

The Negro Leagues Courier

The newsletter of SABR's Negro Leagues Committee

We Are The Ship, All Else Are The Sea

Feb 2005

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Dick Clark - Please affix enough postage (usually 1 stamp/4 pages)

Mini Series In The Works

Jim Gates at the Hall of Fame passed the following on to us:

Warner Bros. to Bring Movie on Negro Baseball Leagues to Television

MANHATTAN, Kan., Jan. 21, 2004 /PRNewswire/ -- Imagine throwing your 50th lifetime no hitter and then walking home still wearing your dusty game clothes because you're not allowed to shower in the stadium you just helped sell out. Or, picture hitting the only home run ever out of Yankee Stadium and being told you can't celebrate with dinner in a restaurant down the road because of the color of your skin. Negro Baseball League players didn't have to imagine. These were real-life inequalities they dealt with on a daily basis from 1920 to 1947. After all, America was a segregated society in those days with 'No Blacks' on the doors of most hotels, restaurants, theaters, and restrooms, etc., all across America -- with no Blacks in Major League Baseball either.

Like those players, who were always hopeful they would get a shot to play in the major leagues, Kansas State University President Jon Wefald has long hoped people would someday be able to do more than just imagine this era. For several years, Wefald has been lobbying to have a movie made on the days of Negro League Baseball. Recently, his lobbying efforts finally paid off.

Dick Robertson, president of Warner Bros. domestic television distribution, said the Hollywood motion picture company plans to honor the legacy of black baseball players from that era with a television miniseries right after the 2006 World Series that chronicles the history of the Negro Leagues. Robertson made the announcement recently at the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum's fifth annual Legacy Awards at the Gem Theater in Kansas City, Mo.

Wefald's interest in the Negro Baseball Leagues began a few years ago when he visited the league's museum in Kansas City. He also has become good friends with Buck O'Neil, the 93-year-old former first baseman and manager for the Kansas City Monarchs. Wefald eventually wrote a paper on the history of some of the great Black teams and players of the league from 1920 to 1947 -- the year Jackie Robinson made history by breaking into the major leagues.

The film will feature two of the great surviving former Negro League Baseball stars, Buck O'Neil and Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe. The Kansas City Monarchs will be featured in the four-hour television movie and it will probably highlight as well the legendary accomplishments of one of the great pitchers in the history of baseball, Satchel Paige, and one of the greatest home run hitters ever, Josh Gibson.

"It's a story about great people achieving great things in a segregated society governed by the so-called separate but equal Jim Crow laws of the first half of the 20th century," Wefald said. "It's a great story about America at its best and at its worst. In my mind, these Negro League players were the 'Players of Hope.' I think the American people would be fascinated by their story."

The Negro Baseball Leagues came into existence in the 1920s, when baseball was truly America's sport. "The truth is some of the greatest baseball players in the entire history of American baseball were these same black players who played in the Negro Baseball Leagues from 1920 to 1947," Wefald said. "They loved playing baseball," Wefald continued. "They aimed to be the best. They strove for excellence. Deep down, they still believed in America and I think they knew that someday, somehow, America would become a land of opportunity for everyone."

Despite being treated as second-class citizens, Wefald said that players like Satchel Paige, Cool

Papa Bell, Oscar Charleston, Judy Johnson, and Josh Gibson were, perhaps, five of the greatest baseball players in America in any league in the 1930s during those years. The Pittsburgh Crawfords, from 1934-36, might have been the best baseball team in America. Wefald said the movie will show players of will and determination who would never, never give up while facing severe discrimination.

"They were the players of hope who believed that someday, somehow they would achieve the American dream and that America would become an ever greater nation," Wefald said. "I think most Americans realize today that there were a multitude of black athletes who played in the Negro Baseball Leagues in the period from 1920 to 1940 that would have been stars in the white Major Leagues. Ironically, in many ways, sports -- especially big-time sports in America -- became a huge vehicle for the transformation and integration of American society," Wefald said.

