

YESTERDAY'S
NEWS

JERSEY JOURNEYS

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African American Stories: The Newark Eagles

Did you know that Newark, New Jersey, once had an exciting baseball team that played in a stadium in the city? Did you know that several players that once played on this team are in the National Baseball Hall of Fame? You may not know about this team because it, and its league, no longer exist. But there was a time when the Newark Eagles were as well known and loved by Newark's African American community as the Yankees are known to New Yorkers. The all-African American Eagles' players were arguably as talented as the best of those in the major leagues, but a policy of segregation kept most from ever competing head-to-head or playing with their white counterparts.

For most of the first half of the 20th century, white Americans and African Americans shared equally in their passion for the game of baseball. At a time before television, going to the game on a weekend afternoon was a major form of entertainment. Racial prejudice kept African Americans from playing in the major leagues so they created their own teams and leagues—the Negro National and the American leagues. Newark in fact boasted two professional baseball teams in the 1930s and 1940s—one all black, one all white,



A team photo of the Newark Eagles. (Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.)

the Eagles and the Bears. The Bears, a minor league team that was part of the Yankees organization, played in the International League and shared (for a sizable fee) their stadium with the Eagles.

Abe and Effa Manley, the dynamic owners of the Eagles, purchased the Brooklyn Eagles and moved them out to Newark in 1937, when the city's growing African American population was ready for a team to root for and call their own. Abe scouted for the best talent while Effa ran the office, finances, and public relations.

Among the top Eagle players were two New Jerseyans who would later make their mark on Major League Baseball—Larry Doby and Monte Irvin. Both were

able to play in both leagues, moving to the major leagues after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in 1947. In fact, Larry Doby was the first African American in the American League.

This issue of *Jersey Journeys* focuses on African Americans and New Jersey baseball from the two hometown heroes who hit it big to the woman who would carve a unique role for herself in baseball. ★

IN THIS ISSUE . . .
EFFA MANLEY AND THE
NEWARK EAGLES: PAGE 2
MONTE IRVIN AND LARRY DOBY:
PAGE 3

Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles

"You don't have to go far to pick out baseball's career woman No.1. Right here in this city we have Mrs. Abraham Lincoln Manley." — A Newark News reporter, 1939

To suggest that Effa Manley was an amazing woman would be to state the obvious. Even now there are few women executives in baseball, and in her day she was arguably the best front office executive of a Negro League baseball team. She had to fight both gender and racial prejudices to claim her place among baseball's top executives. She played several roles, including smart businesswoman and mother hen. Her knowledge of African Americans in baseball was impressive. Beyond her recognized skills for business, finance, and public relations, she was progressive—a civil rights advocate long before it was fashionable, and a woman dedicated to her community and its well being.

The Brooklyn Eagles were bought by Abe and Effa Manley and brought to Newark in 1937. The growing African American population would have a team to call its own. Owning a team in the Negro Leagues was never easy and often was not even profitable. The Eagles' organization had to work hard to make the team important to the African American community, its main source of support. By doing so, more people would come to the games and the team would make enough money to stay in business. Effa knew this too. Most people recognize that the Eagles were probably the best organized and best run team in

the league. Effa prided herself and her organization on paying players on time (which was not the norm for the league), setting and keeping a regular schedule, and having her players look good in quality uniforms. And she made sure that the team had an image of upholding the black commu-

the game, there would also be a black school band and an American flag color guard from the city's black American Legion post. The show she created was almost entirely by and for the black community.

Effa and the team's efforts paid off in 1946 when the Eagles had a championship year—they won the Negro World Series against outstanding pitcher Satchel Paige and the Kansas City Monarchs. But this victory also marked an end because the following year Jackie Robinson entered Major League baseball, breaking the color barrier. A number of other exceptional African American players followed, leaving the Negro Leagues devastated. Among the departures were Larry Doby, the first African American in the American League, and Monte Irvin. Eagles' games attendance went from 120,000 in 1946 to 38,000 just two years later. In 1948 the team was sold and relocated to Memphis.

