

## McFarland-SABR Baseball Research Award winners - 2026

- William Weinbaum, [“He was a legend’: An oral history of Satchel Paige’s final game at 59.”](#) Andscape, February 28, 2025

# He was a legend’: An oral history of Satchel Paige’s final game at 59

*In 1965, the Hall of Fame pitcher threw three scoreless innings against players half his age. Nearly sixty years later, here’s how it happened.*

By [William Weinbaum](#)

*“Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it don’t matter.”*  
– Leroy “Satchel” Paige

Long after Satchel Paige became a legend for the ages as a pitcher, performer and philosopher, he achieved one of the most remarkable feats in baseball history on Sept. 25, 1965.

At age 59 – his official birthdate was July 7, 1906 – and a dozen years removed from his most recent major league outing, Paige threw three scoreless innings for the Kansas City Athletics against the Boston Red Sox, the American League’s top slugging offense. The oldest player ever to appear in a Major League Baseball game gave up only one hit (to a fellow future Hall of Famer) and no walks.

For the conclusion of Black History Month 2025, *Andscape* presented an in-depth two-part story on Paige’s accomplishment, featuring firsthand accounts from interviews conducted since November 2024 with more than 40 people, including more than 20 players. The recollections have been edited and condensed, and they are accompanied by excerpts from a newly obtained recording of the Kansas City radio broadcast of Paige’s ’65 performance.

Paige’s signing with the A’s 15 days before the game was seen as the latest publicity stunt of Charles O. “Charlie” Finley, who bought the ballclub before the 1961 season and fancied himself a master promoter a la Bill Veeck, the inventive owner of Cleveland in the 1940s and the St. Louis Browns in the ‘50s who hired Paige to pitch for both of those teams. Finley was colorful and controversial, as he fielded a perennial loser and entertained moving the team from Kansas City to Louisville, Dallas or other possible landing spots.

As the 1965 season wound down, the last-place A’s were headed for their worst record (59-103) and lowest attendance (528,304) since the franchise relocated from Philadelphia a decade earlier. Two days before signing Paige, Finley drew 21,576 – the fourth-largest home crowd of the season – by having Bert Campaneris become the first



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A pioneer in race relations and the business of sports, Paige was reputed to have pitched more games before more people in more places than anyone. And the Mobile, Alabama, native was especially popular in his adopted hometown of Kansas City, where his overpowering fastball and unrivaled repertoire helped the K.C. Monarchs of the Negro American League win four pennants in the 1940s.

In a professional career that began in the mid-1920s, Paige dazzled and defeated his fellow Negro Leaguers, as well as big names from the all-white major leagues with whom he barnstormed and other ballplayers throughout the U.S., Latin America and Canada. In our 1999 interview, Ted Williams, regarded by many as the game's greatest hitter, called Paige the "greatest draw, greatest pitcher," a description reinforced by statistics and even more so by stories.

But the MLB door was shut for Paige until his birthday in 1948, 15 months after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. Veeck, 38, made Paige, 42, the oldest "rookie" in major league history and the American League's first Black pitcher. Paige pitched mostly

in relief, went 6-1, had more than 150,000 fans flock to his first two starts at Cleveland Municipal Stadium – both victories – and helped his team win the championship.



After Paige's second season for Cleveland, Veeck sold the ballclub, and the new owners got rid of Paige. Then in 1951, Veeck brought Paige to his new franchise. He pitched three seasons for the Browns and made the 1952 and 1953 All-Star games, becoming the oldest player to appear in one at age 47. Veeck sold the team following the 1953 season, and the new owners moved it to Baltimore and released Paige.

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Satchel Paige relaxes in a new easy chair in the St. Louis Browns’ bullpen. Team president Bill Veeck bought the chair in time for a home game against the New York Yankees on June 28, 1952.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Over the next 12 years, Paige continued to pitch far and wide in exhibitions and minor league games, including from 1956-58 for the Miami Marlins, a Triple-A team run by Veeck in 1956 when Paige went 11-4 with a 1.86 E.R.A., 13 saves and two shutouts. True to the showmanship of both men, the peripatetic pitcher’s signing was a secret until he arrived on the field by helicopter after the first inning of Miami’s opening game. As the fans cheered, the nearly 50-year-old Paige – already in uniform – walked to a padded armchair awaiting him in the bullpen.

In 1965, Paige’s daughter Pamela, 17, typed and sent letters to every major league team, seeking a roster opportunity for her father. There were no takers until September, when Finley, 47, gave the 59-year-old Paige a \$4,000 contract through the end of the season. He was joining a ballclub with five players 20 or younger, including future Hall of Famer Catfish Hunter, and only one coach older than he was – Hall of Famer Gabby Hartnett (the staff also included Hall of Famer Luke Appling and Whitey Herzog, a 2010 inductee).

**PAUL FINLEY**, Charlie Finley’s son, attended 9/25/65 game at age 12: If Bill Veeck did something, my dad had to have it in the back of his mind.

**MIKE VEECK**, Bill Veeck’s son and longtime baseball executive, was 14 in September 1965: We all knew where it [Paige’s signing with the A’s] came from. To his credit, he [Finley] was always complimentary. There was a grudging respect on both sides.

On Sept. 10, 1965, the team was on the road, Finley was in Chicago at the office of his insurance business, and A’s general manager Hank Peters posed with Paige at a Kansas City news conference pulled together with little notice. An apparent example of mid-1960s racial attitudes and inequity was United Press International’s wire story account of some of Paige’s quotes, printed the next day in dozens of newspapers coast to coast:

*“I’ll just keep muh fastball off the fat of the bat.”*

*“Muh fastball is still muh money pitch.”*

*“I can still handle the hitters in the big show. I’se know I can. Alls I want is the chance.”*

Finley’s promotional escapades in 1965 had already included a mule named Charlie-O as the team mascot at home and on the road, “Harvey” the mechanized rabbit providing baseballs to umpires, and livestock such as sheep and goats at the ballpark – in addition to the unprecedented Sept. 8 Campaneris game, in which the second-year player pitched the eighth inning and got injured on a home plate collision when he played catcher in the ninth.

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When the A's enlisted Paige, it wasn't the only page Finley took from Veeck's playbook. Veeck, whose three signings of Paige were also derided as publicity stunts, had supplied comfortable chairs specifically for Paige in St. Louis and Miami in the 1950s – and photographs of him in the chairs appeared all over the country.

Finley might well have had one-upping Veeck in mind when he brought in a very large antique rocking chair for the 6-foot-3, 180-pound Paige to use adjacent to the A's bullpen, just past their dugout on the first-base side, with a woman in a nurse's outfit and a water boy stationed alongside the rocking righthander – all a magnet for photo ops. Finley told reporters that the chair was 150 years old, and he received special permission from the league to have Paige sit in it during games.

Just as with the dugout, the bullpen was a few feet below the playing field. According to Finley, Paige said, "Man alive, I'm close enough to below the surface as it is," adding, "I want to spend the rest of my days on at least even ground."



Satchel Paige (left) and his wife, Lahoma (top center) at home in Kansas City's Santa Fe neighborhood with members of their family in 1961. Daughter Pamela is third from the right.

TAMMY LJUNGBLAD/KANSAS CITY STAR VIA ZUMA PRESS WIRE

**JOHN O'DONOGHUE**, A's pitcher, age 25 in September 1965: Charlie Finley and Ringling Brothers would have gone well together. Publicity man Jim Schaaf came into our clubhouse and said Satchel Paige would join our ballclub. Word was Charlie wanted to give him time for his pension, which we thought was terrific.

**PAUL FINLEY**: My dad knew he was helping Satchel, and also helping get some attendance into the park, so I think that was a proud moment for him to be able to do that.

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**SKIP LOCKWOOD**, A’s third baseman, age 19 in September 1965: I came into the clubhouse and saw my name was almost gone from my locker and the name “Paige” was also there. I said, “Oh my God, I’m being released.” That’s how I found out about him joining the team – we shared a locker. I was white and the youngest kid in the league at the time, you couldn’t have two more different people. He was three times my age and still playing; I respected that.