Wefald said he is thrilled to be able to play a small role in the telling of this fascinating story. He admits "luck" played a big part in seeing this project to this stage.

"What are the chances of a paper being written by someone in Kansas being the impetus of a movie," Wefald said. "One in a million. Like the Negro League Baseball players, I was always hopeful. It took a lot of luck and hard work of getting this paper in the hands of someone who knew someone who could get this dream to become a reality."

Suzanne de Passe, the chairman and CEO of de Passe Entertainment, has been named executive producer of the movie. de Passe is the executive producer of popular cable television shows "Sister, Sister" and "Smart Guy," as well as highly acclaimed and award-winning mini-series such as "Lonesome Dove" and "The Jacksons: An American Dream." The recipient of an Academy Award nomination for co-writing the screenplay "Lady Sings The Blues," de Passe won two Emmy Awards and NAACP Image Awards as executive producer of "Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever" and "Motown Returns to the Apollo."

Contributors

The following individuals were kind enough to help us with this issue. We would like to thank Todd Bolton, Dick Clark, Dominick Denaro, Leslie Heaphy, Lou Hunsinger, Jeremy Krock, Larry Lester, Jerry Malloy, Gary Maurer, Joe Purifoy, Bob Peterson, Richard Potter, Bill Plott, Jay Sanford, Lucky Smith, Wayne Stivers, Dean Sullivan, Ernest Withers, and Lyle Wilson.

If you contributed something that was used in this newsletter but did not receive credit, it is simply a mistake on our part. If this upsets you, before you write us a letter, please take a moment, admit you have a problem, and seek professional help immediately.

One fake name, one real one. Which is which?

Committee News & Research Requests

Dick Clark and Larry Lester were recently interviewed by National Public Radio concerning the NLRAG's statistics projection. No air date has yet been announced.

Monte Irvin is looking for the children of "Toothpick" Sam Jones. If anyone knows how to get in touch with them, please that info along to either Larry Lester or Dick Clark.

Obituaries

It is with great sadness that we must report the passing of former Kansas City Monarchs pitcher Clifford "Connie" Johnson. He died November 28th, 2004 at the age of 81. Connie was a true gentleman in every sense of the word. I interviewed him once and then was able to spend a short amount of time with him at the SABR convention in Louisville. I feel fortunate for having had such opportunities. Of all the stories I have to tell about my nearly fifteen years in the field of Negro League history, my favorite of all is one about Connie that took place in the Louisville Slugger Museum. Next time you see or talk to me, I'll tell it to you if you like.

THE CALL, "Rites Today For Monarchs Star Pitcher Connie Johnson" *1pp

KANSASCITY.COM, 12/1/04 "Johnson's Pitching, And Spirit, Were Ageless" **2pp

Johnson Funeral Program **2pp

Wilmer Harris, pitcher for the Philadelphia Stars, died December 30, 2004 at the age of 80.
PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER 12/31/04 "Will Harris, 80, Dies; Was Negro League Ace" **1pp
Harris Funeral Program **2pp

Spencer Gettys, who played catcher for the 1936 Atlantic City Bacharach Giants recently passed away. He was 88. Obit, **1pg

Charles "Sleepy" Chatman, who played from 1955 to 1958 as a pitcher for a number of teams passed away December 1, 2004.

Nice picture of Bill Foster grave. **1pg

Peoria Journal Star 9/30/2004 "Legendary black pitcher buried here" (John Taylor) **2pp

Upcoming Events

The 9th Jerry Malloy Negro Leagues Research Conference

The 9th Jerry Malloy Negro Leagues Research Conference will be held in Chicago, Illinois June 17-19, 2005. Friday June 17th activities will be held at US Cellular Field in their conference center with 20 tickets to the L. A. Dodgers night game. Hotel negotiations are still on going and I hope to have those arrangement settled by the weekend of February 1, 2005. Registration information and materials will be available @ February 15, 2005 at eddie.bedford@emich.edu and on the SABR web site soon after.

