Bell, Cool Papa,

byname of JAMES THOMAS BELL (b. May 17, 1903, Starkville, Miss., U.S.--d. March 7, 1991, St. Louis, Mo.), American professional baseball player, reputedly the fastest baserunner of all time.

Bell began as a pitcher for the St. Louis Stars in the Negro National League at the age of 19 and earned the nickname Cool when he struck out legendary Oscar Charleston; Bell's manager added "Papa." He played centre field for the Stars (1922-28), for the Pittsburgh Crawfords (1933-37), in the Mexican League (1938-42), for the Homestead Grays in the Negro National League (1943-45), and as player-manager of the Kansas City Monarchs in that same league (1948-50). He also played in the California Winter League and in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, as well as on occasion with other Negro teams. A right-handed batter who later became a switch hitter, his average ranged from .308 to .480. He reputedly stole 175 bases in a 200-game season. (Statistics in Negro baseball were not carefully kept.) Playing against all the greats of Negro baseball and against white All-Star teams, Bell batted .391 over a five-year period. He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1974.