



The consummate pose of Duty — enjoying life with his ever-present cigar.

Double Duty Classic at The Cell carries a royal name in Negro League history

By Dr. David Fletcher, CBM President

The Chicago White Sox will host the Seventh Annual Double Duty Classic on Wednesday, June 25 — an event that celebrates the rich history and tradition of Negro Leagues baseball in Chicago and at the same time promotes the next generation of inner-city baseball players.

The game is named after Chicago's very own Negro League superstar, Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, who until his death at the ripe old age of 103 in Aug. 2005, was visible at US Cellular Field, either at official events or just as a fan who was a guest of the White Sox.

Among teams in Major League Baseball, the White Sox are the franchise which possesses the most heritage connecting any team to the past glory of the Negro Leagues, which co-existed with MLB because of the color line that lasted until 1947.

Across the street from US Cellular Field is the ancestral home of what was the center of the Negro League universe: Comiskey Park. The Negro League East-West (E-W) All-Star game was played in Chicago from 1933 through 1960, and Comiskey Park was its home.

Larry Lester, author of *Black Baseball's National Showcase: The East-West All-Star Game*, called the E-W Game "The biggest event in Black America every summer" as it drew between 30,000 and 50,000 fans. Among them were a lot of white fans who liked the brand of black baseball, with its greater emphasis on speed and cunning. The best black players assembled for the annual E-W games which, for a generation, paralleled the all-white MLB All-Star Games."

The Double Duty Classic recreates the "Midsummer Classic." The game features elite inner-city high school baseball players from across the country, dressed in uniforms honoring the E-W games. The goal of the DD Classic is to educate current and future gener-

ations of high school players about the history of the Negro Leagues and provide them with exposure to professional and collegiate scouts. Several players from past DD games have been drafted and are playing for MLB organizations.

The Chicago Baseball Museum (CBM) is fortunate that Lou Hernandez, director of public relations for the Chicago White Sox, asked us to assist with the 2014 DD event.

I have attended most of the Double Duty Classics since its inception in 2008. The first DD day in 2008, which included a distinguished panel of Negro League historians, was prominently featured in the CBM's documentary, *Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago*. The program was shown on PBS in Nov. 2008 and screened at the 2010 Baseball Hall of Fame film festival in Cooperstown.

Chicago Baseball Museum Videos

- [WGN's "Chicago American Giants" from 1992, hosted by Morgan Freeman, to see 'Duty' relive his Negro League days. Video courtesy of WGN-TV.](#)
- [Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago](#)
- [Chicago Baseball Museum YouTube channel](#)

The first DD Classic was planned with a goal of educating the public about the declining participation of African-Americans in baseball, including the low percentage of black ballplayers in the MLB. There were approximately 8% in 2008, down from as much as 27 percent in the late 1970s.

Educating the new generation about Negro League

I recommended to Mr. Hernandez that the event get back to its roots and focus on DD and his life in the Negro Leagues. The CBM's goal was to help educate future generations about the adversity Duty overcame and tell the story of Duty and the Negro League in Chicago.

We wanted to create a permanent CBM web page that honored Duty. That also would be a site where we would record the history of the DD Classic and help track some of the elite high school players to generate more inner-city interest in baseball. In the process, there would be additional support of MLB's RBI Program and other initiatives to increase African-American interest in baseball.

As one of 10 children, Duty grew up in Mobile, Ala. He and his brother, Alex, who would also be a Negro League baseball star as a third baseman, rode the rails at age 17 to Chicago, part of the great black migration north, in 1919. Duty was soon discovered by the Illinois Giants and he hit the road again, now as a professional baseball player. Afterward, according to Duty's biographer Kyle McNary, he would play baseball "everywhere a black man could play" for the next 36 years.

Along the way, Duty earned (in 1932) one of the best baseball nicknames ever, bestowed on him by legendary sports writer Damon Runyon, a National Baseball Hall of Fame honoree. Runyon, who was white, made a career out of coining "Runyonesque" colorful monikers that later became part of popular culture. The musical *Guys and Dolls* was based on Runyon's characters.

Runyon was first impressed with Double-Duty Radcliffe while covering a doubleheader at Yankee Stadium between the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the New York Black Yankees in 1932. In the first game, Radcliffe caught superstar and childhood chum Satchel Paige in a 5-0 shutout and then pitched a shutout himself in the second game, a 4-0 victory. Runyon wrote that Radcliffe was “worth the price of two admissions” for his double duty.



Clouds of dust at home plate, such as in this East-West All-Star Game at Comiskey Park, were part of the taste of Negro League life for Duty.

He became “Triple Duty” as went on to manage, pitch and catch for numerous teams. Duty even became the first black man to manage white professional players, when he was player-manager of the integrated Jamestown Red Sox of North Dakota from May to Oct. 1934.