**RENE LACHEMANN**, A’s catcher, age 20 in September 1965: The first time we saw him go out on the ballfield, I was there to catch some of his side work and it was amazing. We didn’t know how old he was. We didn’t have a radar gun at that time, he might’ve been throwing 84, 85 miles an hour, if that, but he had tremendous control. He could locate both sides of the plate and had all different pitches that he could throw. He said, “I can hit a gum wrapper wherever you put it.” I put one, I think it was Juicy Fruit, on the side of the plate – and it’s a tiny little gum wrapper – and I put my glove there and bang, he hit it. He hit it two or three times.

**GEORGE TOMA**, A’s head groundskeeper, age 36 in September 1965: Every day by the bullpen in right field we would put out the rocker for him and then put it back in a shed. I wish I knew what happened to it.

**PAUL FINLEY**: My mother was an antiquer and found that rocker and it was in need of rehabbing. My dad saw it, wanted it refinished, and he told everybody – since it was very wide – it was President William Howard Taft’s rocking chair. My mom bought it, maybe in Michigan where she went to see antiques, and maybe she heard about Taft first? It was completely rehabbed and had very shiny green leather. And when you would sit in it, it was very comfortable, but your arms had to reach out to reach the ends of it.

**JACK AKER**, A’s pitcher, age 25 in September 1965: In the old stadium in Kansas City, the bullpen and bench were underground like a pit, and Satchel said, “I’m afraid to go in, I won’t be able to get out.” We weren’t winning many games, and we were afraid we’d get released if we sat in his rocking chair.

**PAUL FINLEY**: My dad figured that because of Satchel’s age he wanted to make a bigger deal out of it, so he puts him in a rocker. I can imagine my dad said, “We’ll get the rocker there, and we’ll get some nurses, he’s so old.” And I remember it being crated up and shipped from our farm in Indiana to Kansas City and then shipped back when it was done. The last time I saw it I probably was in my 20s, and I don’t know what happened to it after that.

**PAMELA PAIGE O’NEAL**, Satchel Paige’s daughter, attended 9/25/65 game at age 17: To us, that was just comical. We didn’t see our father as an old man.

Aday before Paige’s planned return to the mound in a game, City Hall ceremonies honored him, as the mayor declared Sept. 25 “Satchel Paige Day.” Former Monarchs

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teammate Buck O’Neil recounted how in 1942, with the Negro World Series on the line, Paige intentionally walked two batters to load the bases to face the great Josh Gibson. Paige then told Gibson he’d throw three straight fastballs, which he did, striking him out looking.

Paige’s remarks before the city’s top officials fueled, as always, mystery about his true age, then he concluded with “I am very glad to be back again because I am trying to get my pension.” A councilman noted Finley’s role in giving Paige that opportunity. Mayor Ilus Davis read aloud a city council proclamation that spelled the honoree’s first name as “Satchell” and included the following, after five other “Whereas” passages:

*“Whereas to insure (sic) every comfort and*

*convenience for Satchell Paige during the games the rocking chair has been installed next to the dugout, complete with an attractive nurse to fill his every request.”*

Satchel Paige watches a game against the Washington Senators from a rocking chair with nurse Sandra Damon (center) standing nearby. The A’s had a nurse stay with Paige for home games and practices.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

**SANDRA DAMON**, a nurse who appeared with Paige on Sept. 21, 1965, at age 23: One afternoon I was shopping in a drugstore. I was still wearing my white uniform, sans nurse’s cap, when I was approached by a representative of the A’s. It was a one-day gig. I was to bring him refreshments and keep him comfortable. They set us up away from the fans so there was very little interaction with others. He was a quiet man and didn’t say a lot.

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**BILL BRYAN**, A's catcher for 9/25/65 game at age 26: I didn't really know how old he was. And Satch, he liked to kid a little bit, too, and he might be one age one day and one another (laughs), so you just had to keep up with the way things went.

**SKIP LOCKWOOD**: He was always talking about his age, saying, "stay young." It had an impact on me. And he always had pearls of wisdom. He told me, "Don't ever let them take that uniform away." Certain things you notice and copy. We had those old metal hangers, and I noticed he hung his britches from the top. He took the hanger and put it up by the belt, so the width was by the pockets, not folded at the crease. I liked it, so I copied it and still do it today.

**RENE LACHEMANN**: The whole time was very educational for me as far as seeing how he went about his business, taking care of himself and everything like that. He didn't believe in running, but he was throwing pitches from the mound, that's how he got his exercise in. He got himself back in shape to be able to go ahead and throw three major league innings, which was an amazing feat, to tell you the truth.

**PAMELA PAIGE O'NEAL**: He did his own kind of workouts in the backyard or running down Paseo Boulevard. As his daughters, we probably were busy making sure he had everything, he had medication, he had all of his rubs and personal items.

**RENE LACHEMANN**: He had tremendous balance with his body, all kinds of deliveries, all different angles. He had the eephus ball, the curveball, he'd drop down sidearm and make things sink. I said, "You putting s-t on that ball there?" And he said, "No, no, no, no," so I don't know. He wouldn't tell me what the hell was in his satchel, so I knew he wasn't gonna tell me what he's put on the ball. Guys were doctoring the balls, using spitters and stuff at that time, too. But he said, "No, no, it's just my natural sinker. That's a 'sinky,' Lach."

**DON BUSCHHORN**, A's pitcher, age 19 in September 1965: He looked older than 59. Of course, when you're around 20, everybody looks old. I figured he was 60, 65 or older.



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**RENE LACHEMANN**: He would say in an honest way, “You know, I could’ve been pitching up here for 15, 20 years, if I would’ve had an opportunity to.” And he said, “When I played against them in the exhibition games, the majority of the players were telling me I could’ve pitched in the major leagues and I was one of the better pitchers that they had seen. So that made me feel very, very good, knowing that these were star major league players. I wish I could’ve done that, you know? But that doesn’t take away the time that I had in the Negro Leagues,” because he said he had a great time in the Negro Leagues.

**KEN HARRELSON**, A’s first baseman, age 24 in September 1965: I was awed. He was a legend. I think we were all thrilled, just happy to be around him – we all loved him.

**WILFORD BRUCE**, A’s grounds crew member at age 18 in September 1965: It was special for a ghetto kid to see a legend, not too many times to see a Black legend like that.

**RENE LACHEMANN**: He was throwing batting practice to us, and I said, “Hey Satch, throw me that eephus pitch you got there.” And he threw it to me, and I hit it out of the ballpark, and I said, “Yeah,” and kind of laughed and grinned at him. And I said, “Throw me another one of them sons of b—s.” The next thing he threw was a hesitation pitch, and next thing I knew it was on top of me. A fastball, I tried to swing, it just blew up my bat, splintered it right in half, it was in pieces. He says, “Go ahead and eephus on that.” Everybody was laughing. You could see he was a tremendous competitor.

**TOMMIE REYNOLDS**, A’s leftfielder for 9/25/65 game at age 24: He was a guy you wanted to rub shoulders with, he could teach you a lot about the game and about life. I loved going out to the bullpen. You’d listen and say, “Wow.” He told us how he traveled, but he didn’t complain. He had a lot of stories and sayings. He said, “If you see me in a fight with a bear, don’t go help me, help the bear.” I wish I had spent more time with him. Lach spent a lot of time with him. *(Editor’s note: Tommy Reynolds died March 19 at age 83.)*

**RENE LACHEMANN**: I wanted to find out about the Negro Leagues a lot. We had Campy Campaneris, one of the best base stealers in the game at that time, and I said, “Hey, Satch, have you ever seen anybody run as fast as Campy?” And he says, “Yeah. Don’t talk to me about that.” He said, “Had a roommate in the Negro Leagues named Cool Papa Bell and he’d turn the light out in the room and be in bed before it got dark.” And I said, “Satch, I’ve heard that story. That’s an old story.” He said, “Well, I tell you one thing, guarantee you hadn’t seen this one. I’ve seen Cool Papa Bell hit a one-hop ball right through the pitcher’s legs and it hit him in the ass sliding into second.” I said, “No, no, I ain’t heard of that one before. So, yeah, you taught me with that one.”

