With little fanfare, Mountain States League history is made on Monday, August 26, 1951, when Middlesboro’s Bob Bowman and Pennington Gap’s Dick Mims take to the mound in the first game pairing two African-American pitchers.

Adding to the significance of the event is that Bowman, at the end of an extremely successful rookie season, is 45 years old, while Mims, a former Homestead Gray, is thought to be anywhere from 50 to 58 years old.

The highly-anticipated pitching duel taking place in the middle of the league’s pennant race turns out to be one-sided as Mims is pulled in the first inning after yielding three runs to the hit-happy Athletics. Bowman, pitching for a second-straight day, has a 12-1 lead going into the bottom of the ninth before tiring and yielding five runs.

Among Middleboro’s 17 hits are home runs by Bowman (his only one of the year), Eddie DeHogues, Oscar Rodriguez (later named the 1952 Puerto Rico League Rookie of the Year), Marion Fajo. Bill Halstead and Tony Immatteo have four-baggers for Pennington Gap.

With only four days and six games left to play in the regular season, Middlesboro, with the win, increases its lead over the Miners for the fourth and final spot in the league playoffs to 4 1/2 games.

The game also marks the debut for George Kennis, the Athletics’ new manager replacing Ted Russ who tendered his resignation Sunday evening following four-straight losses to the seventh-place Norton Braves. Under Kennis, Middlesboro will close out the season with five wins in seven games before losing in the first round of the playoffs to Morristown.

Bowman’s last appearance in 1951 is a 13-inning masterpiece on September 4, in a 13-inning 3-0 loss to the Morristown Red Sox in the first round of the league’s post-season playoffs. Bowman and Gordon McDonald “hook up in a sizzling duel” for 12 innings before the Red Sox push across three runs in the top of the 13th. Bowman strikes out 11 and allows only five hits in the season-ending setback.

The signing of Bowman back on May 8, causes quite a stir in the Mountain States League with league president Virgil Q. Wacks giving the transaction a lukewarm approval (see left).

The popular Bowman will finish the season 17-6 with a 3.49 ERA and 175 strikeouts and 88 walks in 196 innings pitched. The 175 strikeouts are the third-most among league hurlers while his 17 wins tie for sixth and his ERA is ninth. Twenty-three of his 27 games were starts.

Later in life, Bowman suffers a stroke that eventually leads to his death at the age of 69 in Middlesboro on June 25, 1975.