseball fans but has also piqued special interest across the Atlantic.

Dr Chris Stride, from the University of Sheffield in the UK, and Ffion Thomas, a PhD student from the University of Central Lancashire, have researched and written in depth about the existing monuments commemorating Jackie Robinson, and their unique place amongst the 300+ other US baseball statues that they have catalogued as part of their Sporting Statues Project database (www.sportingstatues.com).

They found that Jackie Robinson's seven current statues, plus a giant public-sited bust in Pasadena, are the most of any US sportsman or women, and globally rank him behind only fellow baseball icon Roberto Clemente (12) and soccer legend Pele (10).

However the characteristics of Robinson's statues differ from much of the US baseball statuary. Only two of the Robinson statue designs actually depict him playing baseball. None of the plaque inscriptions give Robinson's detailed career statistics or mention his membership of Pennant and World Series winning teams, instead entirely focusing on praising his social achievements, and/or his association to the statue's location.

These very locations also take Jackie Robinson out of baseball – amazingly, Robinson's new statue at Dodger Stadium will be his first at a current MLB facility. That the Dodgers have not previously honoured him is perhaps due to their franchise history. Stride and Thomas found that relocated franchises are significantly less likely to have statues, and where they do, they rarely honour players who starred in the franchise's previous location and incarnation.

Dr Stride said: "Statues tell us as much, if not more about the societies and cultures that erect them as they do about their subjects. The many monuments to Jackie Robinson reflect

not only his critical and courageous role in driving profound social change, but also the desire of communities to celebrate both Robinson's achievements and their part in his story.

"The designs and locations of these statues, whilst honouring his huge social impact and courage, have perhaps failed to also highlight his baseball achievements and those of the great Dodgers team he played in. Jackie wanted his skills as a ballplayer to be the story – to the extent he had his Hall of Fame plaque rewritten to prioritise his baseball achievements – so it is great that he is finally being honoured at a Major League facility, by the franchise that he starred for."

To download a paper on the subject of Robinson's statues, written by Dr Stride and Ffion Thomas in conjunction with University of Sacramento researcher Maureen Smith, visit <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09523367.2014.923840>

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For images and further information: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/jackie-robinson-sporting-statues-1.692929>

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Notes to editors:

The Sporting Statues Project

The Sporting Statues Project, based at the University of Sheffield, UK is a cross-disciplinary research study that records and researches figurative statues and other forms of commemoration of sportsmen and women around the world. Since 2010 we have published a series of academic papers and magazine articles, spoken at sport history, visual art, and sports marketing conferences, and collected information on over 600 statues.

At present the project website at <http://www.sportingstatues.com> displays databases for all UK-sited sporting statues, US baseball statues, the world's cricket statues, and the world's

football (i.e. soccer) statues. For news on forthcoming project publications and website updates, follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/sportingstatues>

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