Abe Manley died in 1952. But Effa Manley, though she was out of baseball for years, was "rediscovered" in the 1970s, when interest in Negro baseball was high. She gave interviews and cowrote a book *Negro Baseball . . . Before Integration*, and continued to speak out about Negro League players getting their due recognition at the National Baseball Hall of Fame. ★



Effa Manley. (Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.)

nity's standards.

Once the team was established, Effa used game days to raise funds for the NAACP and a number of black charities. On opening day each season, Effa would coordinate the program. While she would invite local and state officials (usually white) to

The Story of Two Eagles: Monte Irvin and Larry Doby

The Newark Eagles had some of the most talented African American players in the late 1930s and 1940s. Eagles shortstop Monte Irvin was one of the few fortunate enough to make the transition to the major leagues from the Negro leagues. In fact, had it not been for World War II, and his military service, he might have been the first black player in the Major Leagues instead of Jackie Robinson. Prior to the war, Irvin had been chosen by the Negro League owners to play that role.

Standout Negro Leaguer "Cool Papa" Bell said "Monte was our best young ball-player at the time. He could do everything. . . . He could hit that long ball, he had a great arm, he could field, he could run." Eagles' owner Effa Manley agreed,

"... he was the best qualified by temperament, character, ability, morals, age, experience, and physique to represent us as the first black player in the white majors since the Walker brothers (Moses and Weldy) back in the late 1880s. But after Irvin went to the Army and came back, he was sick (an inner ear problem), and then they passed him up and looked for somebody else."

On July 4, 1947, ex-Eagle Larry Doby became the first modern-day African American to play in the American League, 11

weeks after Jackie Robinson's debut in the National League. At the time, Bill Veeck, Cleveland Indians president said, "I believe Doby will be a great Major League Baseball player. If he isn't . . . well, I'll be a disillusioned judge of baseball talent." All such assessments of these two players were proven correct as both men



Newark Eagles' Monte Irvin and Larry Doby. (Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, N.Y.)

excelled in the majors as they had for the Newark Eagles.

Irvin's family moved to New Jersey when he was eight. He was an outstanding athlete at Orange High School where he earned varsity letters in four sports. He declined a football scholarship to the University of Michigan and enrolled in Lincoln University to study political science. In 1937, at the age of 18, Irvin joined the Newark Eagles and played on weekends while he was in college. Irvin was a power hitter who also hit for average. He won the first of two

batting titles in the Negro National League in 1941 with a .395 average. Irvin was at the top of his game when he was called to serve in the U.S. Army.

New Jersey native Larry Doby was a four-sports letterman at Paterson's East Side High School. He went to Long Island University on a basketball scholar-

ship, and later transferred to Virginia Union University in Richmond before joining the Navy in 1943. Doby had joined the Newark Eagles in 1942, while in college. He rejoined the Eagles in 1946.

In 1946, with Irvin and Doby, along with Leon Day and Lennie Pearson back from military service, the Eagles won the Negro National League pennant.

Irvin won his second batting championship, hitting .401, and was vital to beating the Kansas City Monarchs in a seven-game series. Irvin's post-season stats include three home runs and a batting average of .462.

With Jackie Robinson's entry into the majors in 1947, it was just a matter of time before these two gifted players would be tapped to follow. After the 1948-49 season in Cuba, the New York Giants paid the Newark Eagles \$5,000 to sign 30-year-old Monte

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

Irvin. In 1951, one of his best years in the majors, he sparked the Giants' amazing comeback that bested the Dodgers in the pennant race. He hit .312 with 24 home runs and finished third in the Most Valuable Player voting. Although the Giants lost the world series to the New York Yankees, Irvin hit .458 and made a memorable steal of home plate against Allie Reynolds. That same year he became the first Negro Leaguer to win the Runs Batted In title, and, he, along with Hank Thompson and Willie Mays formed the first all-black outfield in the majors.

