



CSN Chicago airs 9th annual DD Classic at U.S. Cellular Field

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
and Dr. David J. Fletcher, CBM President
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On Tuesday July 19, the Chicago White Sox will host the ninth annual Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe Classic celebrating the history and tradition of Negro League baseball in Chicago and promoting the next generation of inner-city baseball players.

The game at U.S. Cellular Field begins at 1:05 p.m. and will feature the top inner-city high school players from Chicago and across the country. Gates will open at 12:30 p.m. with live entertainment starting at 11:30 a.m. at Gate 5. Free parking is available in Lot B north of 35th Street.



Double Duty Classic players get a taste of old-style baseball with their uniforms. Photo credit White Sox.

This summer marks 83 years since the first Negro League East-West All-Star Game was played at old Comiskey Park across the street from The Cell. The East-West game started in 1933 -- the same year as the first MLB All-Star game, which was also played at Comiskey Park.

The East-West game was played every year at old Comiskey Park until 1960, around the time when the Negro Leagues finally folded after the integration of MLB. During the ‘30s and ‘40s, the East-West game was the major sports event in Black America.

The White Sox Amateur City Elite (ACE) high school travel team will represent the city of Chicago in the DD Classic showcase. Players will wear uniforms honoring the Negro Leagues’ East-West All-Star teams. Each team will carry a roster of players from both the ACE team and players from across the country.

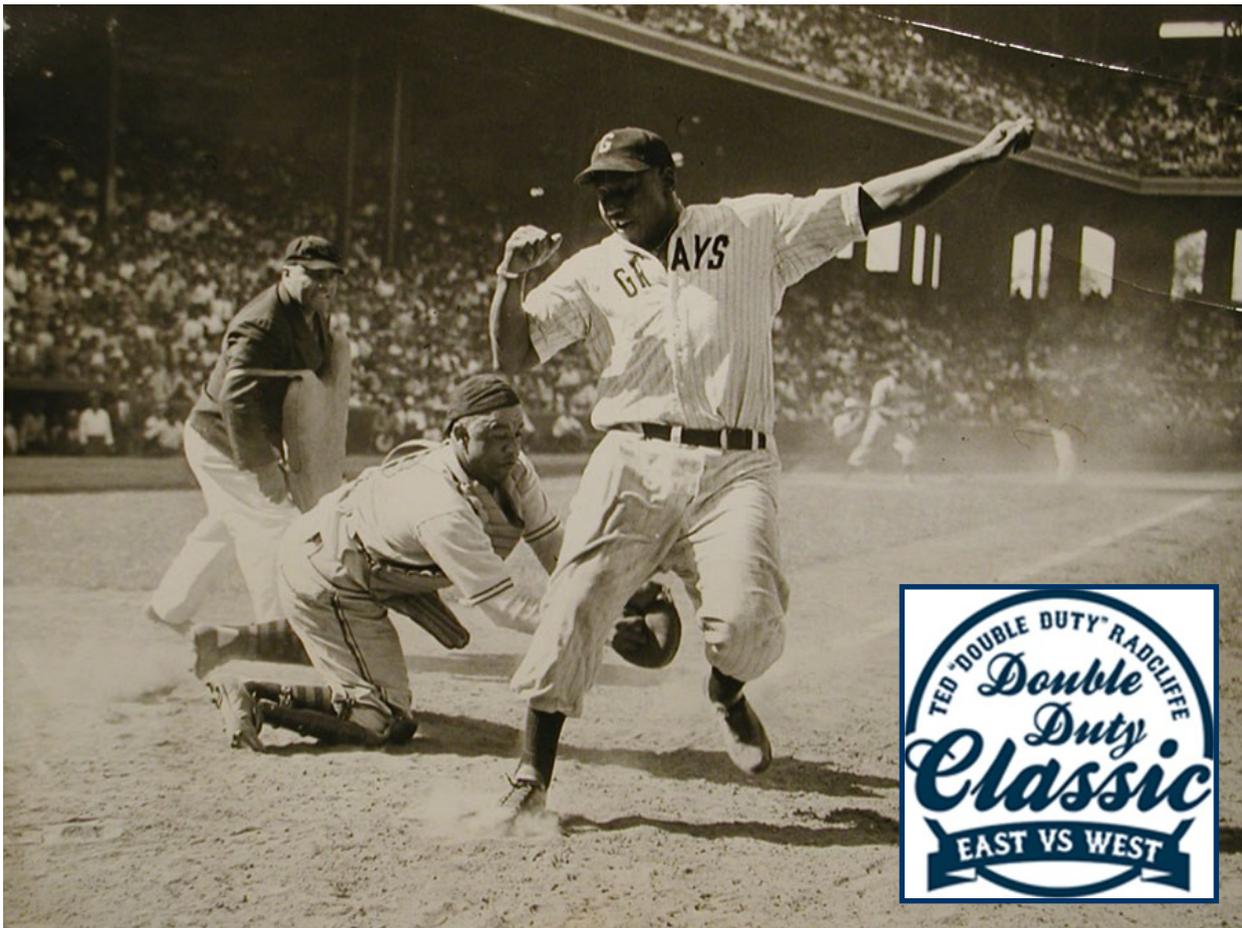
For the second year in a row, fans unable to come to The Cell will be able to watch the DD Classic on Comcast SportsNet Chicago. Jason Benetti, drawing raves in his first season as Sox TV play-by-play man for home games, will perform similar duties teaming with Kevin Coe, the Sox’s director of youth baseball initiatives.

