

Pre-Negro Leagues Candidate Profile: John Wesley Donaldson

First of 39 Profiles

Born: February 20, 1892, in Glasgow, Missouri

Died: April 14, 1970, in Chicago, Illinois

Playing Career: 1911-1934

John Donaldson was the premier barnstorming left-handed pitcher in Black baseball circles during his career. He was 5' 11" and 190 lbs but was a power pitcher who also featured a sharp breaking curveball.

His prime years were 1911 to 1919, mainly with J.L. Wilkinson's All Nations team. Over his career (1911-1934) he also played with the Los Angeles White Sox, Chicago Giants, Indianapolis ABC's, Detroit Stars, Brooklyn Royal Giants, Lincoln Giants, and the Donaldson All-Stars.

He joined the Kansas City Monarchs upon the founding of the Negro National League in 1920 and usually played center field for them. He hit .303 as a regular from 1920-22. He played in 1923-24 and again in 1931 in league play with Kansas City, only.

He was in his true calling, however, as a hurler traveling the country and showing his skills and bringing interracial baseball to hundreds of American cities. Donaldson's charisma and excellence was a countermeasure to the deep-seated prejudices of the era, and his stellar character helped break down racial stereotypes.

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.

Along with these numbers, there are 37 more games that describe events but box scores have not been located. During these games Donaldson went 27-10 with 193 strikeouts. This would put his strikeout total over 4,000.

Hall of Fame manager John McGraw once said of Donaldson: "I think he is the greatest I ever have seen, and I would give \$50,000 for him if it weren't for the color line in baseball."

The 1952 *Pittsburgh Courier* poll, voting by former Negro leagues players put him as the first-team left-handed pitcher. After the fall of the color line, Donaldson continued to make history by becoming a full-time scout for the Chicago White Sox.

Authored by Dick Clark | [Negro Leagues and Pre-Negro Leagues Election page](#)