**MONTE MOORE**, A’s radio broadcaster for 9/25/65 game at age 35: I was thoroughly enthralled and excited to meet him and to have him in the booth with us a couple of

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times, including on a road trip to Boston. At the back of the plane there was a table, and he drew a crowd, telling stories. I think he was tremendous. What really impressed me was how gentle he was with our players and just to see his patience with all of us. He was a gentle giant.

**RENE LACHEMANN**: He was very quiet in a lot of ways, and you had to go ahead and make sure you talked to him to get stuff out of him, as far as I was concerned. I'd get him on the bus a lot and sometimes down in the bullpen. It was very interesting for me to find out the background of the Negro Leagues, which I respected, and knowing about how good they were and what they did to become star baseball players. I'm very appreciative that I had a chance to be with somebody like that. Not many people could ever think about having the chance that I had to associate with him and be a three-week friend of his. What Satchel gave me was some wonderful times.

**BILL BRYAN**: Everybody was pretty enthused about getting to know him and Satch sat during the ballgames in his rocking chair and loved to talk and tell stories. He was good about demonstrating his wisdom in baseball and the things that he tried to do to make himself better and bring himself up. And Satch was a big family man and liked to talk about them a lot and his hometown in Alabama. I never knew him to have any bad things to say about anybody, he always loved to talk and get your idea. He would listen, too, and he wanted to help really.

**RENE LACHEMANN**: He would tell me about Josh Gibson, how one time he hit what they said was the longest home run in in baseball history. He hit it over the fence in Mobile and he said it went something like 500 miles. I said, "You mean 500 feet." He said, "No, 500 miles, son." I said, "How the hell are you talking about 500 miles?" Well, there was a railroad behind the center field stands there and he hit it and it landed in one of the box cars and so it ended up someplace I think in Birmingham or wherever the hell it was. But it was stuff like that that he would give me.

**DON BUSCHHORN**: I remember a lot of things about him. He got along with everybody, he was one helluva nice guy, he didn't have an arrogant bone in his body.

**WES STOCK**, A's pitcher, age 31 in September 1965: I was in the bullpen, we talked to him down there all the time. We were just asking him a lot of questions. I remember him being humble, he would sit there and talk to all of us.

**PAMELA PAIGE O'NEAL**: I think that's just absolutely a perfect statement. He was humble. He was extremely helpful. He supported and pushed those who were around him. He was a trash talker, though. And that would be fun. And we enjoyed it. But as far as putting himself first, no. He said, "I played with some of the greatest ballplayers in the world." And that made him proud.

**BILL BRYAN**: He didn't call anybody by name. It was just, "Hey pitch, hey catch." But you knew what he was talking about. His knowledge of pitching was amazing.

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Satchel Paige talks to reporters after he signed a contract with the Kansas City Athletics on Sept. 10, 1965.

BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Paige's opportunity to pitch on Sept. 25, 1965, was to come against a lineup with young stars Carl Yastrzemski and Tony Conigliaro. Yastrzemski, who tied for the 1965 MLB lead in doubles, hit one to break up a Hunter no-hit bid in the seventh inning the night before in his 8-0 two-hitter before 2,304 fans that brought the A's to within 1 1/2 games of the ninth-place Red Sox.

**JIM LONBORG**, Red Sox pitcher, age 23 in September 1965: It was always fun to go to that old stadium; you never knew what Charlie Finley would do. The first thing we saw that marked it as unusual was the rocking chair – what the heck was going on? Mr. Finley was trying to play all the angles.

**JIM GOSGER**, Red Sox outfielder and leadoff hitter in 9/25/65 game at age 22: We went in there for a three-game series and were taking batting practice and everybody

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was looking down the rightfield line. There was somebody sitting in a rocking chair down there and there was a nurse there. And we didn’t know what was going on. Is somebody sick? Finally, our traveling secretary came out and he said, “That’s Satchel Paige down there.” And we said, “What?” “Yeah, he’s gonna pitch three innings.” I said, “Well, who’s the lady?” He says they have a nurse down there with him. And he’s just sitting there rocking (laughs). I wish I’d have took a damn picture of it. I would’ve loved to have a movie of it or something at that time, but you just don’t think about that.

**DAVE MOREHEAD**, Red Sox pitcher, age 22 in September 1965: It was just really kind of a surreal deal, almost like a circus more than anything else.

**FRANK WHITE**, MLB All-Star second baseman, saw 9/25/65 game at age 14: Baseball was the game back in those days. I was a freshman at Lincoln High School, the first built for Black people in Kansas City. And you could go to the top of our bleachers and look into Municipal Stadium and see the entire field. We were feeling great because [although] we couldn’t afford to go in the stadium, we knew that we could sit in the bleachers and watch those three innings against the Red Sox. That was really the talk of the town leading up to that event. That was pretty exciting. I was with five or six of my buddies, the bleachers were full – probably 100 or more – and everybody was just having a great time watching him pitch.

**RICK SUTCLIFFE**, MLB pitcher, Cy Young Award winner, attended 9/25/65 game at age 9: I was raised by my grandparents. One of our neighbors told my grandfather he had three extra tickets to the game, and I remember him saying, “this is a game you boys’ll never forget.” We sat in the upper deck. I didn’t realize what was going on. My grandfather was laughing that the A’s pitcher was older than he was.

**LARRY LESTER**, Negro Leagues historian, attended 9/25/65 game at age 15: Was his legacy fiction, or fact or somewhere in between? That was the excitement for me, to actually see this man play in person, this was my chance to see him in the flesh instead of reading about him.

**BILL BRYAN**: I thought it might turn out to be just a laughingstock, and a runaway in runs, because I knew he couldn’t throw the ball by anybody anymore. But he changed speeds so much until it’d be hard for the hitters to keep up with what he was going to do.

**RANDY SCHWARTZ**, A’s first baseman, age 21 in September 1965: I warmed him up before the game and he threw pretty good. I was just having fun. It was a special time in my life and obviously in his.

**BILL BRYAN**: I thought it was an honor to get the start, because we had a couple of other catchers on the team. I knew I was setting history. I said, “Heck, a country boy like me [from southwest Georgia] part of history with a guy that played ball before I was born,” and I really enjoyed doing it.

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Publicity and anticipation notwithstanding, the A’s didn’t quite draw 10,000 for the Saturday night “Salute to Satchel Paige” event that featured a brief oldtimers game before the regular one with his fellow Negro Leagues stars and future Hall of Famers Cool Papa Bell, O’Neil, Bullet Joe Rogan and Hilton Smith. But the 9,289 on hand were more than for the five previous home games combined, including just 690 two days earlier. Paige’s wife Lahoma was not at the game, as she was soon to give birth to the couple’s seventh child.

**JOHN O’DONOGHUE:** I know I hoped he wouldn’t get embarrassed. I thought he was always a proud man, and I just didn’t want him to get embarrassed.

**MIKE VEECK:** My expectation was exactly what he did – he was magical. He wasn’t going to embarrass himself. In my dad’s opinion, there was no question Satchel was the greatest pitcher ever.

