

The Negro League Courier

The Newsletter of SABR's Negro Leagues Committee

June 1999

Editor: Sammy J. Miller

Peace, Love & Flowers!

Send all correspondence, both Committee and newsletter related, to
Committee Co-Chairman Dick Clark, 1080 Hull, Ypsilanti, MI 48198-6472
Home (734) 487-5273; Fax (734) 487-0807; e-mail TSTEARNES@aol.com
** Denotes items available for SASE from Committee Co-Chairman
Dick Clark - Please affix enough postage (usually 1 stamp/4 pages)

Benson Called Safe At Home

Gene Benson, legendary outfielder for the Philadelphia Stars and former NLC member, died in his home in Philadelphia on Tuesday, April 6 of congestive heart failure. He was 85 years old. Remembered for his stellar play at 44th and Parkside in Philadelphia and throughout the country, Benson used the basket catch years before Willie Mays and was a mentor to a young Jackie Robinson. There is a piece of advice that Benson gave Robinson that I would like to paraphrase. It is directed to all those that knew and loved Mr. Benson. Always remember, where he's gone ain't half as tough as where he's been.

Funeral Program **2pgs.

"Gene Benson, Negro League Outfielder" from 4/12/99 *Washington Post* **1pg.

"Gene Benson, former Negro League Star, dies at 85" from *Associated Press* **1pg.

"Gene Benson, 85, Negro Leagues outfielder" from *Philadelphia Inquirer* 4/10/99 ** 1pg.

"Negro League Star Gene Benson Dies" from *Philadelphia Daily News* 4/9/99 ** 1pg.

"Mays Wasn't First Fielder To Employ Basket Catch: Negro Leagues Outfielder Gene Benson Dies at 85" from 5/14/99 *Sports Collectors Digest* **2pgs.

"Philly's Gene Benson Was Winner On and Off The Field" by William C. Kashatus **1pg.

"In Recalling Baseball Great, Signs of Changing Times" by Acel Moore **1pg.

Get Well Wishes

Ted Raspberry, last surviving owner of an NL team, recently suffered a stroke and is recovering nicely. Send "get-wells" to 46 Hall St. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49507.

Bob Boyd, the former Memphis Red Sox and Baltimore Orioles first baseman just had his left leg amputated. Send get well cards to Mr. Boyd at: 2811 North Vassar, Wichita, KS 67220

Contributors

As always this newsletter would not have been possible without the help of others. I would like to thank, in addition to the judge that ruled the search of my office was illegal and thus freed me, those that passed along the info found within this month's Negro League Courier. They are Todd Bolton, Rich Bozzone, Bwana Clark, Kit Crissey, Bob Davids, Frank, D'Amico, Paul Debono, Reginald Dwight, Jeff Eastland, Mike Everett, Larry Gerlach, Leslie Heaphy, Larry Hogan, John Holway, Dave Jordan, Neil Lancot, Larry Lester, Jerry Malloy, Gary Maurer, Joe Mitchell, Cliff Otto, Jim Overmyer, Lou Parrotta, Bob Peterson, John Pierce, Bill Plott, Jim Riley, David Skinner, Tim Vrana, and Lyle Wilson.

Committee News & Member Updates

The NLC annual report is available. **1pg
The new NLC address list is available. **3pgs.
Greeting and Salutations to new NLC members James Floto and John Russell!
Floto, publisher of The Diamond Angle Quarterly. His address is 706 So. Alu Road, Wailuku, HI 96793.
Russell has been a regular contributor of biographical information to the committee. His address is P.O.
Box 990267, Boston, MA, 02199, Phone (617) 247-0491.
New e-mail address for Rick Morris is rick.morris@demgroup.com.
Delete the work phone number for Rod Nelson on your NL Committee address list. He is now working at home.
Brent "Mr. Interview" Kelley has a new address. It is 1901 Thatcher's Mill Rd., Paris, KY 40361. Phone is now 606/362-4240. FAX: 606/362-4219.

