

Luscious “Luke” Easter

Born: August 4, 1915 in Jonestown, MS, USA; Died: March 29, 1979

Bats: Left; Throws: Right; Height: 6’4”; Weight: 240; Position: 1B

Induction: Puerto Rico 2025

The story of Luke Easter can be split into two halves: one of Bunyan-esque legend and another rich in documentation. His path to the majors was long and winding, including stops in industrial leagues, the military, semi-pro clubs, the Negro Leagues, the minor leagues, and eventually first base for the Cleveland Indians. Easter was 33 when he played his final Negro League game, but he continued to destroy baseballs for another 15 years, collecting over 420 official home runs. Despite consistent production—including 93 home runs with Cleveland—major league roster spots for Black men remained scarce in the mid-1950s, particularly for those approaching 40. Relegated to the minor leagues and winter ball, Easter thrived, becoming a Hall of Famer in both.

After winning the 1948 Negro World Series title with the Homestead Grays, Easter dominated the Puerto Rican winter league with Mayagüez. He batted .402 and slugged .751, winning MVP honors and receiving a contract from the Cleveland Indians. He had tormented pitchers in Venezuela the previous winter, batting .341 while leading the league in home runs. He debuted for Cleveland in 1950 at age 34 and established himself as a premier power hitter, batting .280 with 28 home runs and 107 RBI. He maintained this pace through 1952, earning down-ballot MVP votes, but a broken foot in 1953 hampered his power. Sent to the minors in 1954, he was never recalled despite batting .315 with 28 home runs.

He returned to winter ball in 1954–55, winning MVP honors in the Mexican Pacific League with a .371 average and 20 home runs. He followed that up by hitting .293 and slugging

.607 in Puerto Rico in 1955–56. In 1956, Easter joined the International League’s Buffalo Bisons, becoming the team’s first Black player since Frank Grant in 1888.¹ He became a beloved fan favorite, belting 40 home runs to earn the 1957 Most Valuable Player award. He hit 38 more in 1959 before moving to the Rochester Red Wings, where he continued to slug over .500 well into his late 40s. Easter played his final professional games in 1964 at age 48. In all, he hit 269 minor league home runs—all at the Triple-A level, just a stone’s throw from the majors. He was selected to the International League Hall of Fame in 2008, a year after the institution was relaunched following over four decades of dormancy.

If Easter was this prolific in his late 30s and 40s, his prime remains one of baseball’s greatest “what-if” stories. Early in his career, Easter played seven seasons with the St. Louis Titanium Giants, a semi-pro outfit that offered Easter both a position in a very competitive lineup and a steady day job with the American Titanium Company. He played with the club from May 1935 until his 1941 season ended due to a broken leg suffered in a car accident with teammate Sam Jethroe. After serving 13 months in the Army, he earned an honorable discharge in 1943 and took a civilian job at a chemical plant in support of the war effort.

After the war, he barnstormed with Abe Saperstein’s Cincinnati Crescents in 1946—reportedly batting .415 with 74 home runs—before joining the Homestead Grays in 1947. Tasked with replacing the offensive output of the recently deceased Josh Gibson, Easter earned East-West All-Star honors and a championship in 1948. While box scores verified by the Seamheads Negro Leagues Database credit him with 12 home runs for the Grays in 1947 and 1948, Philip Lee’s *Black Stats Matter* cites over 100 more across all levels of competition during

¹ Joseph Wanchow, “Luke Easter,” *SABR Baseball Biography Project*, accessed April 5, 2026, <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/Luke-Easter/>.

that span. Overall, Lee's research credits Easter with at least 655 career home runs, with just a handful recorded prior to age 30.²

Easter's reputation as a "Gentle Giant" ultimately made him a target. Later in life, he worked for TRW (Thompson Ramo Wooldridge) and served as a union steward, entrusted by his colleagues to collectively cash their paychecks. On March 29, 1979 he was leaving the bank with the cash when a pair of men (one a former TRW employee aware of Easter's arrangement) attempted to rob him. The thieves were caught off guard when Easter drew a firearm of his own to defend the funds. In the ensuing struggle, Easter was shot. Following a brief police chase, the suspects were apprehended, but the beloved slugger was tragically killed.

² Philip Lee, *Black Stats Matter: Integrating Negro League Numbers into Major League Records* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2022), 200–202.