

# The Courier

A Publication of SABR's Negro Leagues Committee

"We are the Ship, All Else the Sea"

Editor, Larry Lester

Memorial Day Issue

June, 2018

## In the News

### Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Sussex's tie to the Negro Leagues

By [Hugo Daniel In Los Angeles For Dailymail.com](#) and [Kelly McLaughlin For Dailymail.com](#) - May 18, 2018

**M**eghan Markle's pioneering great-great uncle was a professional baseball player who never got to play in the major league because he was black, DailyMail.com can reveal.

**William Demont 'Happy' Evans Jr** - Meghan's great-great uncle - played for the prestigious Homestead Grays in the American Negro League, the Negro National League, and independent leagues for black players when US baseball was segregated.

Known for having one of the strongest throwing arms in baseball, Evans helped the Pittsburgh,

Pennsylvania-based Grays win eastern championships in 1930 and 1931 - the equivalent, say historians of winning the Negro World Series, as none took place in those years.

Evans' other nickname was '**The Gray Ghost**', because of his foot-speed and good play as an outfielder.

Evans, a Kentucky native, played in the segregated Negro Leagues between 1920 and 1937, a decade before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier for African-American players in Major League Baseball.

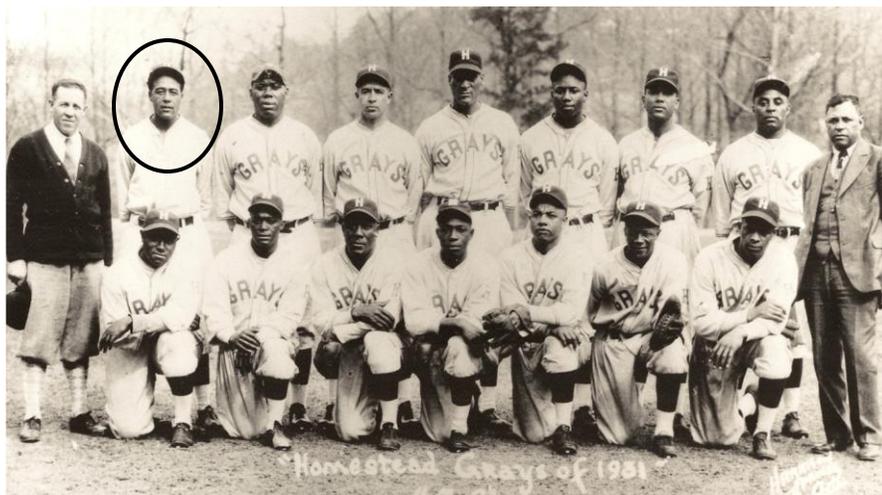
He played alongside some of the most famous players in the Negro Leagues, including Hall of Famers **Josh Gibson** and **Oscar Charleston** with the Grays.

**Jacob Pomrenke** of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), based at Arizona State University, who helped *DailyMail.com* uncover the astonishing story, said: 'Evans was known to have one of the strongest throwing arms in baseball and he was an important contributor to one of the greatest Negro Leagues teams ever built, the 1931 Homestead Grays.'

Asked if he knew why Evans had the nickname 'Happy', Pomrenke said: 'It was likely because he had a pleasant disposition - similar to other ballplayers named Happy in that era - but it could have been for other reasons, so I can't say for sure.'

Meghan's great-great uncle died when she was five but she knew his wife, **Lillie Evans**, who died when she was 22.

Her great-great aunt was a pioneering figure in her own right, working as a maid and a cook when she was forced by financial hardship to drop out of college in Tennessee, but then forging a successful career in Los Angeles as a realtor which saw her endow her local community with a swimming pool.



Evans left her Los Angeles home to her nephew Alvin when he died, and in turn he left it to **Doria Ragland**, Meghan's mom, and she continues to live there.

Known for having one of the strongest throwing arms in baseball, Evans helped the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based Grays win eastern

championships in 1930 and 1931, years when there was no Negro World Series taking place. Evans is circled, standing first on the back row with his teammates in 1931, including Hall of Famers **Josh Gibson** (standing fourth from right), **Oscar Charleston** (standing second from right) and owner **Cumberland Posey** (far left in the knickerbockers).

As an outfielder, middle infielder and pitcher, Bill Evans played for several Negro League teams from 1924 to 1936; Chicago American Giants, Brooklyn Royal Giants, Dayton Marcos, Cleveland Hornets, St. Louis Stars, Indianapolis ABCs, Homestead Grays, Washington Pilots, Detroit Wolves, Cincinnati Tigers, and the Memphis Red Sox.