Irvin retired after the 1956 season. He ended his Major League career with a .293 average

and 99 home runs. Irvin added a .394 average to his list of stats for two World Series performances. Keep in mind that most of his prime years were spent in the Negro Leagues, where his lifetime average was .373. Irvin's accomplishments during his 11-year career in black baseball resulted in his selection to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1973.

Larry Doby has his own impressive list of accomplishments. He and Satchel Paige were the first blacks to play on a World Series champion when the Indians beat Boston in 1948. He batted .318 in the series and won Game 4 with a home run that prompted winning pitcher Steve Gromek, who was white, to embrace his

black teammate after the game. This embrace was seen as quite controversial at the time.

Doby made seven All-Star teams and led the American League with 32 homers in 1952 and 1954, when he also had a league-high 126 RBIs. In 1954, he drove in 126 runs to capture the RBI title. He was finally selected into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1998.

Few Negro League players got the opportunity to play in both the Negro and Major Leagues, Doby and Irvin not only played, they excelled. Doby and Irvin are two of four players to play in both a Major League and Negro League World Series game. ★

DID YOU KNOW . . .

that the Society has a photograph of Ruppert Stadium where the Newark Eagles played.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE SOCIETY

Come visit the New Jersey Historical Society at 52 Park Place in downtown Newark. On Friday, April 28 the Society is opening the exhibition called *Pride of Newark: Baseball's Bears and Eagles*.

Sat., Feb. 5, 2000; 1:00-2:00 p.m.
AND 2:30-3:30 p.m.

Landscapes on the Passaic—Travel back in time and visit New Jersey's past through landscape paintings of the Passaic River. Create your own New Jersey landscape.

Sat., Feb. 12, 2000; 10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

Be a New Jersey Historical Society Detective!—Pick up your detective kit at the front desk and try to figure out what the building was used as and who used it before it became the New Jer-

sey Historical Society. Solve the mystery and receive a badge and certificate.

Sat., Feb. 19, 2000; 1:00-2:00 p.m.
AND 2:30-3:30 p.m.

New Jersey Presidents—What do Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson have in common? Find out more about these two famous Presidents from New Jersey and design a memorial in their honor.

Sat., Feb. 26, 2000; 12:00-4:00 p.m.

African American History Month Community Family Festival—Celebrate Black History month! Discover more about the role of African Americans in New Jersey's remarkable history. Performances and art activities for the whole family.

Schedule subject to change; for updated information, call (973) 596-8500, and press "3."

NJHS Hours

Office hours: Mon.-Fri., 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Public hours: Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Library hours: Tues.-Sat., 12 p.m.-5 p.m.
Closed Sunday and Monday
Admission to the Society is free.

For more information on Education Programs for grades Pre-K-12, after school and scout groups, family and adult programs, and Teachers' Services at the Society, please call the Education Department at (973) 596-8500.

SOURCES

Queen of the Negro Leagues: Effa Manley and the Newark Eagles. By James Overmyer, 1998.

Nice Guys Finish First: The Autobiography of Monte Irvin. By Monte Irvin with James A. Riley, Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1996.

READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Leagues Apart: The Men and Times of the Negro Baseball Leagues. By Lawrence S. Ritter. 1995, William Morrow and Company. This book focuses on 21 players/managers of the Negro leagues. Prejudice and segregation, the story of how and why the leagues were formed. Reading level. Grades 3 and up.

To order a subscription to *Jersey Journeys* call (973) 596-8500 and press "0."

Costs: Large classroom subscription (35 copies per issue, one Teacher's Guide) \$65. Small classroom subscription (25 copies per issue, one Teacher's Guide) \$50. Annual resource packet (2 copies per issue, mailed at year-end) \$25. Individual subscription (1 copy) \$10.

BASEBALL BANTER

Batting Average: a ratio of base hits to official times at bat. To give you an idea of what is a good batting average, no player has been able to reach .400 for a season since Ted Williams did so in 1953.

Runs Batted In (RBIs): A statistic that shows how often a player has made it possible for his teammates to score while at bat. A player who has 30 RBIs has caused 30 runs to score. Manny Ramirez led the major league in RBIs in 1999 with 165.



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Upon Request