Hall of Fame News

NLC member Neil Lanctot gets an official Negro League Courier pat on the back and high five for finding out that Hall of Famer Joseph "Smokey Joe" Williams died in New York City on Feb. 25, 1951. The previous date of May 12, 1946 came from a player questionnaire filled out for the Hall of Fame by one of Williams' relatives. "Smokey Joe Waved Home" from *Philadelphia Tribune* 3/17/51 **1pg. This is from a sports columnist's piece, so we still need an obit for Williams. Larry Lester reports that neither the *New York Age* nor the *New York Amsterdam News* ran one.

In addition, Stew Thornley reported on the SABR-L that Williams is buried at Lincoln Memorial Cemetery on Suitland Road in Suitland, Maryland. For the record, Suitland Maryland is located nine miles southeast of Washington, D.C.

Negro League Con II: Atlantic City Bash

One page flyer with the latest news on the NLC/Pop Lloyd Committee Con is available. **1pg.
Planning on attending the conference? Good. How about a piece of friendly advice, ok? REGISTER NOW! Come people lets get the lead out! Send a check for \$70, made out to the "Pop" Lloyd Committee, to Mike Everett, 1014 Maple Avenue, Linwood, NJ 08221. It will be a great time. I am so sure of this fact that for a limited time *The Negro League Courier* will give you a special guarantee. If you don't think that you had \$70 worth of fun at the convention then I guarantee you'll think twice about going to the next one. (You didn't actually think I was stupid enough to say you'd get your money back did you?)

For your hotel reservations call the Clarion Bayside Resort at (609) - 641-3546 and tell them you want to make reservations for the SABR Negro League Baseball Conference. Room rates are \$49 a night for Thursday and Sunday nights, and \$89 a night for Friday and Saturday.

Anyone with topics they wish discussed at the NLC meeting (Eastern version) please pass them along to Dick Clark.

Obituaries

William "Bill" Owens died on Wednesday, May 5, 1999 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The 98 year old Owens was the last surviving member of the Eastern Colored League. He was a great reservoir of history and the inspiration for Paul Debono to write his fine book THE INDIANAPOLIS ABC's. Funeral program **3pgs. "Negro Leaguer for Indianapolis team dies at 98" from the 5/7/99 *Indianapolis Star* **1pg. Web version of obit from the *Indianapolis Star* ** 2pgs. Web version of *Associated Press* story **2pgs.

Wallace Guthrie, former pitcher with the Memphis Red Sox and the Birmingham Black Barons, died April 7, 1999 in Paris Tennessee. He was 77 years old. Obit available **1pg.

Sam Barber, a pitcher and outfielder for the Kansas City Monarchs and the Birmingham Black Barons, died April 18, 1999 at the age of 79. 4/23/99 obit from the *Birmingham News* **1pg. "Family of Late Black

Baron Barber Keep Memory Alive" from the 5/16/99 *Birmingham News* **1pg.

Robert R. Taylor, a catcher for the St. Louis Stars, and New York Black Yankees, among other died in Binghamton, New York on May 16. He was 82 years old.

Special Events

Due to the involvement of Sammy J. Miller with the following two news items, the editorial staff of the Negro League Courier contracted writer R. Ellim to cover the event.

"On April 14, the Main Branch of the Cincinnati Public Library was the site of "Clowns, Red Sox, and American Giants: Life in the Negro Leagues". The program was a panel discussion of the Negro Leagues moderated by local sports writer from the Cincinnati Enquirer John Erardi. The panel consisted of Chuck Harmon, formerly of the Indianapolis Clowns, Thomas Turner, former Chicago American Giant, and Charlie Davis, former member of the Memphis Red Sox. Local historian and writer Sammy J. Miller also sat in on the panel as an expert on the Negro Leagues. (Yeah, I know it's a stretch but that's what they called him. The really sad part in that he was the best they could come up with.)

The program, which ran from 12:10 pm to 12:50 pm, had an impressive turnout with a crowd that looked to number in the area of fifty people, ranging from 8th graders from a local school to the elderly. The event was very well received by those present, with the only downside being the shortness of the program.