## Negro Leagues baseball legend Josh Gibson's story debuted at Detroit Opera

Photo Credit: Porsha Monique for Steed Media

The story of Negro Leagues baseball legend Josh Gibson is extraordinary and was brought to life on stage at the Michigan Opera Theatre in the groundbreaking opera *The Summer King*. Gibson was one of the greatest baseball players of all time and his story of triumph and tragedy showcases his talent, hard work, and journey of overcoming prejudice and discrimination in the 1930s and 1940s. It was said that Gibson's record was so impressive that he ranked second, only to Satchel Paige, as the best-known Negro League player. His captivating story uncovers his life and the struggles he underwent as a famous Negro League baseball player. It was as informative as it was entertaining. Unfortunately for Gibson, he died suddenly on January 20, 1947, a few months before Jackie Robinson broke the color line in the major leagues. Gibson was, however, inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1972, and became the second Negro League player, after Satchel Paige, to be so honored.



The Michigan Opera Theatre, in conjunction with the Pittsburgh Opera presented the new work. Sponsors include General Motors as the 2018 Spring Opera Season Sponsor, PNC Bank as the Summer King Saturday Opera Sponsor, and MGM Grand Detroit as the Summer King Sunday Opera Sponsor. Gibson's story first debuted late last year in Pittsburgh, and the Detroit debut was held on Sat., May 12, 2018. Detroit performances will continue to run through Sun., May 20, 2018.

The show was phenomenal, and the cast was poignant, stirring and inspiring. They all cohesively worked together to deliver a stellar performance that commanded a standing ovation at the end of their acts.

In attendance for the Detroit debut were Gibson's descendants, and included his great-great-granddaughter Madason Gibson, her two sisters and her

father, Gibson's great-great grandson, Sean Gibson. When asked how he felt about the legacy of his great-great grandfather being brought to the stage, Sean Gibson had this to say: "Well, number one, I think it's exciting, first of all, to have an African-American male portrayed in opera. That's something I've never even dreamed of."

Sean Gibson also runs the Josh Gibson Foundation (<http://www.joshgibson.org/>) in Pittsburgh. The foundation's goal is "to provide the type of access that Josh Gibson never enjoyed with the creation of facilities and baseball fields dedicated to the youth of the Pittsburgh community," according to their website. The organization, which was established in 1994, is also "dedicated to providing a variety of academic and athletic programs that allow the next Josh Gibson to reach his or her potential."

When asked how the production came about to tell his great-great-grandfather's story, he said, "I was taught by my grandfather that you never turn down a sale, so when we [the show's producer] talked about it and once I heard the story, I said let's give it a shot. Ten years later, 2017, my great-great grandfather's story debuted on the stage in Pittsburgh, PA." He went on to voice his excitement for his own kids to see a part of their legacy as he said, "For this show to be in Detroit, I'm so excited. I'm excited for my kids to see it! [We're] a part of history!"



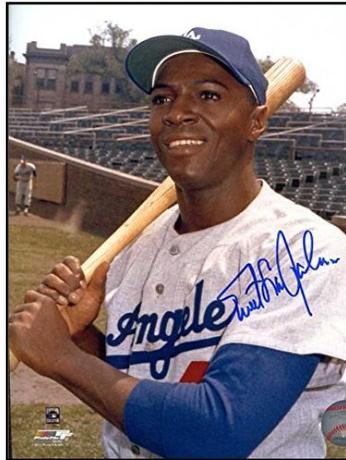
## Sweet Lou Johnson Scholarship

By Lucinda D. "Bluegrass" Baker

The newly created **Sweet Lou Johnson Lexington** chapter of SABR, headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky, is proud to announce the Sweet Lou Johnson Scholarship Program for qualifying students attending **Bluegrass Community and Technical College** (BCTC). Any student attending BCTC who has a minimum 2.0 grade point average and either played High School or community sports are welcome to apply. African-American men are especially encouraged to apply.

This scholarship has been established to honor of Sweet Lou Johnson, a Lexington, Kentucky native, who became the first African American from Lexington to play Major League Baseball. He is a member of the **1965 Los Angeles Dodgers** World Series champions.

Johnson also spent time in the Negro Leagues (**1955 Kansas City**



**Monarchs**), playing under the legendary coach, Buck O'Neil. Even at the ripe young age of 83, Johnson remains involved in the game, working in community relations for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

To make a gift to the Sweet Lou Johnson Scholarship, please make checks payable to Bluegrass Community & Technical College Foundation or BCTC Foundation and write *Sweet Lou Johnson Scholarship* on the memo line.