The man appeared in six E-W games, dividing them equally as a catcher and pitcher; he batted .308 and was the winning pitcher with his only decision in 1939. His All-Star pitching numbers totaled a win, a save and a 2.25 ERA. Duty’s greatest glory in the E-W classic came on Aug. 13, 1944 in the 12th annual game. Before 46,247 fans, including his mother, Duty — at age 42 — went 3-for-4, including a home run in the fifth inning into the Comiskey Park’s left-field stands, helping lead the West All Star team to a 7-4 victory.

His brother Alex, who played third for the West squad, hit a triple. Each of the Radcliffe brothers earned a \$700 cash bonus, which they gave to their mother after the game. In 1945, Radcliffe played for the Kansas City Monarchs and roomed with Jackie Robinson, whom he mentored in the pioneering Robinson’s last year in the Negro Leagues before signing with Brooklyn Dodgers boss man Branch Rickey to play for the Montreal Royals in 1946.

With the Negro Leagues beginning to wane as MLB slowly integrated by signing many Negro stars, Duty came up with the novel idea of finding the “reverse Jackie Robinson” when he was managing the Chicago American Giants in 1950. He signed three young white players to join the Giants roster, all of whom could later be sold to an MLB team when their skills developed.

Royko drew attention to hazards in Duty’s life

Except for a brief time scouting for the Indians in 1960, Duty faded into obscurity until late 1989, when legendary columnist Mike Royko wrote about him in a Nov. 20 *Chicago Tribune* column titled “Safe At Home Would Suit Former Catcher”:

By the time the doors opened for Jackie Robinson and the blacks who followed, "Double-Duty" Radcliffe was too old to be a slugging catcher or a dominating pitcher.

That`s why, instead of being a household name, he and his wife sit behind double-locked doors in a deadly Chicago public housing project, wondering how they got in their present mess and when they will get out of it. Radcliffe, 87, lives in the Ida B. Wells housing on the South Side. This is the way he describes it:

"When we moved in here 26 years ago, it was beautiful. There were flowers and everything. But now there`s the dope and the gangs. They kill. It seems like they kill somebody around here every day."

Royko wanted to alert Mayor Richard M. Daley`s office about Duty`s plight and assist moving him into safer housing:

He'd just like to be able to walk out the door and not have to worry about shotgun blasts...

Who knows, if Radcliffe could get outside for an occasional stroll without being shot at, he might get his legs in shape and play third base for the Cubs next year.

Duty and his wife of 58 years, Alberta, had no children. Alberta died in 1992. Royko`s publicity brought them to the attention of the Baseball Assistance Team (BAT), which aids needy former players. In March 1990, BAT and Daley`s office helped the Radcliffes move into a church-run senior citizens residence on 38th Street. That home became Duty`s permanent residence until he moved into the apartment of great niece Debra Richards toward the very end of his life.

In Sept. 1994, the rich history of the Negro Leagues became relevant again. The profiles of Duty and Buck O`Neil soared when Ken Burns` marathon *Baseball* documentary aired during the last baseball strike. Their careers toiling in a separate "Coloreds Only" baseball league were important in educating future generations about what they accomplished.

The Chicago White Sox adopted Duty and soon he was a regular at U.S. Cellular Field, including multiple appearances to throw out a first pitch.

Double Duty Exhibit

The Sox`s Hernandez asked us to help assemble an exhibit on Duty which could be displayed at the [DuSable Museum of African-American history](#) from 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, June 24, the day before the 2014 Double Duty Classic. The DuSable Museum is at 740 E. 56th Place in Chicago. More information can be obtained from the DuSable website [here](#) or (773) 947-0600.

We were fortunate to know Richards, who was willing to loan some personal items which once belonged to her Uncle Ted. They include his trademark red fedora and



A Kansas City Monarchs uniform signed by Duty.

some suitcases which help tell the story of life on the road in the Negro Leagues. I have a signed Double Duty framed Monarchs uniform.

We hope that this exhibit at the DuSable museum can become a precursor to a permanent Double Duty Radcliffe exhibit at the Chicago Baseball Museum, when when we open our doors.

My own special connection to Duty

I was lucky enough to spend time with Duty on several occasions in the years before his death, including a couple of memorable dinners. I have special feelings toward Duty for three reasons:

I have special feelings toward Duty for three reasons:

- He supported my efforts to get Sox third baseman Buck Weaver reinstated by MLB after his lifetime ban in 1921 for his role in the 1919 World Series Black Sox scandal.
- Because Duty hit on my 73-year-old mother Dottie at dinner at one of the Clear Buck Weaver campaign events in 2003. Duty, who had a keen eye for the ladies until he died, furnished us a jovial cherished memory both of us would enjoy recounting until my mother died in June 2008.
- Right before he died, Duty helped expose a Negro-League player imposter who was making false claims about his alleged playing career.

Duty personally knew Buck Weaver, who was the only one of the eight Black Sox to remain in Chicago after his lifetime ban in 1921 by Judge Landis. Until his death in 1956, Weaver fought to get back into baseball so he could manage or coach for an MLB team.