Sox in-house historian Jeff Szynal will produce the broadcast and educate fans about the rich history of the Negro Leagues.

And, of course, the game itself is named for Chicago's own Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, a frequent Negro League All-Star who played in the East-West games at old Comiskey. Read more at <http://www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/CBM-Double-Duty-Ted-Radcliffe.php>.

At 41, Radcliffe earned MVP honors for his performance during the 1943 season with the Chicago American Giants.

Nicknamed "Double Duty" by legendary sportswriter Damon Runyon because he once pitched the first game of a doubleheader and caught the second, Radcliffe was one of the most dynamic players in the Negro Leagues and all of baseball.



The Classic is named after Double Duty Radcliffe, shown here tagging Negro League superstar Josh Gibson in an East-West All-Star Game at old Comiskey Park.

He was both a player and manager for the American Giants. Radcliffe also managed an early integrated semi-pro team in North Dakota in the early 1930s.

Radcliffe was born on July 7, 1902 in Mobile, Ala. He was a regular attendee at Sox games until close to his death at 103 in 2005.

Radcliffe settled in Chicago at 17 and stayed in the city during the off-season amid a 32-year playing career. Never moving away, he served as a beloved elder statesman/raconteur the rest of his life.

Beginning in 2002 until the year of his death, Radcliffe threw a ceremonial first pitch prior to a Sox game.



ACE program director Kevin Coe (left) with then-Sox pitcher Hector Santiago meeting college-bound inner-city players at The Cell.

The Sox did not forget him after his death in 2005, naming an annual high-school all-star game at The Cell the Double Duty Classic that started in 2008.

The Most Valuable Player trophy of the game is named in honor of late Sox great Minnie Minoso, himself a Negro League veteran with the New York Cubans before he made his big-league debut with the Cleveland Indians in 1949. Before his death in 2015, Minoso regularly attended the DD Classic game.

Distinguished panel meets pre-game

Prior to the game, a special private forum that always accompanies the Classic will be held at The Cell's Conference & Learning Center to educate players and their families about the history of the Negro Leagues and the East-West game. The gathering will discuss the status and history of African-Americans in baseball.

The history and present participation of African Americans in the majors is a crucial topic. After peaking at 27 percent in the mid-1970s, the percentage of African-Americans in MLB steadily dropped to around 8 percent by the early 2000s. That very modest number has remained virtually unchanged ever since. A significant portion of teams will go through large stretches of seasons without any African Americans on the roster.

Beginning at 10 a.m., the forum features a question-and-answer session with Kenny Williams, Sox executive vice president; Harold Baines, assistant White Sox hitting coach; Tyrone Brooks, senior director of Major League Baseball's new front office and field staff diversity pipeline program; and Dr. Damion Thomas, curator of sports at the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture.

The panel will be moderated by Comcast Sports Net anchor/reporter Kip Lewis.

The panel will address and answer questions from the young athletes on site.

"The Double Duty Classic is about honoring the legacy of the many great players who worked and sacrificed so that we all could enjoy this game," said Williams, whose father played in the Negro Leagues "With this event, we also hope to share that legacy with the next generation of players and ensure they carry that on as they develop as players and as people."

Said Coe: "Each year we try to vary the forum guests, which allows us to deliver a different message about the history of African Americans in baseball."

Brooks, 42, said the MLB program is designed to increase the pool of minority and female candidates for on-field and baseball operations positions. He had been the Pittsburgh Pirates' director of player personnel. He reports to MLB Chief Legal Officer Dan Halem.