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*In [Part 2](#), Satchel Paige’s astounding major league swan song – remembered by those who were there – and the newly obtained radio broadcast of his performance for the ages.*

*William (Willie) Weinbaum is an ESPN broadcast and digital journalist whose career highlights include co-producing the groundbreaking 1997 Outside the Lines special “Breaking the Line: Jackie Robinson’s legacy.” Robinson tops his list of figures from sports history he wishes he could have met for a meal, interviewed or (preferably) both.*

<https://andscape.com/features/satchel-paiges-mlb-debut-75-years-ago-changed-baseball-forever/>

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# ‘He was older than our fathers’: An oral history of Satchel Paige’s final game at 59

*Paige’s last pitching performance left an impact on players, fans and family who were there in Kansas City 60 years ago*

By [William Weinbaum](#)

In [Part 1](#) of Andscape’s in-depth Black History Month story about 1965, when Satchel Paige became the oldest player ever to appear in a Major League Baseball game, his Kansas City Athletics teammates and others revisited the hoopla when he joined the ballclub, including owner Charlie Finley providing an on-field rocking chair for the 59-year-old legend.

Part 2 picks up the story on Sept. 25, 1965, with the firsthand accounts of Paige’s daughter, the A’s and Boston Red Sox players and others who witnessed and contributed to the history he made in his first appearance in an MLB game in 12 years. All of the recollections are edited and condensed from more than 40 interviews – more than 20 with players – conducted from November 2024 to February 2025, and they are accompanied by excerpts from a newly obtained recording of the Kansas City radio broadcast of Paige’s historic performance before 9,289 fans at Municipal Stadium on a night billed as a “Salute to Satchel Paige.”

*You can listen to the full radio broadcast of Paige’s performance [here](#) (courtesy of John Miley).*

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**PAMELA PAIGE O’NEAL**, Satchel Paige’s daughter, attended 9/25/65 game at age 17: He was good, so I knew he would be OK. We, like our dad, don’t attempt things unless we are going to conquer it, unless we are going to do it and do it well. The day of the game, we were quite excited. And we, contrary to what happens now, were all dressed up – young ladies didn’t wear slacks and leisure clothes. We all got ourselves ready. I’m the oldest, so I checked my younger siblings, my brothers and sisters, and we get in the car and go to the game. I just remember holding hands with my brothers and sisters and walking and sitting down and watching what happened. It was a unique experience to see him on the pitching mound and we were all excited. And where we

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were seated, we could see everything on the field. We were offered hot chocolate. And you sat quietly. And you paid attention. There wasn’t a lot of running around, the cameras weren’t flashing, nobody was coming up interviewing us. Those kinds of things did not happen.

**LARRY LESTER**, Negro Leagues historian, attended 9/25/65 game at age 15: There was energy in the ballpark, a lot of anticipation about “What would this 59-year-old man that we have heard so much about do? Would he live up to the hype?”

**TOMMIE REYNOLDS**, A’s leftfielder for 9/25/65 game at age 24: I didn’t really believe that he was going to pitch in a game. I was afraid somebody would hit a ball back through the middle. *(Editor’s note: Reynolds died March 19 at age 83.)*

**RICO PETROCELLI**, Red Sox infielder, age 22 in September 1965: All of us had a meeting and the manager, [Hall of Famer] Billy Herman, said, “try not to hit up the middle.” We thought he’d be throwing 60 miles an hour, it was just a promotion. All of us were concerned, we knew he was Satchel Paige, one of the all-time greats. We knew it was a promotion, obviously, and thought, “he’s older, he won’t throw hard, we’ll get some hits, maybe knock him out of the box and fans will have gotten to see him pitch.”

**WAYNE CAUSEY**, A’s third baseman in 9/25/65 game at age 28 (other than Paige, the oldest player in the A’s lineup that night): I remember I was playing as deep as I could get. I was afraid they’d hit it so hard that I wouldn’t catch it and they’d kill me.



Satchel Paige (center) demonstrates his technique to four Kansas City rookie pitchers. From left to right: John “Blue Moon” Odom, Jim “Catfish” Hunter, Paige, Dick Joyce and Ron Tompkins on Sept. 24, 1965.

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AP PHOTO/STF

**JOHN O’DONOGHUE**, A’s pitcher, age 25 in September 1965: All the lights went out and they put on the BIC lighters and there was a spotlight put on Satchel, and they said, “Kansas City’s own Satchel Paige,” and the place just went goofy.

**PAMELA PAIGE O’NEAL**: And that was a huge honor, for him and of course for our family. And a huge round of applause.

**LARRY STAHL**, A’s outfielder, pinch-hit in 9/25/65 game at age 24: I didn’t know what to expect. He had all kinds of pitches and the ball moved a lot. He really did surprise, that a man that age could throw the ball really good, not throwing that hard.

**BOB DULIBA**, Red Sox pitcher, age 30 in September 1965: I couldn’t wait for it, from all the things I’d read and heard. It was awesome; all our guys were in the same boat, thought it was awesome. I was amazed he could still throw strikes, and our guys couldn’t do anything with him.

**FROM A’s RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER RED RUSH: For Satch**

**Paige, it’ll be Jim Gosger, Dalton Jones and Carl Yastrzemski in that order here in the first inning of play.**

**JOHN O’DONOGHUE**: When he threw the first strike, the stands went wild. It was quite an experience, it really was.

**RICO PETROCELLI**: Holy Jeez, oh my god, he’s throwing hard. Our mouths were open, seeing this guy throw pitches that sunk a foot. It was incredible; we were a good-hitting team. In one sense, we were in awe of him, but he just had great stuff. It was really a surprise. It was one of the great thrills of my career. I’m glad Finley picked the Red Sox. I wish I would have been in the lineup.

**FROM A’s RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF**

**THE FIRST INNING: Two balls, two strikes. Now the Red Sox players down**

**in the dugout, and that’s gonna be an interesting thing to watch here for a**

**while, all hiding their head and laughing at Gosger. Paige is looking over**

**into that dugout as if to say, “You might get your chance too,**

**buddy.” Bryan gives a target to Satch. He takes the double pump, holds**

**that ball over his head, curls the leg around and throws. There’s a pop-up.**

**Out behind first base, Rosario’s going back near the stands, under the ball.**

**Satchel Paige has got one out! (CHEERING)**

**JIM GOSGER**, Red Sox outfielder and leadoff hitter in 9/25/65 game at age 22: We didn’t know what he was going to throw, how he threw. I was the first man up. When I come back to the bench, somebody said to me, “How’s he throwing?” I said, “Pretty darn good for a 59-year-old man.” I said, “It’s amazing, I just can’t imagine how well he would’ve pitched when he was younger.”

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**DAVE MOREHEAD**, Red Sox pitcher, age 22 in September 1965: It was probably more like an exhibition game where guys were having a lot of fun. Yeah, it was definitely a different atmosphere.

**JIM GOSGER**: Oh my God, the people were crazy. The excitement, every time he got somebody out they were cheering, they were clapping. Usually when you play a game, nothing happens till the end of the inning.