Tom Turner, Charlie Davis, and Bunny Warren of the Detroit Stars, were joined at Porter Middle School in Cincinnati by Sammy Miller on May 7 for a talk on the Negro Leagues. Former Cincinnati Red and San Francisco Giant Eddie Milner was also present and spoke on the importance of staying in school. Around sixty 7th and 8th graders were present for the talk that lasted around two hours.

Buck O'Neil was inducted into the Florida Sports hall of Fame on April 26th. Film at 11:00.

Ray Dandridge was inducted into the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame on May 7th. Our own Jim Riley was the presenter for Dandridge.

The following report is courtesy of Negro League Courier cub reporter Skippy Clark.

"Larry Lester arrived in Detroit on Friday April 23rd. to begin an exciting weekend. On Friday he toured the city and spent time at The Motown Museum and the site of Mack Park (in Detroit), Tiger Stadium and the Comerica Park site. Saturday ushered in his 40 minute slide presentation "Discover Greatness" presented at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit. After Larry's excellent show and a question & answer session, the crowd was treated to a 8 minute presentation by Chavis Harrison on Negro League baseball and integration. Her presentation has won awards and Chavis will go on to the Michigan State Competition. She is very, very polished. Many players were in attendance at the Museum and great fun was had by all.

Much appreciation to Michelle Parchment for coordinating Larry's appearance in Detroit. Afterwards we accepted an invitation from Mr and Mrs Rufus Lewis to join Ron Teasley, his wife, Louis Manley Jr. and son Louis III, and Lucky Smith and his two sons, for homemade ice cream. Well, we ended up with a complete dinner, a grand time and great story telling.

On Sunday Larry and I got together at my home before we departed for the airport and his flight back to K.C. A tiring but outstanding get together."

Larry Lester also recently hosted a party at his home in Kansas City for Slick Surratt's birthday. Reports are that a number of former players were present with some making trip of several hundred miles to be present.

Lyle Wilson participated in the re-dedication of Garfield Park in Seattle on May 2 by giving a presentation on local history. Several old time semi-pro players from the area were present for the ceremony. Improvements made for the re-dedication included a resurfacing of the field, as well as a new backstop, scoreboard, and dugouts.

The 4th Rickwood Classic was held in Birmingham on May, 16. Articles available are "Remembering The Pioneers: 4th Rickwood Classic Honors Black Barons on Beautiful Sunday" from the 5/17/99 *Birmingham News* **2pgs. "Barons, Stars Set the Table At Rickwood" from the 5/16/99 *Birmingham News* **2pgs. "Black Barons' Stories Are Rich" from the 5/17/99 *Birmingham News* **1pg. "History Says That Black Barons Were Remarkable" from the 5/14/99 *Birmingham News* **1pg.

On Saturday May 29, 1999, The Detroit Tigers celebrated another Negro Leagues Day. Highlights were presentation of scholarships to two students by Tony Clark and Damien Easley, of the Tigers. Congratulations to two winners of Negro League contest sponsored by Tigers. On field there were introductions of many players including Ron Teasley, who was interviewed by FOX TV-2, Frank Duncan, Rufus Lewis, Marvin Jones, Herald

Gordon, and Larry Williams. James Moore threw out the first ball. It was really a great time.

Current and Future Individual Projects

Jeff "The Picture Man" Eastland is much in the news lately. He recently acquired a beautiful postcard of the 1935 National Semi-Pro Champion Bismarck team that included Satchel Paige and Double Duty Radcliffe at the last Hunt Auction. Eastland also passed along a series of letters concerning baseball's true home run king from the Fredericksburg (VA) *Free Lance Star*, as well as an article the same paper did on him (Eastland.) Look! Up on the wall! It's a 5x7! No, it's an 8x10! No, it's Picture Man! Faster than A Polaroid! More powerful than the largest auction house! Able to leap photos in a single bound! It's Picture Man, savior of pictures and defender of the down trodden! The letters are available for **2pgs., the article is available for **2pgs and Picture Man is available for wedding, birthday parties and bar mitzvahs.