Checks can be mailed to **Laurel Raimondo** Martin, BCTC Foundation Executive Director, 500 Newtown Pike, Lexington, KY 40508.

Questions about the Scholarship Program can be directed to **Laurel Martin** at [laurel.martin@kctcs.edu](mailto:laurel.martin@kctcs.edu) or 859-246-6584.

## Why Babe Ruth Never Became a Manager

By Jerry Amernic, author of *BABE RUTH - A Superstars's Legacy*, [www.BabeRuthLegacy.com](http://www.BabeRuthLegacy.com)

In 1918 the Cuban Stars from Havana, an all-black team, was touring the United States and won 30 of 32 games against semi-pro and Minor League teams that were all white. The New Haven Colonials, a minor-pro team, wanted to play them and arranged for Babe Ruth to join the club. Ruth, who was fast becoming baseball's biggest star, had just won another World Series with his Boston Red Sox. He played and hit a homer, the only run for the Colonials in a 5-1 loss.

In 1920, after his first season with the New York Yankees was done, Ruth continued to barnstorm and often played against Negro League teams, much to the chagrin of Major League Baseball. Throughout his career, he played some 800 games on the barnstorming circuit appearing on the field with both black and Latino players.

Baseball historian and author **Bill Jenkinson**, who has been studying Ruth for over 30 years, contends that race was the reason Ruth was never hired as a manager. He has newspaper clippings, most from 1933 and 1934 when Ruth's career was winding down, and says up to ten different teams wanted to hire him as their manager. But it never happened.

Ruth retired in 1935 and died in 1948. According to his daughter **Julia Ruth Stevens**, now 101, he spent those 13 years depressed about not getting the call to manage. I once spent an afternoon with her and *Daddy* not becoming a manager came up. She said he would have hired black ballplayers and also would have encouraged players to ask for more money. During our interview she related a story about Lou Gehrig, whom she knew well, and *Daddy* urging him to ask Yankees co-owner Col. Jacob Ruppert for a raise.

"Lou was making \$15,000 or \$18,000 and Daddy said to ask the Colonel for \$40,000," Julia said. "That much?" said Lou. "Oh yes," Daddy said. "You might have to come down a little but make it difficult for the Colonel."



As far as the owners go, that sort of thing coupled with Jenkinson's contention would have made two knocks against him.

Says author-researcher Jenkinson: "As early as 1918, at age twenty-three, Ruth began his long journey to integrate Major League Baseball. Men of color from Ruth's day were well aware of Babe's efforts on their behalf, and, to a man, told me in numerous interviews of their heartfelt appreciation. In fact, the historical evidence strongly suggests that **Babe Ruth did not achieve his lifelong dream of managing a Big League team because of his advocacy of integration.**"

Baseball Commissioner **Kenesaw Mountain Landis**, no supporter of integration, died in 1944. In 1946 Jackie Robinson, hand-picked by Branch Rickey to break the color barrier, was tearing up the AAA circuit with the Montreal Royals, and joined the Brooklyn Dodgers for the 1947 season.

"In my mind there is no mystery here," Jenkinson says.

## Dugout Reading:

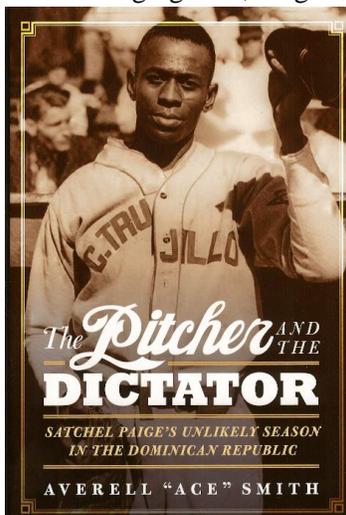
### **The Pitcher and the Dictator: Satchel Paige's Unlikely Season in the Dominican Republic** by Averell "Ace" Smith

Soon after Satchel Paige arrived at spring training in 1937 to pitch for the Pittsburgh Crawfords, he and five teammates, including **Josh Gibson** and **Cool Papa Bell** were lured to the Dominican Republic with the promise of easy money to play a short baseball tournament in support of the country's dictator, Rafael Trujillo. As it turned out, the money wasn't easy as Paige's **Ciudad Trujillo All-Stars** foundered in the initial games.

