

## Opinion

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*

# Lefty pitcher convinced Hall of Fame he was worth watching

About a month ago I was waiting for information about a certain pitcher who was one of 39 players from the past being considered for election to the famous Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. This particular pitcher has an interesting connection with local sports history.

Now, let's be clear about one detail. Jeff Budlong is doing an excellent job as the Tribune's sports editor. I have no intention of ever cutting into his area of expertise. Also, sports isn't really any part of my area of coverage. Yet, because of the historical aspects regarding this particular player, the initial information was given to me for use in a possible column.

Before going further with this topic, two details are worth revealing right here. First, the

player's name is John Wesley Donaldson, once known as the "World's Greatest Negro Pitcher." Second, of the 39 players considered for the Baseball Hall of Fame at the end of February, Black History Month, only 17 were selected for this prestigious honor, Donaldson, sadly, wasn't in this last group.

The person who really promoted Donaldson to be considered for inclusion in the Baseball Hall of Fame is Peter Gorton of Minneapolis. His research has helped to reinforce the concept of this particular player as possibly being the "greatest left-handed pitcher of all time."

With special thanks to Gorton and my Tribune col-



Ed Shannon  
Between the cornrows

league, Jeff, for finding an article from the Feb. 26 issue of the Winona Daily News by Darrell Ehrlick, here's more information about Donaldson's baseball career. And somewhere in this narrative I'll have more details about his visits to Albert Lea.

Donaldson was born in Glasgow, Mo., sometime between 1892 and 1894. His prime baseball years were 1911 to 1919 as the pitcher for J.L. Wilkerson's All Nations team. In an era when segregation by skin color was an unfortunate aspect of American life, this traveling team played in hundred of localities. They were called barnstormers and pioneers as a team, as the name indicates, in

interracial baseball.

In fact, Donaldson really didn't have a choice. The nation's major teams then had a firm racial barrier and the Negro League hadn't yet been created.

The All Nations team had to contend with many aspects of segregation and too much prejudice and stupid heckling. Yet, Donaldson's pitching ability helped to convince folks at the games that he was a player worth watching.

The All Nations team came to Albert Lea on Aug. 11, 1913, to play the local nine. They won this game with a score of 2-1 and Donaldson struck out 20 of the local batters. The Freeborn County Standard said Donaldson represented "invincible pitching." A Tribune report on this game said, "Donaldson, according to

all those who saw the game, is easily the best pitcher seen in these parts this year."

This pitcher must have also been good at batting because he made a home run during this first Albert Lea game.

An e-mail message from Gorton said, "For the next several years Donaldson returned to Albert Lea nearly every summer to show the locals his world class abilities."

Donaldson played for other teams and toward the end of his sports career he was pitching for the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro League.

This player had retired from playing baseball professionally by the time Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in the major leagues during 1947. However, Ehrlick's article in the Winona Daily News

explained that Donaldson broke this color barrier with his employment by the Chicago White Sox in 1917. Donaldson died in 1977.

To close off this column here are several statistics regarding Donaldson's baseball career. He reportedly had over 5,000 strikeouts and played in 5,000 games.

Maybe in the future Donaldson will again be considered for inclusion in the Baseball Hall of Fame. He finally be inducted into this prestigious place. It's a place this pioneer baseball player deserves.

Ed Shannon's column appearing in the Tribune Friday since December 19