**FROM A’s RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF**

**THE FIRST: Bouncing ball down the first-base line. It’ll be fielded by**

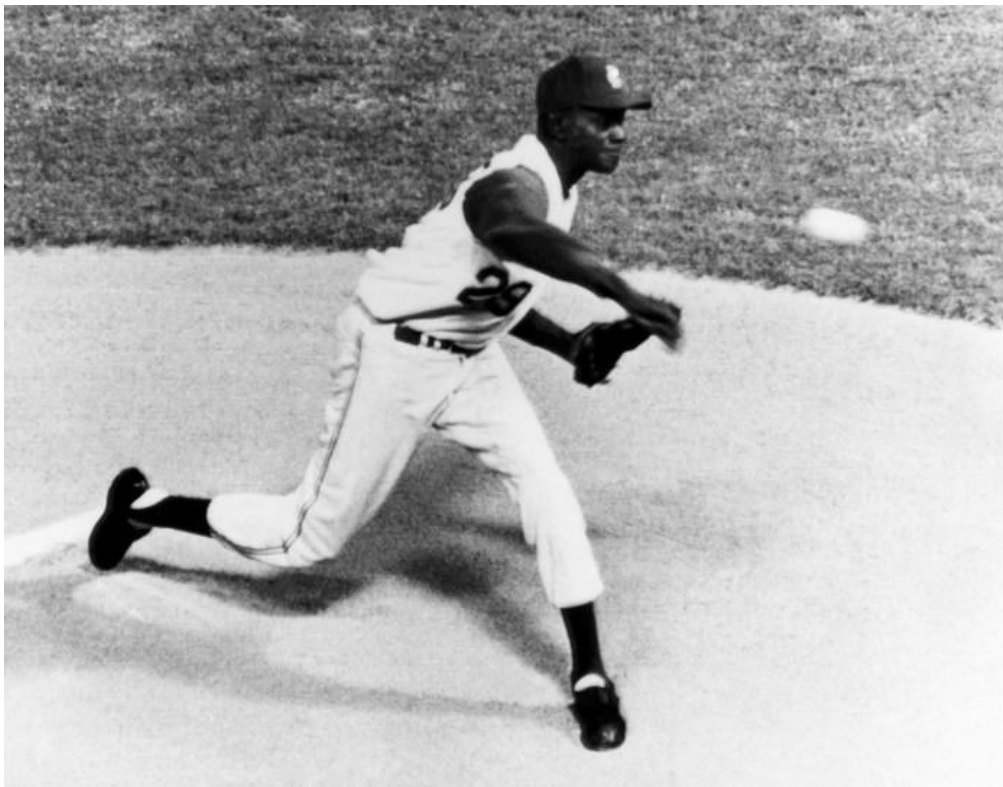
**Rosario. He fumbles the ball, and Jones is safe at first, going around him.**

**Rosario, who is known as a fine defensive ballplayer, tried to pick that ball**

**up. He had an easy tag out on Jones going by if he’d have just picked it up,**

**but he bobbed the ball, and Jones is safe at first.**

**DALTON JONES**, Red Sox third baseman and second hitter in 9/25/65 game at age 21: I had known the name Satchel Paige all my life; my daddy played in the St. Louis Browns organization and said he was a great pitcher. I do recall saying, “Lord, don’t let me strike out.” I didn’t want to get struck out by a guy that age. That had to be going through the minds of our other guys, too. He was ahead from the start, because he had you thinking that.



Satchel Paige throws a pitch against the Boston Red Sox on Sept. 25, 1965 at Kansas City Municipal Stadium.

BRUCE  
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Monte Moore announces as Satchel Paige pitches to Jim Gosger to start the game against the Red Sox. BROADCAST COURTESY JOHN MILEY

**JIM LONBORG**, Red Sox pitcher, age 23 in September 1965: We were a s—ty team, they were a s—ty team and I think we were just trying to win a ballgame. Sitting there watching, talking with our hitters, nobody wanted to be the guy to strike out.

**FROM A's RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF THE FIRST: Here's a pitch to Yastrzemski. Got away from Bryan. Went right through his mitt. Down to second base goes Dalton Jones. He's gonna try for third. Bryan picks the ball up, throws it down there. They've got him. He's out! (CHEERING)**

**BILL BRYAN**, A's catcher for 9/25/65 game at age 26: I had a good arm and I don't think they should've been surprised that I threw him out. (laugh)

**JIM GOSGER**: It was funny, Dalton didn't run real good, he was average speed-wise. When he got in after he got thrown out, everybody looked at him and says, "You're not real quick, Dalton. What are you doing?" He says, "I had to stretch it, try to see if I could get to third."

**FROM A's RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF THE FIRST: Three balls and no strikes. Great control pitcher of the past is behind Yastrzemski. Here it comes. There's a drive towards left field, hit pretty well. Reynolds going back. He's at the fence. It's gonna be over his head, off the wall. Tartabull backs the play up and holds Yastrzemski to a double off the left-field wall.**

**CARL YASTRZEMSKI**, Red Sox outfielder and third hitter in 9/25/65 game at age 26: I didn't think he'd throw as hard as he did, he had a good live fastball and that's all he threw to me. I didn't think of anything except trying to get a hit. When I first hit the ball, I thought it was out. It was against the left centerfield wall and bounced back. I was so happy to get a hit off him. When I was standing at second, I wanted to tip my hat to him, because I couldn't believe what he was doing.

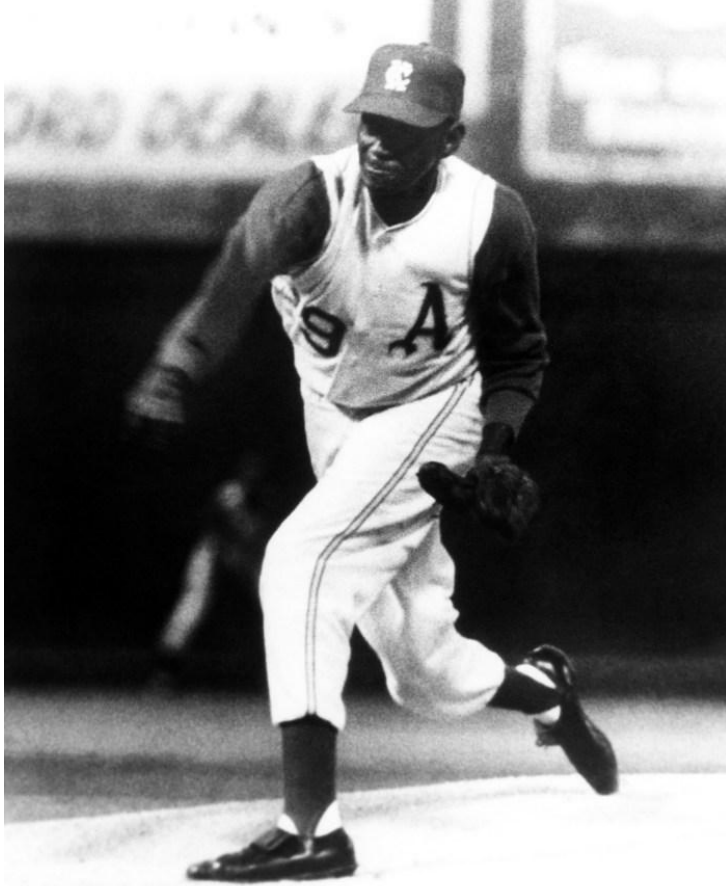
**RICK SUTCLIFFE**, MLB pitcher, Cy Young Award winner, attended 9/25/65 game at age 9: He gave up a hit in the first, the Yaz double, and then was cruising. The last home run Yaz hit in his career was off me (home run No. 452, at Cleveland, Sept. 10, 1983, on the anniversary of Paige signing with the A's).

**SKIP LOCKWOOD**, A's third baseman, age 19 in September 1965: I didn't think he'd go an inning. I didn't know if he could reach home plate. When I look back at it, I should have taken it seriously. I was thinking it was part of the circus. He was a darned good pitcher even at that age and took it seriously. All of us were witness to something historic, I failed to realize it. I wish I had.

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**JACK AKER**, A's pitcher, age 25 in September 1965: He gave them nothing down the middle. You could see he was relaxed. He was older than our fathers, this was making us look bad. (laugh)



Kansas City Athletics pitcher Satchel Paige in action against the Boston Red Sox on Sept. 25, 1965 at Municipal Stadium.

BRUCE BENNETT STUDIOS VIA GETTY IMAGES STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES

The exultant crowd and two stunned teams saw Paige throw just 28 pitches in his three innings, with the only hit the first inning double by Yastrzemski, who was a batboy in 1950 when Paige struck out his father in a Riverhead, New York, semipro game. Paige stranded Yastrzemski at second base, using his famed hesitation pitch to get 1965 American League home run champ Tony Conigliaro to pop out – the first of seven straight Boston batters Paige retired.

***FROM A's RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF THE THIRD: Here's the 0-1 pitch. Change up from the hesitation, popped up to the shortstop, Campaneris. Campy's back. He's got it. (CHEERING) Mike Ryan almost fell down chasing that one. Satch threw a hesitation pitch changeup, looped it I'd say maybe 10, 12 feet high.***

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**RANDY SCHWARTZ**, A's first baseman, age 21 in September 1965: When Ryan swung, I thought he was going to break his back against that hesitation pitch.