Kaz Sayama will be leading the Japanese High School All Star baseball team on its tour of the United States from August 27 thru September 8.

Larry Gerlach's 29 page (with footnotes) article on Eddie Klep entitled "Baseball's Other Great Experiment: Eddie Klep and the Integration of the Negro Leagues" appeared in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Journal of Sport History*. It is an excellent piece.

William McNeil is currently working on his next book *Baseball's Forgotten Stars*. It will discuss stars from the Negro Leagues, the Japanese Leagues, the Mexican leagues and the Latin leagues.

Lyle Wilson has written entries on the Baseball Hall of Fame & the Negro Leagues and the Eastern Colored League for the *Encyclopedia of African American Associations*.

Our very own James A. Riley was recently interviewed by Japanese television for a documentary on the Negro leagues.

Frank D'Amico's new address is 93 Dutcher Street, Hopedale, MA 01747-1032

Long time reader Jorge Figueredo is the new Spanish color commentator for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays.

As reported in the last issue, Warren Wilbert is working on a project "involving the best players of the 20th century at each position." Various members of the NLC were surveyed to chose the Negro League players. Wilbert now needs box scores for some of the chosen players. While don't you explain to the readers what you need, Warren. "I'm looking for one of those "dream games" where the player had a 4 for 4 or 5 for 5 game or something close it, or a game whose writeup also featured a sensational fielding play. I'm sure you get what I'm after - a game to make the player look like Clark Kent after he had been in the phone booth." Are you looking for any specifics for certain players? "In the case of POP LLOYD: I'd like a box from the Tigers' series in Cuba during their Spring Training when Lloyd had several great games "vs. Cobb." Failing that, one of those dream games will do. If you have the boxes from that Series by the way -- pick the best in your estimation. In the case of Dihigo: A box listing him in more than one position since he will be featured in the Utility Players section -- a box listing him as having hit a HR or several hits would be great." And finally, what other players do you need boxes for? "These are the rest: Cool Papa, Judy Johnson, Oscar Charleston, Buck Leonard." You can reach Warren Wilbert at 5905 Bellingham Lane, Fort Wayne, IN 46835 Email OleFox333@aol.com

Bob Davids is sending along a picture of Spots Poles grave site to the Committee. He is also investigating reports that Joe Williams is buried in Suitland, Maryland. Many thanks, Mr. Davids.

Paul Bauer will be in North Carolina in June (specific dates unknown) for a book signing of *Catching Dreams: My Life In The Negro Leagues*, the book Paul did with the late Frazier Robinson.

Author Melissa Kim Phillips (marina@javanet.com) is looking for someone in their 70's whose father played in the Negro Leagues. She wishes to include their story in her 6th children's book "When I Was Your Age". If you can help, please do so.

Jerry Malloy will be reviewing "Jackie Robinson: Race, Sports and The American Dream" for NINE magazine.

SABR member Jeff English, a student at Florida University, is interested in helping out on projects. Contact him at (850) 536-0971 or jeffrey.english@gowebway.com.

Larry Lester, reports a new addition to the Negro League Register. Why not tell the people the story, Larry. "In reading Robert Peterson's book *Pigskin: The Early Years of Pro Football*, he mentions Charles W. Follis, a running back for the Shelby Athletic Association, a pro club in 1902. Peterson's mentioned that Follis

later played in the league with Cleveland. He died in 1909 of pneumonia. We had no first name for him in the register." Thanks, Larry. And thank you, Mr. Peterson.

On The Web

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS online had articles on Latin Baseball from Sunday May 23, 1999 to Thursday May 27, 1999. A total of 14 articles totally 46 pages.

Negro League Related Articles

"From Pitching To Picking: Ex-Black Baron Charley Pride Comes Back For Rickwood Classic" by NLC member Bill Plott from the 5/9/99 *Birmingham News* ** 2pgs.