Living outside the shadow of segregation, Paige and his recruits spent their nights carousing and their days dropping close games to other teams stocked with talented players. Read about their ultimate outcome in Ace Smith's adventurous novel.

*The Pitcher and the Dictator* is an extraordinary story of race, and politics playing high-stakes baseball on behalf of the Caribbean's cruelest dictators.

Get your copy from the University of Nebraska Press, <http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/>



### **Baseball's Brotherhood Team** by Bryan Steverson

In the Book of Genesis, when Cain is confronted by God regarding the death of his brother, he replies, *Am I my brother's keeper?*

Within these pages, players respond affirmatively to this century's age old question. They took stands against prejudice during times in our country when it was not the norm. Their courage serves as a model of all of us today. These players lived the biblical challenge of loving your neighbor.

This is the third book by Bryan Steverson, a regular presenter at the annual **Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference**. Fifteen members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum are featured here, as well as others of lesser fame. The examples include 19th Century baseball, **Babe Ruth** and **Pete Rose**. Each player was special. And each story inspirational!

*Baseball's Brotherhood Team* is available from WestBow Press, [www.westbowpress.com](http://www.westbowpress.com)

### **The Page Fence Giants: A History of Black Baseball's Pioneering Champions** by Mitch Lutzke

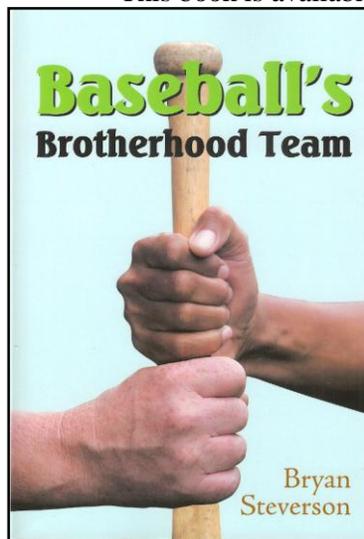
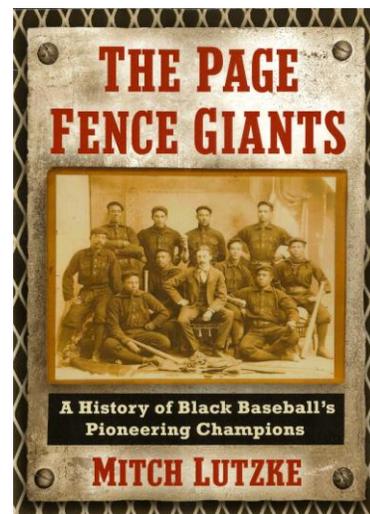
The Page Fence Giants, an all-star black baseball club sponsored by a woven-wire fence company in Adrian, Michigan, graced the diamond in the 1890s. At the time of the Page Fence Giants' formalization in 1894, integrated baseball was still being played around the country. The year before the Giants, Adrian fielded an integrated team (the **Light Guard**) and played against at least one other such club. While many draw the end of the baseball segregation line with Jackie Robinson's entrance in 1947 with the Brooklyn Dodgers, that is historically accurate. Close followers of baseball know the names of **Bud Fowler**, **George Stovey**, **Frank Grant**, and the brothers **Weldy** and **Moses Fleetwood Walker**, just to name a few, as black men who played on professional white baseball clubs in the 1880s and 1890s.

This book tells the story of a long-ignored team at the close of the 19th century, whose Hall of Famer second baseman **Sol White** was but one of their best players.

Mitch Lutzke was an award-winning radio reporter before beginning his second career as a high school history teacher and coach in Michigan. He has had history themed articles published in newspapers, magazines, web pages and with SABR.

This book is available from McFarland

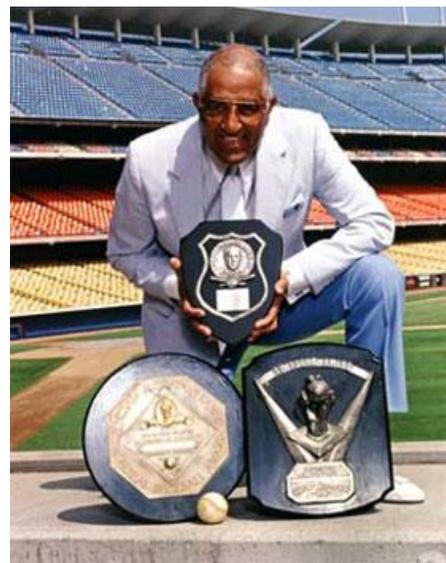
Publishers, [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)