**LARRY LESTER**: The hesitation pitch is very simple. The foot hits the ground before the arm comes around. A delayed release of the baseball. And it would throw the timing off of the batter.

**DAVE MOREHEAD**: I saw a string bean kind of looking guy, it seemed like he had really long arms. One thing that I was kind of looking forward to was his hesitation pitch. I'd heard about that, and I was glad he did do it. It was kind of cool.

**RANDY SCHWARTZ**: It was amazing to see his hesitation pitch, he would throw it hard or soft. Literally winds up, steps, stops and throws – hitters had a very hard time, it was unlike against anybody else.

**DAVE MOREHEAD**: I think we thought we were gonna hit the ball all around the park. Guys were trying to jack the ball and he was changing speeds. He never threw the same pitch the same speed consecutively, and from that aspect, it was really something to see. He had fantastic control.

**CARL YASTRZEMSKI**: I just couldn't believe somebody that old was pitching – and that well. I think everybody was amazed and our hitters couldn't believe they didn't get a hit.

**FROM A'S RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF**

**THE THIRD: He's pitching now to Bill Monbouquette, the Red Sox pitcher ...**

**There's the pitch. Swing and a miss. Strike three. He got him! (CHEERING)**

Monte Moore announces as Satchel Paige strikes out Bill Monbouquette in the third inning. BROADCAST COURTESY JOHN MILEY

**DAVE MOREHEAD**: I remember that we had a lot of laughs with Monbo and giving him a little ribbing. (LAUGH) And it was good, it was fun.

**LARRY LESTER**: In 1990, I wrote to each ballplayer on both teams a questionnaire about "What was it like playing that game?" I did keep all those letters. *Excerpts from the late Bill Monbouquette's questionnaire: I remember our guys saying, "I'm going to hit one off of the old man." He mowed us down like taking candy from a baby. It really was a shame he never got the chance to pitch in the M.L. for a long period of time.*

*Baseball really missed not only a great pitcher but a great showman.*

**JIM LONBORG**: His velocity was decent – the one thing I remember is that everything moved, he didn't throw anything straight. He was very skinny, very frail looking, but he had some great gifts from God that allowed him to be smooth and agile. He had a very fluid delivery, was very limber and loose and had a great idea of where it was going.

**TOMMIE REYNOLDS**: I was amazed, flabbergasted, for a man of that age, moving the way he did – he wasn't very spry moving off the mound – they swung and tried. He had a lot of pride that he could do it.

**DON BUSCHHORN**, A's pitcher, age 19 in September 1965: I just remember thinking, "How the hell is he doing that?" It was like, "this can't be real, it's too easy." When I think about it, it was like one of the eight wonders of the world, to do that at his age.

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**BILL BRYAN:** Every once in a while, he would throw one pretty good speed, and I think that surprised some of the hitters and he just kept 'em off stride. It gets to be irritating that you can't just hit it like you want to. And they didn't.

### RELATED STORY



[Satchel Paige’s MLB debut 75 years ago changed baseball forever](#) [Read now](#)

**JIM GOSGER:** He wasn't overpowering, I would say probably in the mid-80s. But the best thing about him pitching was the fact that everything was from the belt down. And he was so consistent. I can't imagine how hard he threw when he was younger. I mean, he was that good and it was very impressive. And it was fun playing against him, I mean, he embarrassed us. He really did.

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Outfielder Carl Yastrzemski was the only player to get a hit off of Satchel Paige during his game for the Athletics.

***FROM A's RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCER MONTE MOORE, TOP OF THE THIRD: There's interest in this ballgame all over the United States tonight. Bryan giving the target to Satchel. Gosger cocks the bat. Paige delivers. Bouncing ball to the shortstop's right. Campaneris digs it out, strong throw to first base. He got him! (CHEERING) Three up and three down. Paige has retired seven in a row. So in the middle of the third inning, the score: Kansas City one, Boston nothing.***

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**JIM GOSGER**: The thing that really got me, I was the last man to face him, and I had grounded out and I’m running to get my glove, and he grabbed my arm, and it scared me. I turned around and he just looked at me, had a smile on his face, and he said, “Good luck, young man.” And I thought, “Wow.” I said, “Thank you, sir.” And that’s something I will never forget. You know, coming from a man of his stature to just take the time to say something like that to me, being a young player. I can remember it as if it was yesterday. He was just a gentleman, and he didn’t have to do what he did, that shows a lot of class. I had a few great memories, but this was probably the tops. It’s just enjoyable to even think about it.

**FROM A’s RADIO BROADCAST – ANNOUNCERS MONTE MOORE AND**

**RED RUSH, TOP OF THE FOURTH: Satchel Paige is on the mound.**

**Haywood Sullivan has gone out. He’s gonna take Satch out of the ballgame**

**here. (BOOS) ... Segui is just about now on the mound. He’s been given the**

**baseball. Satch shakes his hand. And here he comes. (CHEERING). Satchel**

**Paige is getting a standing ovation, and he has twice doffed his cap to the**

**crowd here and actually bowed to them. The A’s players in the dugout**

**standing at attention as Satch comes by. They’re clapping hands. ...**

**Whether he is 23, 53, 63, or 73, as some say, he really showed a lot of**

**people that he still has that old love of the game and, boy, his arm is still**

**there. What a guy, Satchel Paige.**

Monte Moore and Red Rush announce as starter Satchel Paige leaves the game after pitching three full innings, allowing only one hit and no walks. BROADCAST  
COURTESY JOHN MILEY

**DIEGO SEGUI**, A’s pitcher, relieved Paige in 9/25/65 game at age 28: You thought the Boston Red Sox would kill him, but it was the opposite, he made it look easy. You see what experience can do to fool people. You see somebody do something like that at that age, it’s special. For the rest of your life, you never forget it. I congratulated him before he left the mound, then he disappeared. (*Editor’s note: Segui died June 24 at age 87.*)

**RICK SUTCLIFFE**: He went out in the fourth and I remember my grandfather telling us to stand up. Sixty years later, I remember the ovation and thinking it was the coolest thing I’d ever seen. It gave me goose bumps. Maybe I thought I’ll get an ovation like that someday. There’s not a doubt in my mind that it had an impact on my love of the game.

When Kansas City rookie manager Haywood Sullivan – a quarter-century Paige’s junior – took the ball from him at the start of the fourth, the A’s led 1-0, but they ultimately fell

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5-2 to the ninth-place Red Sox and failed to pull within a half-game of Boston with eight games left. Paige disappeared into the clubhouse, but was summoned back, as fans stood and celebrated him, singing "The Old Gray Mare."

**FRANK WHITE**, MLB All-Star second baseman, saw 9/25/65 game at age 14: He reportedly pitched over 2,500 games, 50 no-hitters, so to me that's mystical when you can do something like that. And you can say, "I saw him pitch at 59, three innings of no-run baseball, and he walked off the mound with his head up." Based on what people talk about of Satchel, he probably said to himself, "I told you I could do it." I just really feel blessed that I got to see the greatest pitcher in baseball history pitch that night.

**PAMELA PAIGE O'NEAL**: For people who are sports enthusiasts and historians, it would be like a gladiator. He went out and did something no one thought he could do, that goes down in the annals of time. How many other people can say that at 59 they were at the epitome of holding down three innings with a pitching arm that had pitched, I can't imagine, since the time he left school? But he could automatically get himself in shape and do an outstanding job.

**LARRY LESTER**: It got rid of any doubts that the hyperbole about Satchel Paige was right on point. I just look at the anniversary as a time to reflect, a time to reminisce about what 'woul'da, shoul'da, coul'da' happened. He could have been one of the greatest pitchers in integrated Major League Baseball ever. It showed me that maybe this man was just as fantastic as his story was and even more so. I became even more involved with learning more about the Negro Leagues. Curiosity became my philosophy.