"The Business of Blackball" by Brian Major from *American Legacy Magazine*, Spring 1999 issue. **7pgs.

"In Old Cuba With Dihigo and Lasorda" by Dave Anderson from the 3/23/99 *New York Times*. ** 1pg.

"Baseball's Proud Peanut" by Eugene L. Meyer, an article about Mamie Johnson from the 4/5/99 *Tacoma News Tribune Sound Life* insert. **3pgs.

Article from the 4/29/99 SCD on the 1976 Douglas "Cool Papa Bell" card set. ** 1pg.

"Racial Integration Was A slow Process" from 4/16/99 *USA Today* **1pg.

"Negro League Baseball items Prove To Be Great Catch" from the *Stuart (FL) News* **1pg. Article discusses the recently published Negro League Autograph Guide.

E-mail print out of "Celebrating Negro league baseball: Museum Is A Reminder of Glorious Past" from *Boston Globe* 4/10/99 ** 3pgs.

E-mail print out of "A Family's Triple Play: Hairstons Only 3 Generation African Americans To Play In The Major Leagues" from 4/8/99 *Democrat and Chronicle* **3pgs.

From the *Black Legends Professional Basketball* program short bios of Sammy Gee **1pg., Ted Raspberry **1pg., Cumberland Posey **1pg.

A short bio of Spots Poles as well as a picture of his tomb stone from the web site www.arlingtoncemetery.com. **2pgs.

E-mail print out of "Harmon Honored: First Black Player For Reds" from *Cincinnati Enquirer* 8/10/97. **1pg.

"History Behind The Seams" by Mike Dodd of *USA Today* which details various baseball related museums across the country. **1pg.

"Discovering Greatness: 'Batter Up' at the History of Negro Leagues Baseball Exhibit" from the *Oakland Press*. **2pgs.

"Ex-Negro League Player, 97, to Suit Up Again" from the *Ann Arbor News* concerning Double Duty Radcliffe's upcoming pitching appearance with the Schaumburg (IL) Flyers. **1pg.

"Woman Pitched in Old Negro Leagues" on Mamie Johnson from the *Observer Dispatch* **2pg.

Brent "Mr. Interview" Kelley's undertaking this time around in an interview with Buster Haywood **2pgs and Glanville Gladstone **1pg from the 5/7/99 *Sports Collector's Digest* and an interview with "Jumpin" Johnny Wilson from the 5/26/99 issue of SCD **2pgs.

The comic strip "Flashback" by Philip Reynolds of April 25 focused on the Negro Leagues. ** 1pg.

"Democracy On The Field: The Black Press Takes on White Baseball" by Chris Lamb and Glen Bleske appeared in the Summer 1998 issue of *Journalism History*. If interested in the article, contact the SABR Research Exchange.

"Players Take Part In Negro Leagues exhibit" by Keri Guten Cohen from the 4/16/99 *Detroit Free Press* **1pg.

Results from *The Diamond Angle's* most recent Stars In Their Time Hall of Fame elections is available.

**2pgs. Also from *The Diamond Angle* is David Marasco's latest "Before Jackie" column. ** 2pgs.

Upcoming Events

The 4th Annual Judy Johnson Night in Wilmington Delaware will take place August 28, 1999. This year's event will honor Josh Gibson. Josh Gibson Jr. will be in attendance to sign autographs. **1pg flyer.

The following report comes from our Negro league Courier Bureau Chief in Harrisburg, PA, Ted Knorr.

"The City of Harrisburg will hold its third annual Negro League Commemorative Night on Saturday, June 19th. The Harrisburg Senators take on the Trenton Thunder in an Eastern League contest at 7:05pm. The Senators will wear the uniforms of the 1925 Harrisburg Giants.

Gates open at 5:30pm; there will be vendors present and an exhibit of Harrisburg Negro League memorabilia. The theme of the night will be honoring the 1954-55 edition of the Harrisburg Giants, a later day Negro League team from the Eastern Negro League. There will be an exhibit of Negro League memorabilia. Harrisburg Giant baseball caps will be given to the first 1500 youth in attendance, a "Spottswood Poles" baseball card will be given to all attendees. A small program insert will be included with regular game programs that evening.