## Sunrises!

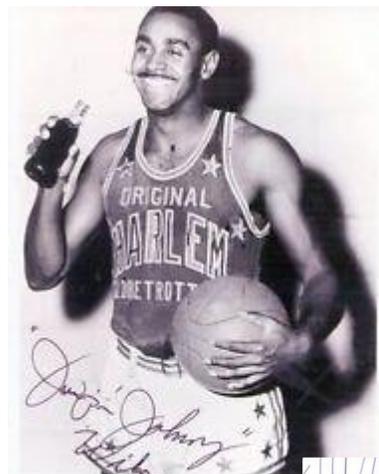
### JUNE

- 8<sup>TH</sup> – LIONEL EVELYN - 89  
14<sup>TH</sup> – **DON NEWCOMBE - 92**  
19<sup>TH</sup> – HANK MASON - 87  
20<sup>TH</sup> – AL CARTMILL, JR. - 88  
21<sup>ST</sup> – ART SIMMONS - 81  
22<sup>ND</sup> – BOB SCOTT - 88  
23<sup>RD</sup> – ULYSSES HOLLIMON – 87  
24<sup>TH</sup> – NEALE “BOBO” HENDERSON – 88  
30<sup>TH</sup> – RENDON MARBURY - 81



### JULY

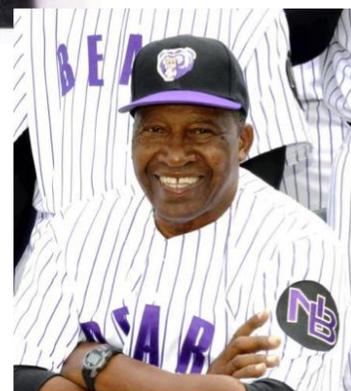
- 1<sup>ST</sup> – **FRANK ENSLEY - 91**  
7<sup>TH</sup> – **JUMPIN' JOHNNY WILSON - 91**  
16<sup>TH</sup> – CLIFF DUBOSE - 81  
19<sup>TH</sup> – JOHNNY FAIRLEY – 77  
26<sup>TH</sup> – PEDRO SIERRA – 80  
30<sup>TH</sup> – WILLIAM BELL – 88



### AUGUST

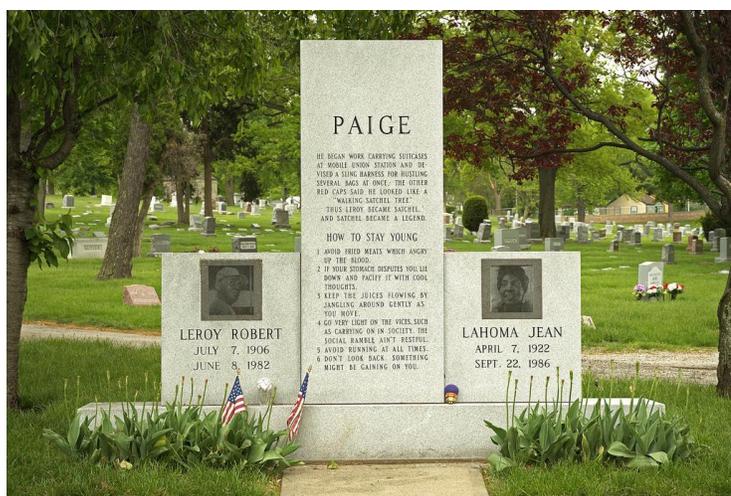
- 1<sup>ST</sup> – A.J. JACKSON - 85  
5<sup>TH</sup> – IRA MCKNIGHT, JR. - 83  
8<sup>TH</sup> – GRADY MONTGOMERY – 87  
12<sup>TH</sup> – **RAYMON LACY – 96**  
19<sup>TH</sup> – WALT “COACH O” OWENS – 85  
26<sup>TH</sup> – **IKE WELCH – 98**  
29<sup>TH</sup> – RICH BOOKER – 89  
31<sup>ST</sup> – JAKE SANDERS - 84

**CONGRATULATIONS** to Nonagenarians, **DON NEWCOMBE, JUMPIN' JOHNNY WILSON, FRANK ENSLEY, DON JOHNSON, RAYMOND LACY & IKE WELCH.**



## Sunsets . . . .

**THERE ARE NO DEATHS TO REPORT THIS QUARTER.**



Forest Hills Cemetery, Kansas City, MO

## SABR's Negro Leagues Committee

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*The Courier* is a quarterly newsletter published by the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR); in March, June, September, and December. Inquiries, submissions and research requests can be sent to Larry Lester.

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