**PAUL FINLEY**, Charlie Finley's son, attended 9/25/65 game at age 12: I remember my dad at the end saying, "Wasn't that something? You'll remember this."

**PAMELA PAIGE O'NEAL**: I was happy for my dad; it was his last opportunity to shine. I think it was huge for him and he was quite pleased. Now I'm shamelessly full of joy, pride, all of the good things. He just did not get the opportunity when he was at the zenith of his career. And that's unfortunate.

**RENE LACHEMANN**, A's catcher, age 20 in September 1965: My wish would've been that 20, 30 years earlier people could've experienced the greatness of this guy as a pitcher in Major League Baseball and he would've been able to be seen by the entire United States of America. It's just a shame that a lot of people didn't get the knowledge that he had, to find out what made him the pitcher that he was. He would probably have the best command of any major league pitcher in the history of the game and that's something you don't see now at all. Everybody's just interested in the [radar] gun reading at 100-plus miles an hour; they don't want to see inside, outside, up, down.

**PAMELA PAIGE O'NEAL**: I just know that he was never an unhappy person, that he understood how life was and things presented themselves to him. He taught us to always keep moving forward like he did. I'm always glad that his name is mentioned, that

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someone cares about his accomplishments, that people still want to read, report and do research about him. Those are the things that keep his legacy alive. Those are the things that bring joy to me and my family.



Four days before his own pitching performance, Satchel Paige watches his Kansas City teammates in action against the Washington Senators, from the comfort of the rocking chair.

In the clubhouse after the game, Paige noted that “everyone doubted me on the ballclub.” He thanked Finley in what was reported to be their first face-to-face meeting, and Finley said, “Nothing in baseball has ever given me more satisfaction.” The A’s owner said he hoped to bring Paige back as a coach the next year and get him closer to pension qualification, but it didn’t happen.

All these years later, intrigue envelopes Paige’s pitching and life, including the 1965 game and festivities, from which hardly any film is available – typical for most of his prolific career. And there are few known artifacts around from 1965 other than his contract, which sports auction house REA [sold for \\$48,000 in 2015](#). (Editor’s note:

[Paige’s 1965 contract was resold at auction in April for \\$66,000](#))

On African American Heritage Night in Oakland last June, the Athletics (Finley moved the A’s to the Bay Area after the 1967 season, won three straight World Series from 1972-74 and sold the team in 1980) distributed bobbleheads of Paige in a rocking chair to the crowd of 9,158 – an attendance figure 131 lower than for the 1965 game that inspired the collectible. The team commissioned 10,000 of the bobbleheads in tribute to the man and his incomparable achievement in his only game for the A’s.

Satchel Paige never appeared in another MLB game after the history he made on Sept. 25, 1965, but he did become eligible for a pension in 1969. He was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1971 and died in 1982.

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Coverage in 1965 and since of what Paige did with the A’s has almost invariably mentioned the rocking chair, often including images of Paige in it and a nurse alongside, but not a hint about the saga of the chair.

In a January follow-up interview with Paul Finley, two months after our first one, he said he’d made some inquiries and learned a little bit about the rocking chair’s fate. “It was sold,” he said. “My dad took a lot of furniture to a company in Indiana to sell, probably a few years before he died (in 1996). The furniture company is out of business.” Finley didn’t have any other information on either the company or the chair.

Further reporting for this story led to the furniture business owner, Bruce Rippe, who said he first learned about the chair from Finley in the early 1980s.

“He called me one day and said, ‘I’d like you to reproduce the rocking chair, and we’ll market it as having belonged to William Howard Taft,’ ” Rippe said, adding, “Charlie was the consummate salesperson, he said some senator gave it to Taft.”

Rippe said he told Finley that without authentication of the White House connection, the proposition was a non-starter. Not long after, the two men hauled the hefty rocker to a nursing home in Cincinnati, where Taft’s octogenarian son Charlie – the city’s former mayor – resided. But Charlie Taft told Charlie Finley he didn’t recognize the chair as having belonged to his father, who died in 1930. Nevertheless, Finley had a photo taken of the former president’s son in the chair, and gave him an autographed orange baseball, one of Finley’s innovations that never quite took hold.

A decade after that, according to Rippe, Finley asked him to sell the chair and other furniture, and Rippe complied.

“The rocking chair sold in a day,” Rippe recounted. “It was a very unusual, ginormous chair. The back was about 55 inches tall and it was about 30 inches wide. It was in very good shape, nothing at all loose or rickety. It was not your grandmother’s rocking chair, this was a one-off.”

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In tribute to Satchel Paige and what he did for the Athletics in 1965, the 2024 Oakland A's had 10,000 bobbleheads (left photo) made of him in the rocking chair. The actual chair (right photo) is now in the home of car dealer Steve Burkhart, who's had it for three decades.

As for the buyer, Rippe said he was a Cincinnati-area dealer of European cars who liked the chair, as well as the Paige and Taft stories, and thought the rocker would be a nice addition to his showroom. But Rippe didn't remember his name and said the person who would know it had died three weeks earlier and left no family.

Then, nearly two weeks later, Rippe said he had good news. He had come up with the name of the purchaser – and even found him.

But that wasn't all.

Steve Burkhart, the man who bought the chair from Rippe, still had it.

Contacted for this story, Burkhart said, "I paid \$2,000 for it. The rocking chair has been sitting in my house or car lot since then."

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When he bought the chair more than 30 years ago, the selling price was non-negotiable, Burkhart said. “I tried, I am a car dealer, but I was told that if Charlie didn’t get the price he wanted, he’d donate it to the Hall of Fame. It’s a huge damned chair. You’ll never see another like it; it’s amazingly impressive, bigger than life.”

Burkhart said he received a yellow folder with some photos when he made the purchase three decades ago, including one of Charlie Taft in the chair, but he’s not sure of the whereabouts of the folder or its contents.

As for the chair itself, it remains in top condition, according to Burkhart, because few have sat in it and he moved it to his house to protect it after it was at his used car dealership for about five years.

The 73-year-old Burkhart said he still sells cars, but he wouldn’t sell the chair, “unless it had significance to somebody who’d be willing to pay for something irreplaceable in history.

“I love the chair.”

*William (Willie) Weinbaum is an ESPN broadcast and digital journalist whose career highlights include co-producing the groundbreaking 1997 Outside the Lines special “Breaking the Line: Jackie Robinson’s legacy.” Robinson tops his list of figures from sports history he wishes he could have met for a meal, interviewed or (preferably) both.*

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Cleveland Indians pitcher Satchel Paige throws before a game Aug 1, 1948. Bettmann/Getty Images

By [Justice B. Hill](#)

July 7, 2023

*“Age is a case of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it don’t matter.”* — Satchel Paige  
The [editor of the Sporting News](#), “the Bible of Baseball,” labeled the signing of the 42-year-old Satchel Paige a publicity stunt. Cleveland Indians owner Bill Veeck wasn’t averse to a gimmick to put butts in his ballpark.

But 75 years ago, in the summer of 1948, Veeck had an American League pennant on his mind, so the P.T. Barnum flair in him had to step aside and let the reality of such a challenge sway the choices he made.

Veeck made a significant one on July 7, 1948, when he signed Paige to a major league contract.

Two days later, Paige made his debut.

“Somehow you sense of all the things Bill Veeck has done in the way of entertaining the public, this was the best,” Harold Sauerbrei of [The Plain Dealer](#) wrote after Paige’s first outing. “At the same time, it probably will strengthen the ballclub.” Sauerbrei proved prophetic.