In the days preceding the event the Senators will conduct baseball clinics for youth and Penn State Downtown Center (in Harrisburg) will offer a noontime lecture series featuring Eric Ledell Smith (June 10) and SABR members Calobe Jackson (June 8), Fred Brillhart (June 15) and Ted Knorr (June 17)."

Call or e-mail Ted Knorr (PapaBell@aol.com) for additional details.

Larry Lester hopes to make it to SABR 29 in Scottsdale. Any other NLC members or readers that plan to be in attendance, please notify Dick Clark. Also anyone with topics for the NLC meeting (Western version) pass those along as well.

The 1999 inductions for the Negro League Wall of Fame at Milwaukee's County Stadium will take place on July 21st. This year's inductees will be Jimmy Dean, John "Mule" Miles, James McCurine, Joe B. Scott, Jim Zapp, and Henry "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron. The festivities will begin around 4:00pm to be followed by the Brewers/Phillies game. *The Negro League Courier* will be represented by our roaming reporter, Gary Maurer. Look for his report in a future issue.

The Marketplace

Although little information was available at press time, it has been reported that Sports Illustrated has named the Homestead Grays teams from 1937-1945 as one of their favorite sports dynasties. More info as it become available.

Recent auctions prices: a single signature baseball signed by Satchel Paige \$1,487; a Satchel Paige signed Negro League scorecard \$843; Martin Dihigo signed book page \$843; a EX-MT 1948 Satchel Paige Leaf baseball card \$2,709; a 1934 Negro league "Colored All Star Game" scorecard and ticket stub \$1,044.

The following book reviews are courtesy of Bwana Clark. (What he's been doing since drafting me to write the newsletter is sort of obvious now, isn't it?)

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS: The Life Story of Hall Of Fame Sportswriter Sam Lacy is a compelling look at all of Sam's involvement in all areas of sports in his 60 plus years, 55 years at the Baltimore AFRO-AMERICAN. A very enlightening read, highly recommended. \$29.95 call Tidewater Press 1-800-638-7641 worth the price. 270 PP, indexed 35 very interesting pictures.

THE PRIDE OF HAVANA: A History of Cuban Baseball by Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria (464pp, 73 photos, indexed, footnoted, bibliography) is a comprehensive coverage of Cuban baseball from inception to the end of professionalism in the 60's. It is not about the Negro Leagues but obviously many players are mentioned. It really gives insight to the many Negro Leaguers from Cuba through the years. A very good book in that regard.

SMOKE: THE ROMANCE AND LORE OF CUBAN BASEBALL by Mark Rucker and Peter C. Bjarkman is due out in Oct. 1999. The 256 page book will cover the game in Cuba from 1870 to Orlando Hernandez's place on the 1998 New York Yankees. It will sell for \$29.95

CAUGHT IN A RUNDOWN by Lisa Sexton is a mystery novel centered around a search for a former Negro League player. Cost is \$21.00

According to publisher James Floto, *The Diamond Angle Quarterly* is celebrating it's 10th anniversary in August. Sample copies of the 72 page issue are five dollars and will include several pieces on the Negro Leagues,

as well as a supplementary booklet on Peter Bjarkman on Castro and Cuban baseball." The address is 706 So. Alu Road, Wailuku, HI 96793.

Final Remarks

In regards to the various jokes and gibes that are now found in the newsletter, the reason they are included is very simple. The Roman poet Horace (65 B.C. - 8 B.C.) wrote "Without love and laughter there is no joy; live among love and laughter." I thought that was pretty sound reasoning and so I try to bring a little joy to people whenever I can. All the jokes are meant in good fun and should be taken that way. If you are the target of one of them, remember this, if I didn't like you, I wouldn't take the time to pick on you.

See you next time around.

Sammy J Miller