



Castle to profile JRW champs, neighborhood that groomed 43-year-old baseball program

*By Dr. David Fletcher, CBM President
Posted Wednesday, October 15th, 2014*

The Chicago Baseball Museum (CBM) is proud to announce that CBM Resident Historian George Castle has signed a contract to write the definitive book on the story of the Jackie Robinson West (JRW) Little League World Series U.S. Champions.

JRW captured the hearts of the nation, and George's book, his 13th since 1998, will capture the attention of fans once again.

Taylor Trade Publishing will publish the book, as yet untitled. Target release date is Sept. 2015.

The book would not look only at JRW's development as an appealing national youth sports champion, but also all the factors that produced success. The parents, extended families, neighbors and community and educational leaders all comprised the "it takes a village to raise a child" situation prevalent in the far South Side Washington Heights neighborhood. It was this family which built on the tradition of excellence started by JRW's founder, Joseph Haley, in 1971.

It is a story of hope, home — most specifically fathers' involvement in their sons' lives — and redemption. It shows how the game of baseball can unite a community and offer a better future with alternatives to social conditions in which gun violence, death and gang activities perpetuated in nearby Chicago communities.

How did this urban baseball program thrive while others struggle to gain traction? How did this group of boys and dedicated parents so gracefully and wisely handle the tremendous off-field attention and demands, while still accomplishing the goals of youth development and winning baseball? George's book will examine many levels, including how, going back to the late 1960s, the adults of JRW's neighborhood created, nurtured and continued their environment of all-American success and stability against the backdrop of violence plaguing other communities. Most astounding will be an account of a neighborhood watch program involving dozens of residents volunteering their time in a 24-hour cycle from Fridays through Sundays starting in the 1970s.



Dr. David Fletcher

Political struggles, intrigue past and present and daily challenges met so successfully will be included in this account of remarkable success for pre-teens who became heroes to a city, a region and, for that matter, a nation. The inspiration these young men provided is desperately needed.

Long before mainstream media picked up on the story, the Chicago Baseball Museum recognized its potential as part of CBM's mission to tell the story of Chicago baseball in every way, not confined to the Major Leagues. This is a perfect opportunity to continue our work of promoting the game to a new generation of young people, including disadvantaged youth.

Since 2008, the CBM has supported the White Sox's efforts in this regard, as we have assisted in the organization's Double Duty Classic, honoring the rich heritage of Negro League baseball, started at Old Comiskey Park. The Double Duty Classic, named for Negro League great Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, includes a reenactment of the legendary East-West Negro League All-Star games, this one played by today's inner-city high school stars.

Earlier this year, CBM produced for the Sox an exhibit on Double Duty Radcliffe at the DuSable Museum of African-American History, as part of the Double Duty Classic. The exhibit was well-received during and in the months since the Sox's event, attended by Double Duty Classic players, their families, team personnel and other supporters.

As part of their award-winning, ongoing community service efforts, the Sox have supported JRW since the program's inception. In fact, six of the JRW players played in the Sox's ACE Program.

These and other storylines will be expertly weaved into the JRW book by Castle. He has written nearly 2 million words on baseball subjects in all his books. The forthcoming text likely will be the most compelling.

The finished product has the potential to be Castle's best book ever.