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LOCAL SPORTS

Glasgow celebrates John Wesley Donaldson Day

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By Justin Addison

Glasgow honored its native son Saturday by celebrating the remembrance of John Donaldson, one of the best pitchers in baseball history, with a two-hour ceremony including films and speeches. More than 80 people attended.

Donaldson was born in February of 1892 in Glasgow. His baseball career spanned 27 years from 1911 to 1938. Unable to break the 'color barrier,' he went on to become a star in baseball's Negro League — for such teams as the Kansas City Monarchs and the Chicago Giants — as well as other semipro teams throughout the country. Much of his career was played in Michigan.

Donaldson was buried in an unmarked grave in Chicago, until Peoria anesthesiologist Jeremy Krock raised enough money for a proper headstone. Krock was in attendance at the ceremony.

Saturday's ceremony began with an introduction by MC Donald White, followed by the singing of the Black National Anthem by Vivian Enyard.

Glasgow Mayor Howard Black gave a welcome, saying, "It's nice to know someone from our town was famous."

"They Were All Stars" from the Kansas City Negro League Baseball Museum was the first of two films shown. It began like any baseball game, with the singing of the National Anthem. It was followed by a moving montage of historical baseball footage featuring black baseball players from Willie Mays to Cardinal Ozzie Smith.

John Ward knew Donaldson as a child and spoke with him a few years before his death in 1970. He shared memories such as receiving his first baseball glove from the baseball great.

"John Wesley Donaldson was liked by most people he came into contact with," said Ward, "except for opposing teams." Ward started the whole thing by contacting the Glasgow museum board about putting a few pictures of Donaldson on display.

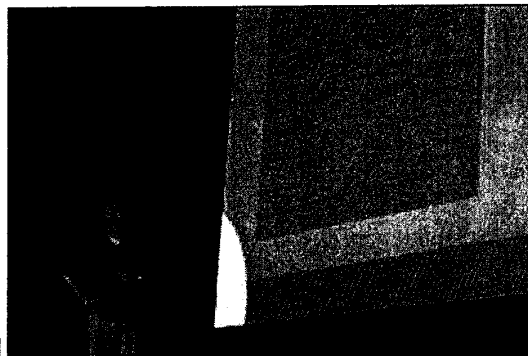
Pete Gorton gave a thorough powerpoint presentation on Donaldson's career, focusing particularly on his time in Michigan. Among the slides shown were historic photos of team lineups as well as a map of Michigan detailing the many areas in which Donaldson played.

Keynote Speaker Phil Dixon, a member of the Negro Leagues Museum Board of Governors, diagramed Donaldson's 1915 season, one of his best. In that season, the southpaw struck out an average of 18 batters per game, and fanned 30 in a marathon 18-inning bout. He noted that Donaldson not only struck out more than 500 batters that year, but did it three years straight.



Dixon compared those records to the greats of today citing Roger Clemens and Kerry Woods who share the MLB strikeout record of 20 in one game. Even hall-of-famer Nolan Ryan had only 383 strikeouts in the 1973 season.

Dixon is regarded as one of America's foremost experts on baseball history. He is the author of a number of books including "The Ultimate Kansas City Baseball Trivia Quiz Book," "The Negro Baseball Leagues – A Photographic History," and "The Monarchs 1920-1938." Dixon was the winner of the prestigious Casey Award for 'the Best Baseball Book of 1992,' and the SABR MacMillan Award for 'excellence in baseball research.'



Pete Gorton delivers a powerpoint presentation on his research of Donaldson.

Dixon also invoked former Alabama Governor George Wallace's famous words, "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," finishing up his own speech saying, "Inclusion today, inclusion tomorrow, inclusion forever."



Keynote Speaker Phil Dixon examines Donaldson's role in the history of baseball among an era of racial intolerance.

Donaldson not only has a place in Glasgow's museum and now the KC Negro Leagues Museum, but may make it to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. A decision will be made by 2007.

The Hall of Fame is researching the Negro Leagues and comparing statistics in order to find inductees. "John Donaldson is on a short list," said baseball historian David Miller.

The event concluded with the singing of America the Beautiful.

An exhibit will be on display in the Glasgow Community Museum until July 10.

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