



Former black baseball star on this year's Hall of Fame ballot

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Photo provided by Peter Gorton

**John Wesley Donaldson**, fourth from the left, back row, is shown with his teammates on the Bertha city team in central Minnesota. Donaldson played a number games in Minnesota in the early 1900s, pitching thousands of strikeouts.

# HIS SHOT AT THE HALL

*Former Negro League baseball player John Wesley Donaldson, who often played in the Marshall area, is on the short list for National Hall of Fame induction*

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In his time, pitcher John Wesley Donaldson was recognized as one of the best black baseball players in the country.

Almost 100 years after he started playing the game he has an opportunity to be immortalized among the games all time greats.

Thanks to a fan who never saw him play, Donaldson has a shot at the Hall of Fame.

Peter Gorton of Minneapolis was introduced to the Donaldson story when he was asked to research him for the book "Swinging for the Fences: Black Baseball in Minnesota."

Donaldson played a number of ground breaking seasons in Bertha, a city near Gorton's home town of Staples. His career lasted from roughly 1912-1934, including barnstorming stints and time in the Negro Leagues.

After the book was published earlier this year, Gorton continued to receive information on Donaldson's career, including about a number of games he played in the Marshall area.

In July, Gorton's research took on an added importance.

The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown announced a special election for Negro League baseball players.

"We submitted a proposal for the Oct. 30th deadline," said Gorton. "They put out a press release in July that said they were taking an open casting call for the special election."

"I came together with a number of established Negro League researchers figuring I had a bunch of information, they had a little information, but nobody (had everything)."

Through the connections Gorton has made through his research, he put together



Gorton

what he calls the "Donaldson Network" to help gather as much statistical information as possible.

"We put together quiet an impressive points statistical analysis of his entire career as we knew it at that time," said Gorton.

"We got around 200 victories and over 3,500 strikeouts (from Donaldson).

"There has been some debate about the numbers but part of this Hall of Fame nomination is the numbers, not my favorite part because I'm not an accountant. I had to learn how to do all of that."

Thanks to the information provided to the Hall of Fame Committee, Gorton said Donaldson made the short list of nominees.

"(The committee) met on Nov. 7th in Florida to go through the nominees," said Gorton. "They had somewhere around 93 nominees. They were trying to decide who was going to make it and who we're going to push forward."

While Gorton believes Donaldson has a good shot at the Hall of Fame, he points out the impact the short list has on Donaldson's legacy.

"The important part for Donaldson is that he made the final list," said Gorton. "This opportunity is huge but if he doesn't make it, he made the list which means he was distinguished amongst the Negro Leaguers and the black players."

A list of 39 candidates has been announced for the Negro League ballots.

Gorton said to be inducted from the bal-

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lot, a candidate requires 75 percent of the votes from the 12-member committee. He said each candidate is voted on individually, meaning all candidates could be inducted.

Since the Oct. 30 deadline, Gorton said he has continued to gather more information from around the mid-west that is helping create a better picture of Donaldson's career and the history of one of his teams the All Nations team.

"If they do elect him, they will come asking for more," said Gorton. "I would assume they would need to have displays and all the other stuff that goes in the Hall of Fame."

Gathering the information over the years has given Gorton a better view of what Donaldson and the teams he played on accomplished. He said it hasn't been an easy process, but it's a story that needs to be told.

"It's a process, the reason this story has been on the moth balls for 80 years is because it's quiet a job," said Gorton. "We're coordinating and assisting volunteers to find as much as we can possibly find."

Donaldson's legacy as a great black baseball player was ensured in the 1950s through a Pittsburgh Courier

newspaper poll.

"In 1952 they came up with a poll of the greatest black baseball players of all time," said Gorton. "On the list there are four guys that aren't in the Hall of Fame already who were on the first team, John Donaldson was one of them."

Donaldson has become a big part of Gorton's life.

"Donaldson was so much more than a baseball player. He was a galvanizing figure in the community of humanity, not just because he was a black person. He was the first black person a lot of people ever saw and he had the personality that endeared to people."

Gorton said he's received some help a little closer to home in the research process.

"My wife Kelly has followed me to the ends to try to figure this stuff out," he added. "She has listened to me essentially work it out in my head. To have somebody who understands the importance of this is extremely valuable."