Veeck Legacy Is That of 'Real Abe Lincoln'

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The achievements of Bill Veeck were many, but the most significant came as a leader in the integration of major league baseball.

It was Veeck who signed Negro Leagues star Larry Doby, the first African-American player in American League history. He didn’t stop there. The Cleveland Indians owner understood that, not only could black athletes improve the product on the field, but their up-tempo brand of ball could help sell tickets as well.

By 1949, the defending world champions had 14 black players in their organization. Six were in the major league camp – Doby, infielders Artie Wilson and Minnie Minoso and pitchers Satchel Paige, Jose Santiago and Roy Welmaker. All except Welmaker reached the major leagues, and Doby and Minoso became perennial All-Star candidates.

As Sun-Times sportswriter Edgar Munzel wrote in The Sporting News that spring, “Before long Bill Veeck probably will be recognized as the real Abe Lincoln of the game.”

For tickets to our symposium One Family, Two Teams: The Impact of the Veecks on Chicago Baseball, see details on this site.