In signing Paige, Veeck was getting the most celebrated figure in the history of “Black baseball.” Barred from the bigs because of his skin color, Paige had barnstormed the

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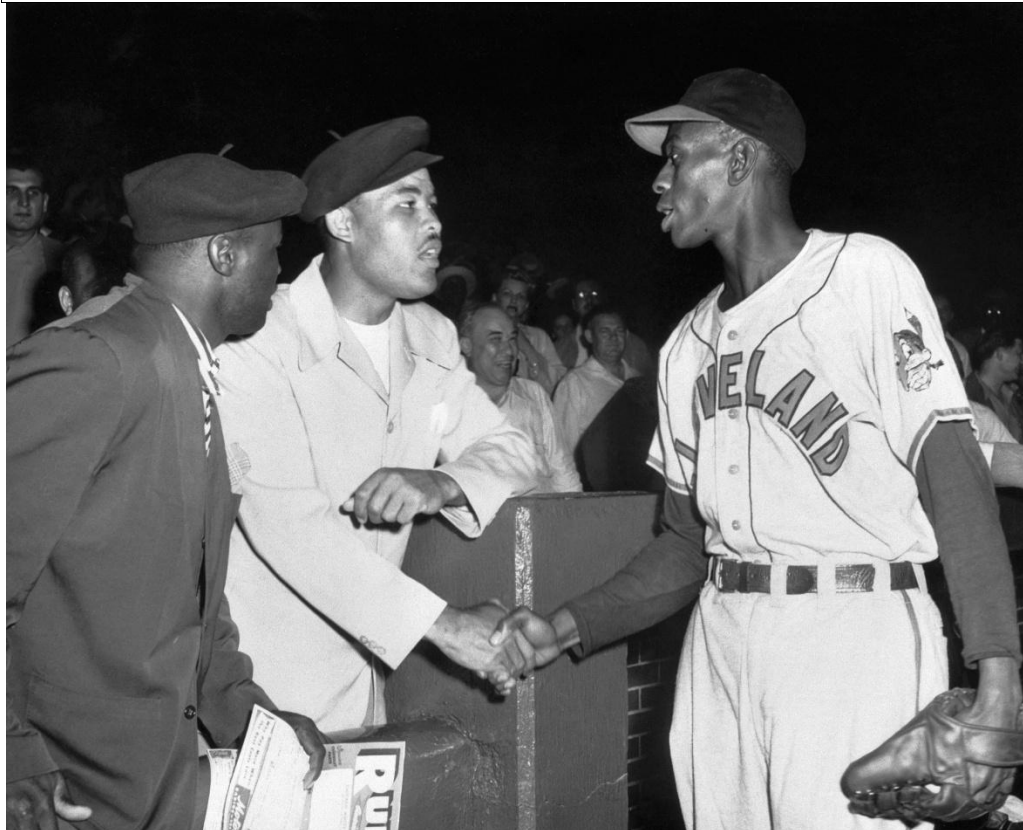
United States and Latin America for more than two decades, dazzling fans and baffling hitters with moves he named “be ball,” “wobbly ball,” “whipsy-dipsy-do ball” and “nothin’ ball.”

He also had a high-octane fastball to overpower hitters.

“The fabulous Satchel was to the Negro Leagues what Babe Ruth was, and is today, to baseball,” wrote Al Pritzker, sports editor of the *Monrovia News-Post*, in 1948. “A wrong has been partially corrected ...”

The wrong, of course, was this, said Pritzker, reflecting the sentiments of a handful of journalists in mainstream media and most journalists in the Black press: “Here was a man who was probably the finest pitcher of his time, and his time was long. But he had no chance to prove it in the majors.”

Pritzker wondered as many [white sportswriters](#) did about what Paige had left. With so many innings behind him, did he have quality innings ahead of him?



Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis (left) greets Cleveland Indians pitcher Satchel Paige (right) before a ballgame against the Chicago White Sox on Aug. 13, 1948.

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Remember, he came to the majors with other questions to answer. Sportswriters such as [Wendell Smith](#), one of the prominent journalists in the Black press, asked whether the ageless Paige had the discipline to make it in the bigs.

Paige often faced those questions and about his ability to play a team sport. He told Walter Johns, a sportswriter for *The Evening Independent* in Massillon, Ohio, in 1948: “I’m not hard to get along with and I don’t eat 12 hot dogs before I pitch. I don’t know how they picked up such stories. If I was hard to get along with, how would I ever get a chance to pitch for Cleveland? I don’t even eat hot dogs.”

Paige being Paige, added this last line for Johns: “In fact, I don’t like hamburgers either.”

How many hot dogs he did or did not eat mattered little to Veeck. He counted on Paige to help the Indians win a pennant with his arm, at an age most ballplayers weren’t good enough for the minor leagues.

Two days after Veeck signed him, Paige showed his major league bona fides.



In front of 34,780 fans in Municipal Stadium, he relieved right-hander Bob Lemon in the fifth inning and shut out the St. Louis Browns for two innings, offering a glimpse to all what they had missed during his two-plus decades in segregated baseball.

No doubt, Paige had lost a bit of the giddyup on his fastball. What he hadn’t lost was the flair for the dramatic, how to seize the spotlight, and his pinpoint control. His outing became etched in The Tribe folklore.

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Flashbulbs popped; the ballpark erupted in cheers as Paige, a man 42 or older — he turned his age into a guessing game — took a leisurely stroll from the bullpen to the center of the diamond.

“This wasn’t exactly a new experience for Old Satchel because he had faced major leaguers on countless occasions,” Sauerbrei wrote. ‘But this was the first time he pitched to a big league club in a championship game — and it made no difference to Old Satchel.’”



Cleveland Indians pitcher Bob Feller (left) and Satchel Paige (right) talk in the team dugout in 1949.

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Paige was as calm as an ocean with no waves. How could he not be? He spent his life on mounds in ballparks across the baseball landscape where he proved he was as good as a pitcher gets.

“He walks like an amiable camel, is remindful of Stepin Fetchit, so languid and loose are his movements,” sportswriter Harry Grayson wrote in the *[Shamokin News-Dispatch]* in Pennsylvania.

In the 1948 season, the brightest star of “Black baseball” might not have been as good as he once was, but he was still good — *[really]* good.

His debut made Paige the seventh — and oldest — Negro Leaguer to wear a major league uniform. He was the second to play for Veeck, who had signed Larry Doby in 1947.

None of the others had Paige’s résumé. Still, many outside the Negro Leagues had started to question the quality of his work.

“How much help he can give the Indians now is problematical,” *[The New York Times]* sports columnist Arthur Daley wrote the day before Paige’s debut. “The speed has gone from his arm but the cunning still remains. ... The Satch of a decade or two ago might have been able to assure the Tribe of a pennant. But he’s been in the twilight of his career for so long that there’s just no telling.”

Although Paige was ancient for a “rookie,” Veeck knew his right arm had plenty left in it. Veeck needed a reliable arm to shore up his bullpen and thought Paige could provide it.

“His wiry arms and stilt-like legs were aerodynamically perfect to propel a ball from mound to plate,” nonfiction writer Larry Tye wrote. “They gave him motion. Momentum. Strength. And he had the ideal launching pads: hands so huge they made a baseball look like a golf ball, with wrists that snapped with the fury and flash of a catapult.”

In his debut, Paige proved he was still Paige.

“Old Satchel put most of his wares on display in those two innings,” Sauerbrei wrote. “Satchel now is in the big leagues after all those years and there is only one thing left — Satchel in a World Series.”

Paige, the first Negro Leaguer elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame, went on to complete the unfinished business that Sauerbrei wrote about. He and Doby helped The Tribe win the 1948 World Series, the team’s first since 1920. It also was their last.

Paige went 6-1 with a 2.48 ERA. Yet even had he not contributed to the title, even if Paige had never made it to the big leagues, he would be remembered for pioneering a trail for Black ballplayers who came after him.

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As sports editor Dan D’Addona wrote in 2020 for *The Holland Sentinel*: “Paige was a pivotal figure in the integration of baseball. He helped create the buzz about Black players and Black teams. Thousands and thousands of fans all over the country watched him beat all-white teams, some led by Bob Feller and Dizzy Dean. “And his legend grew.”

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