

Pioneer Black Players To Be Granted Pensions

By MURRAY CHASS

Some long-retired baseball players are in line to receive some long-sought pensions.

At its meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz., last week, Major League Baseball's executive council decided to create a pension plan for about 90 black players who did not play in the majors long enough to qualify for a pension or did not have the opportunity to play in the majors at all.

The council is continuing to consider pensions for a group of non-black players who retired before 1947, the year the pension plan began.

The lack of pensions has been a sore point and has prompted a series of lawsuits. No player ever has won a court case.

The black players will receive pensions of about \$10,000 a year. If the council decides to include all of the players under consideration in the plan, it will cost Major League Baseball about \$10 million, one official said.

"Baseball wants to take care of those who contributed so much to its past as it grows in the future," Randy Levine, management's chief labor executive, said yesterday. "The council and Commissioner Selig have realized this is a good step as we move forward in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Jackie Robinson's entry into the major leagues."

Leonard Coleman, the National League president, who formulated the plan with Levine and Gene Budig, the American League president, said: "Baseball cannot restore the careers of these former Negro League players, but they were victims of discrimination outright and were prevented from making a living in the major leagues. The very least baseball can do is provide a pension."

The black players who will receive pensions either played in the Negro Leagues for at least four years or played a combined four years in the Negro Leagues and the major leagues.

The group includes Sam Jethroe, an outfielder with the Boston Braves; Ray Noble, a catcher with the New York Giants; Artie Wilson, an infielder with the Giants, and Connie Johnson, a pitcher with the Chicago White Sox and Baltimore Orioles. Buck O'Neil and Lyman Bostock Sr., father of a player whose

major league career was cut short when he was shot to death, are among the players who were strictly Negro Leaguers.

Coleman said Joe Black, a pitcher in the Negro Leagues and major leagues, would be the chairman of a committee that will determine pension eligibility.

Jethroe, who was the Braves' first black player, filed one of the most recent lawsuits in the pension dispute, alleging that if the major leagues had not discriminated against black players, he would have reached the majors at a younger age and could have qualified for a pension. His suit was dismissed last October.

The group the council is still considering includes non-black players whose careers ended before 1947 and thus never had a chance to be in the pension plan.

The pension plan began April 1, 1947. The current vesting requirement is one day in the majors, but a player has to play at least a quarter of a season to receive money. A full pension, which is earned by a player with at least 10 years in the majors, is about \$113,000 a year.