

# The Courier

A Publication of SABR's Negro Leagues Committee

"We are the Ship, All Else the Sea"

Editor, Larry Lester

September, 2014

## In the News

### Jerry Malloy goes to Motown

Some folks called it a family reunion. Others called it a party. A few called the Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference a conference. Whatever the case, we enjoyed the camaraderie of like-minded historians, scholars and baseball fans for a weekend of fun. Everybody was there! Great-grandma was there (**Nettie Stearnes**), along with a kettle of kids! Plenty of uncles and aunts of black ball history showed up. Plus the cousins of **Jimmie Crutchfield** and **Hank Aaron** joined us. They came from near and they came from a far (Portland, Oregon), to celebrate "**Turkey Stearnes and Black Baseball in Michigan.**" Wow, what fun!

We kicked off the conference on **Thursday**, August 14, with our educational forum, led by **Leslie Heaphy**, at the Purdy/Kresge Library on the campus of Wayne State University. She shared potential lesson plans with students and teachers. We later traveled to Hamtramck Stadium for the dedication of a new "State of Michigan Historic Marker" with several political figures in attendance, the Stearnes family and several former Negro leaguers. The historic moment was organized by **Gary Gillette**, the president and founder of the **Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium**. More information about the Detroit Stars' home field can be found at: <http://www.hamtramckstadium.org/> Also note, a poster showing the home fields of various Detroit Negro League teams was provided by Gillette.

From Hamtramck, we gathered for our Meet & Greet at the **Detroit Historical Museum**, enjoyed a little trivia and the best Coney dog in America

provided by **Lafayette Coney Island** of *Sparkle* movie fame.

### FRIDAY

The first presentation came from **Bryan Steverson**, entitled "Motor City Meteor." He took Sabermetrics to a new level with employment of the hypotenuse to calculate the fastest runner on the diamond. For those who stayed awake during geometry class, we found out that **Cool Papa Bell** was faster than **Turkey Stearnes**, **Billy Hamilton** and even Olympian **Usain Bolt**. That's "c equals the square root of  $a^2 + b^2$ " for those keeping score. Steverson also wrote an article about "*Tennessee's Best*" (Stearnes) for the conference booklet.



Our next presenter was the always reliable **Todd Peterson**, who talked about information on the well known, but seldom researched **1895-1898 Page Fence Giants** of Adrian, Michigan. The Kansas City-based visual artist, exhibited several unpublished images of this legendary team, including photographs of their private rail car. This was one of Todd's best presentations. Following Peterson was professor **Lawrence Rushing** from New York City, who gave us a thought-provoking side of **Jackie Robinson's** personality. His talk perhaps yielded the most discussion of any presentation, as he examined Robinson's symbiotic relationship with icons Paul Robeson, Adam Clayton Powell, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robinson's quotes from the infamous *Ebony* article. Due to time constraint, we had to dance around the real issues. As we know, guilty feet have no rhythm. We look forward to more presentations from Dr. Rushing.

**Karl Lindholm**, former trivia champion and a teacher at Middlebury College, mesmerized the audience with his talk about Harvard's famous colored shortstop, **William Clarence Matthews**. Lindholm revealed a portrait of Matthews's life in America between Reconstruction and the Great Depression. We look forward to his biography on this pioneer player and lawyer extraordinaire.

Our next presenter, **Missy Booker**, exclusive of her two cats, "Satchel the Cat" and "Sox the Cat," talked about **Booker T. Washington**, baseball's quiet ambassador. Making her Malloy debut at the 2012 conference in Cleveland, the rookie had offered "The Undefinable Satchel Paige." In her recent email, "I never would have thought that Leroy "Satchel" Paige would have led me to Booker T. Washington, and then to William Clarence Matthews. I have come to learn, though, that the real gift of Satchel Paige and his gigantic personality was to introduce myself (and many others) to the Negro Leagues and black ball. Go [Cincinnati] Reds."



When the knothole gang returned from lunch, we visited with players **Walt "Coach O" Owens**, (right) a former pitcher for the **Detroit Stars**, and **Ron "Schoolboy" Teasley**, (left) an outfielder for the **New York Cubans, Detroit Wolves** and others. Both men, college graduates, spoke about their careers and the struggle for acceptance by the masses. Owens coached more than 25 championship teams on various levels of competitions, and tutored the 1962 American league batting champion **Alex Johnson** and Tiger legend **Willie Horton** at Detroit's Northwestern High School. While Teasley, still holder of the highest lifetime batting average at Wayne State, talked

about his races against gold medalist **Jesse Owens**, and time spent with the **Brooklyn Dodgers** organization and his all-star years with the **Carman Cardinals** in the Mandak League. To everyone's surprise, **Alex Johnson** bounced in to sign autographs, take pictures, and talk a little baseball.



A last minute change in the schedule, forced former players **Pedro Sierra (Detroit Stars)** [right] and **Ernie Nimmons (Indianapolis Clowns)** [left], along with former **Detroit Stars** owner **Minnie Forbes** into the lineup. The always elegant and beautiful Ms. Forbes, hosted the next hour, fielding questions with managerial ease of a winner. After a brief break, we took the PeopleMover to **Comerica Park**, where Forbes, Sierra, Nimmons, Owens, and Teasley were honored on the field under the umbrella of perfect weather.

That evening we received the priceless **Miguel Cabrera** bobble head doll with the typo. A great looking ballpark with gigantic Tigers hovering overhead, the hometown team played like the Kansas City Royals of past years, disappointing a packed house. The Tigers became the first hometown team in conference history to lose, breaking a 16-year streak. It was not a pretty game.