Thomas is an assistant professor of Physical Cultural Studies in the Department of Kinesiology and affiliate faculty in the African American Studies Department at the University of Maryland. His contribution to the National Museum of African American History and Culture will be on display when the facility opens on the National Mall Sept. 24. Thomas earned his PhD at the University of California-Los Angeles.

Thomas was instrumental in the Smithsonian Channel's legacy documentary *Major League Legends: Hank Aaron* which premiered in February 2016. His research interests include: sports and United States race relations, black internationalism, and African American popular culture.

In the past a number of former Negro Leaguers attended the game and forum. But most have passed away, including Minoza and most recently Al Spearman in January. Spearman played for the Chicago American Giants in 1949 and 1951 for the team managed by Double Duty.

Coe said the Sox are considering a moment of silence to honor Spearman, who also attended the MLB Civil Rights Luncheon and Game hosted by the Sox in 2013.

History of DD Classic

The first game was played on July 7, 2008 and featured an All-Star panel of dignitaries.

The forum was chaired by Sharon Robinson, the daughter of the late baseball pioneer and Hall of Famer Jackie Robinson. Also attending were Negro League historians Eddie Bedford, Dr. Adrian Burgos and Larry Lester, along with Baines and Sox slugger Jermaine Dye.

MLB sent Hall of Famer Frank Robinson to the first DD Classic game as well. Jesse Jackson also attended.

The first DD Classic was featured in the 2008 "Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago" documentary film that was produced by the CBM and was shown at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, N.Y. as part of the fifth annual Baseball Film Festival in Oct. 2010.



Broadcasting his first Classic on Comcast SportsNet Chicago is Sox TV announcer Jason Benetti (left), shown here with analyst partner Steve Stone.

In the past, Negro League veterans have been panelists. Ernie Westfield, for instance, appeared with ex-Sox outfielder Chris Singleton in 2014. Former longtime Illinois Dept. of Labor official Westfield actually went back to the Negro Leagues in its final season in 1960 after pitching in the Cubs organization in Carlsbad, N.M. Westfield was the starter in the last East-West game held in 1960 at old Comiskey Park.

In 2013, the CBM helped the Sox recruit as a speaker local black historian Timuel Black who was born in 1918 and was vibrant at 95. Black had actually seen Double Duty play at old Comiskey Park

In 2014, the CBM assisted the Sox with a special exhibit on Radcliffe the day before at the DuSable Museum of African- American History.

Players in DD Classic

“Players are selected from our Sox’s Academy City Elite (ACE) traveling youth baseball program and through our scouting department,” said Coe, who runs the ACE program for the Sox and who has been with the Sox for five years.

This year’s DD Classic will feature Justin Diaz (Illinois State University commit), Trey Leonard (University of Louisville commit), Angelo Smith (University of Michigan commit), Alek Thomas (18U Team USA trial participant ranked by Perfect Game as the No. 7 high school player in the class of 2018) and Donovan Williams (Illinois State University commit), among others.

According to Coe, some 30 DD Classic participants have been drafted by MLB teams.

Micah Johnson, now with the Oklahoma City Dodgers, played in the inaugural 2008 DD Classic game as an 18-year-old from Indianapolis on the Midwest All-Stars team. Johnson was the first DD Classic alumnus to make it to the Major Leagues when he debuted for the Sox in 2014. He was traded to the Dodgers organization as part of the Todd Frazier deal.

Legacy of DD Classic

For nearly a decade the Sox have shown their leadership in MLB in educating the present generation about the rich legacy of Negro League baseball.

In nine short years, The DD Classic has become the premiere MLB event that promotes inner-city baseball. Since 1993, the Sox have been committed to giving all children the opportunity to enjoy the game of baseball and a chance at a better life.

White Sox Charities (CWSC) funds a number of youth baseball programs to keep kids off the streets and engaged in the classroom. These programs support inner-city youth of all ages and playing skills on and off the field from recreation and intermediate levels to highly competitive travel teams. Nearly 13,000 players in the city of Chicago have participated in youth baseball programs funded by CWSC, including: Amateur City Elite (ACE), DD Classic, Inner City Youth Baseball (ICYB) and Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI).

“It was vitally important for future generations to learn about the Negro Leagues,” Sox Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf said after the first Classic in 2008.

Reinsdorf also emphasized the constant theme in the history of black baseball – Chicago and old Comiskey Park.

“There is no specific theme for this year’s DD Classic. We will continue to focus on promoting the legacy of the Negro Leagues,” said Coe, who knows how important it is to engage youth in learning about the past. “That is legacy of the DD Classic.”