



Hall of Fame nomination for famous barnstormer pitcher

by Peter Gorton

There was time when just about everyone in Minnesota knew the name and fame of pitcher, John Wesley Donaldson. He was a baseball legend. And in 1924, this famous black barnstorming hurler came to Battle Lake. This month, he is being considered for induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. Coincidentally, February is also Black History Month.

Donaldson's story was hidden away in hundreds of local newspaper stories that preserved some of the magical moments and the overwhelming numbers of strikeouts accumulated by this left-handed wonder.

Known as a power pitcher, John Donaldson was the best left-handed barnstorming pitcher in black baseball history. During his prime seasons from 1911 to 1918, he "had near-perfect control," according to noted historian Robert Peterson and had a "sharp-breaking curve ball that was faster than most pitchers' fastballs." Upon the founding of the Negro League in 1920, he played mainly as an outfielder for the "top clubs," most notably the Kansas City Monarchs, into the 1930's.

Donald and the All Nations team brought interracial baseball to towns and cities across the face of the U.S., from Missouri to Montana and from Wisconsin to farthest North Dakota. Donaldson's charisma and composure was a countermeasure to the deep-seated prejudice of these communities and his stellar character acted against the stereotypes of the era. His excellence on the mound was a deterrence to racism and his pioneering presence on the mound planted the seeds to bring forth improvements in racial attitudes in those towns. Donaldson was the predecessor of Satchel Paige as a barnstorming hurler, for Paige pitched in many of the same towns where Donaldson had showcased his formidable talents just a decade or two earlier.

June 5, 1927 while pitching for Bertha, MN, Donaldson fanned 19 batters in front of nearly 1,200 people in Battle Lake. Donaldson, with Bertha, had played against Battle Lake several times during the previous seasons. This

instance was one of the most impressive, solidifying the legend of Donaldson.

Highlights of Donaldson's record:

John Donaldson's verifiable statistical analysis consists of games James Donaldson pitched in that have been documented in hundreds of surviving newspapers from his era.

John Donaldson's major statistics are: Wins: 235+; Strikeouts: 3950+.

Donaldson is presumed to be the all-time leader among black pitchers in Wins, Strikeouts, Winning Percentage and Shutout games, and also is among the top black pitchers all-time in Earned Run Average.

Peter Gorton and his team of researchers have documented much of his career. Box scores

reveal 235 wins and 84 losses and a winning percentage of .737. He also notched 3,832 strikeouts, an ERA of 1.37 and 86 shutouts. He completed 296 of 322 starts (92%), had 22 one-hitters, six no-hitters and a perfect game. He also had a 30 strikeout game, 26 games with more than 20 strikeouts and a total of 166 double digit strikeout games. Donaldson could also hit, batting .334 in over 1,800 at bats.

The Donaldson network continues to uncover even greater number totals. If the combination of both documented games are combined with known totals, Donaldson currently registers 264 wins, 94 losses and 4,058 strikeouts as of January 19, 2006.

Although Donaldson never

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Peter Gorton stands with a display showing photos of John Donaldson, who could possibly be voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame February 27.

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gained the full recognition for his pitching talent during his lifetime and never was admitted into major league baseball during his career, he made history by becoming the first full-time black talent scout in the big leagues for the Chicago White Sox in 1949. In this small way, baseball's establishment rewarded him for his loyalty to the game. Yet even after he died in 1970, little was remembered of his accomplishments. But his fellow black ballplayers knew of his skill and his greatness as a pitcher was re-discovered by modern-day researchers and historians and he was included in a ballot of 39 Pre-Negro League and Negro League players for possible induction into Baseball's Hall of Fame. Finally, when the vote is conducted February 27, 2006, the famous barnstorming black pitcher, John Donaldson may again be awarded a place among baseball's finest players.