## SATURDAY

Our first presentation of the day was by **Donald Spivey**, a University of Miami professor. His down-home talk was about how **Satchel Paige** should be credited for helping extend the New Negro Movement and the coming of age of black self-assertion, along with providing us with a very different - and critical - perspective on the **Civil Rights Movement**. The Spivey style of presentation is fast becoming a favorite among attendees.

Followed by another heavy hitter in the lineup was **James Brunson III** with his piece on "Black Style or Baseball Minstrelsy Reconsidered: Literary & Visual Representations, 1860-1889." He spoke eloquently about how the 19th century "black style" on the baseball diamond remains a highly complicated and misunderstood aspect of the national pastime, scrutinizing both literary and visual images of how blackball minstrelsy emerged.



Batting third that day was **Gary Gillette** with his excellent talk about "*Unearthing a Lost Diamond: Hamtramck Stadium, Lost and Found*." Gillette has been fighting to save the historic park since 2008 when he discovered it was still standing. He successfully led efforts to place **Hamtramck Stadium** on the National Register and secure a state historic marker.

Batting cleanup on Saturday was **Lizz Wilkinson**, a recent grad of Chatham University with a degree in Art History, with an interesting talk about problematic use of white bronze in statues of players at **Washington's Nationals Park** versus the brassy images at **Pittsburgh's PNC Park**. Her speech created a great deal of discussion about the merits of using the proper elements to represent black athletes.

Our next presentation centered on **Homestead Grays** player/manager **Vic Harris**. **George Skornickel**, an educator from Pittsburgh, promoted Harris as "The Greatest Manager in Negro League History." And he made a very strong case, showing that Harris won eight N.L. titles in the 10 years he managed the Grays. His eight pennants are more than twice his closest competitor, the iconic Candy Jim Taylor. Harris was also selected to manage the

East team in the all-star classic eight times, four more than **Oscar Charleston**. With a won-lost percentage of .682, Harris definitely has **Cooperstown** credentials.

After all the insightful presentations, the highlight of the conference, per feedback surveys, was the panel hosted by co-chair **Dick Clark**, featuring 95-year old **Nettie Stearnes** with daughters **Joyce** and **Rosilyn**, along with family members; grandsons **Gary**, **Cary** and **Tony**, and granddaughters **Karen** and basketball coach **Vanessa**, also an English teacher at Bloomfield Hills High School, as they shared their special moments about dad and grandpa. Joyce sang "*Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again*," from the *Phantom of the Opera*. The lyrics reminded Joyce of special times with Dad and how much she misses him. Joyce also provided a PowerPoint presentation of vintage family photographs. The **Norman "Turkey" Stearnes** family provided attendees with unforgettable insights into one of black baseball's greatest dads.



The Stearnes family celebration was followed by the authors' panel, moderated by Dick Clark, featured **Lisa Doris Alexander** (*When Baseball Isn't White, Straight and Male: The Media and Difference in the National Pastime*), **Adrian Burgos, Jr.**, (*Playing America's Game: Baseball, Latinos and the Color Line*), **Joel Nathan Rosen** and **Roberta J. Newman** (*Black Baseball, Black Business: Race Enterprise and the Fate of the Segregated Dollar*), and **Donald Spivey** (*If You Were Only White: the Life of Leroy 'Satchel' Paige*). They provided insight on how to research and identify primary source material.

Local historian and chairman of the Scouts Committee **Rod Nelson** rocked the field and won his first Malloy Conference trivia contest. Using a new College Bowl format, the tough questions came from the daily presentations and local history, and were developed by moderator & quiz master **Ted Knorr**. Nelson needed an extra inning to nip former champion **Karl Lindholm**. While **Josh Salvner** took the Bronze and **Dan D'Addona** took fourth, as everyone took home a goldmine of prizes.



Before the awards banquet, we enjoyed the intoxicating sounds of **Beth Griffith**, a backup singer for award-winning soul singer Kem, accompanied by her all-star ensemble. They performed soulful sounds from the songbooks of **Stevie Wonder, Martha & the Vandellas, the Miracles, the Temptations, the Beatles** and **Anita Baker**. To see 95-year old Nettie Stearnes jamming to Baker's "*Giving You the Best That I Got*" go to our Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference [Facebook](#) page. She truly gave it her best.



At the Awards Banquet we announced winners of our scholarships, library grants and several individual awards. A list of winners and more photographs can be found at:

<http://www.larrylester42.com/detroit---2014.html>

Of special note, **Louis Manley, Jr.**, an UPS man, was the winner of the coveted **Fay Vincent Most Valuable Partner** award, raising several thousands of dollars to help fund several programs. Super effort, Louis!

Also a great big Thank You to **Tom Tuttle, Bryan Steverson** and **Rick Meister** for their financial contributions.

One note of special interest, at the Awards Banquet, **Roy Langhans**, a member of the **Bob Davids Chapter**, and regular conference attendee, made a very generous donation to the Malloy checkbook, when he won a special poster featuring more than 100 Negro League autographs (many of whom are deceased) at the live auction. The poster, which will be framed and displayed at the SABR office in Phoenix, was donated by former Vincent MVP award winner **Wayne Stivers** from Plano, Illinois. Executive Director, **Marc Appleman**, accepted the donation on behalf of the SABR office.



And lastly, on Sunday morning, we closed out the conference with a tour of **Comerica Park** by **Ron Wade**, Director of Marketing for the Tigers.

At press time, we don't know where the next family reunion will take place, but be prepared for another majestic ride in the Jerry Malloy DeLorean time machine. Are we there yet?



For comments about the Conference visit:

<http://www.larrylester42.com/testimonials.html>

Photographs courtesy of James Brunson III, Rick Meister and Larry Lester