The 9th Jerry Malloy Committee invites all members to make a research-based presentation at the national convention in Chicago. Oral presentations are limited to 35-40 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions-and-answers. The conference center is well equipped with media that will allow all types of electronic presentations.

Poster presentations also are very much encouraged. If your presentation is mostly slides, please consider this option.

Subjects on all aspects of Negro League Baseball are encouraged, but those with an emphasis on Chicago or Latin baseball are encouraged. Summaries should be no more than 200 words and should describe what the presentation adds to the area of research and how previous research has been examined. Though it is not mandatory, it is preferred that summaries be submitted electronically, electronically to eddie.bedford@emich.edu; or 9 So 170 Meadowlark Ln, Naperville, IL 60565 either as plain text-mail or standard word processor. Awards will be awarded to the best three research presentations including the best poster presentation (if any).

Submission deadline is April 15, 2005.

Negro League Related Articles

CHICAGO TRIBUNE 9/25/2004, "A fan's tribute to legends of Negro Leagues" (Krock) ** 4pp
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS 9/28/2004, "Grave mistake rectified by marker" (Krock) **3pp
THE KANSAS CITY STAR 12/1/2004, (Connie) Johnson's pitching, and spirit, were ageless" **2pp
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS obit on Ray Miller, **1pg and 11/23/2004 **2pp story-obit.
RIVER FRONT TIMES 11/17/2004, Prince Joe's (Henry) Lament" **7pp
LOS ANGELES SENTINEL 3/22/2000 **3pp on Turkey Stearnes
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM 7/5/2003 **6pp on Willie Wells
MLB.COM **1pg "NLBM Announces Legacy Winners"
THE KANSAS CITY STAR 1/9/05 "Legacy Award Winners Awed" **1pp
THE EASTERNER 11/9/04 "NCAA Pays Tribute To Historical League" **2pp
THE KANSAS CITY STAR 11/18/04 "Pair of Aces" (Buck O'Neil and USA Softball Star Jennie Finch) **2pp
KANSASCITY.COM 11/14/04 "Buck's Bash Aids Museum" **1pg
NEW YORK POST 11/14/04 "Birthday Present" (Buck O'Neil) **2pp
THE DENVER POST 12/10/04 "Stats Cover The bases, Put Crown On Careers" **3pps
MEMORIES AND DREAMS Winter 2004 "A Giant Season For A Junior Monarch: One Fan's Memories

of a Hall of Famer" **2pp

"Fresh Air From Buck O'Neil" 1/18/05 from unknown publication **2pp

PITTSBURG CATHOLIC, 1/7/05, "Bases Loaded With Memories" **2pp

We Make The Call

This time around we are reviewing "Negro League Baseball" published by Hal N. Abrams, Inc. While books on the Negro Leagues are becoming common place, with most done by authors that possess as much knowledge on black baseball as I possess on farming corn in Siberia, this book is something special. Even though the only text in the book that is larger than a caption, other than the foreword by Willie Mays, talks only about the person responsible for this book, that does not detract from this gem but rather adds to it. So what makes it so special? It is a collection of Negro League photographs taken by the legendary Ernest Withers of Memphis, Tennessee.

The photos in this book are fantastic. Even the ones that you know (rest assured there are more that you have never seen) take on a new life because you see not only the individual in the picture, but you get to know the man behind the camera. Once that happens you no longer just look at the photos in regards to their historical aspect, you began to realize that they are indeed art and you begin to look at them in that regard as well. Even though I never thought I would hear myself say this, the \$35.00 price tag on this book is a small price to pay for what you get in return.

Our Call: A great slam.

The Final Pitch

As the weather man predicts a storm of snow, sleet, and ice, I find myself depending more and more on a single fact to make it through the dreariness of another Cincinnati winter. That fact is that there is only 55 days left until I go to Disney World. The rest of you are on your own.

Col. Sammy J. Miller