Weaver did eventually manage the Chicago Bluebirds in 1944 in the National Girls Baseball League, a second women's baseball league during the era of the pioneering All American Girls Professional Baseball League. The Bluebirds played in Bidwill Stadium at 1925 E. 75th St. The team was owned by Charlie Bidwill, the millionaire owner of the NFL Chicago Cardinals, who coached third base under manager Weaver.

Duty came to several of my www.clearbuck.com events, which worked for the reinstatement of Weaver, because he identified with Weaver as a fellow outcast from baseball. Both were kept out of MLB for different reasons by the same man — Judge Kenesaw Landis.

In Nov. 2003, Duty came to the Mock Trial of Buck Weaver and Joe Jackson held in a courtroom in the Richard J. Daley Center Circuit Court of Cook County. This event was staged by the Chicago American Lincoln Inn of Court — a group of lawyers and jurists who meet periodically to discuss issues of import to the legal profession.



Duty was all smiles for his 100th birthday cake in 2002.

Afterward, the audience, including Duty, re-assembled at the nearby Petterino's restaurant. This is where I got to hear Duty's private thoughts about the color line that Judge Landis kept in place until his death in 1944.

It was at Petterino's that ladies' man Duty, at age 101, put the moves on my mother, who was amused by Duty's spirited persistence. In the years that followed, the hilarious memory of the centenarian's gnarly fingers — caused by inadequately treated catching injuries — on my mother's backside always brings me joy.

Tripping up imposter cashing in on Negro League

Later, before Duty died, he help to confirm that a Negro League imposter was going around trying to cash in on his bogus claims.

In 2004, as the CBM project began, I was tipped off to the fraud by Al Spearman, a pitcher who played for the Kansas City Monarchs and Chicago American Giants. An

older black man named Johnny Washington was making the circuit as “living Negro Leagues history.”

Washington attended card shows and other events, claiming he played in the Negro Leagues and had promotional material stating that he was on the Boston Red Sox in 1951, but the first black player on the Red Sox didn't arrive until 1959. The real Johnny Washington was a power-hitting first baseman in the Negro Leagues from 1933 to the 1950s, and he had died by the time the imposter made his rounds.

The fake Johnny Washington ended up singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" at Wrigley Field in 2004 and participated in several Negro Leagues ceremonies and events held by the Sox.

Spearman, who had roomed with Elston Howard when they were with the Kansas City Monarchs, was later drafted by the White Sox and got as high as Triple-A. Spearman knew that this Johnny Washington was a fraud because he was a member of the Chicago American Giants when the imposter said he played for the Giants.

Further questions about the veracity of Johnny Washington's story resulted from the fact that Double Duty was the Chicago American Giants manager that year and he was still alive to disprove Washington's claims.

“He didn't play for me...” I heard that a few times from Duty, who was angry that someone was exploiting all the suffering and discrimination he endured as a Negro Leaguer and was trying to make a buck on it.

Duty's funeral in Aug. 2005 was chronicled in detail in a chapter entitled “A Funeral in Chicago” in *The Soul of Baseball: A Road Trip Through Buck O'Neil's America* by Joe Posnanski. O'Neil, who himself would die only two months later, came to Chicago to celebrate Duty's life at the funeral, held at the Apostolic Church of God at 63rd Street and Kenwood Avenue.



Duty (front) is joined by (from left) Dottie Fletcher, Amber Buchanan, Lois Stein, Gary Crawford and author Irving Stein after the mock trial of Buck Weaver in 2003.

During the funeral, Spearman chided the fact that the fake Johnny Washington was making a good living off of his false claims as a Negro League star. But Buck told Spearman to let it go, according to Posnanski. Sadly, the *Chicago Tribune's* obituary of Duty, written by Fred Mitchell, included quotes from the fake Johnny Washington, claiming he played for him on the Giants in 1950.

Right after Duty's funeral, I completed my investigation, and it confirmed this Johnny Washington was a fraud. I met with the Illinois Attorney General's office consumer fraud division and Chicago's MLB teams. First, I had a meeting with then-Cubs marketing chief John McDonough at Wrigley Field to explain the man who sung during the seventh-inning stretch was not who he claimed to be.

Next, I met with White Sox Vice President of Communications Scott Reifert and the team's general counsel in Sept. 2005. They were most appreciative and avoided any potential embarrassment in the 2005 World Series by ensuring that this Johnny Washington was no longer credentialed for special events.

The fake Johnny Washington had played baseball — just not in the Negro Leagues. He had apparently played from 1946 to 1948 at Morgan Park High School and for the Swift Meatpacking team of the Chicago Industrial League in 1948-49.

John Kass wrote a *Tribune* column on Sept. 16, 2005 about the NL imposter titled "Negro Leagues 'player' may not be what he says":

"For years, baseball has looked away when questions of legitimacy were raised. But that has changed.

"You'd think we'd be losing players, because they're so old now and passing away," Kendrick (Bob Kendrick, then marketing director and now president of the Negro League Museum), told me in a phone interview.

"But strangely, the numbers are increasing. And some people are looking for their opportunities. We can't determine yet about Mr. Washington, but it's important that we're able to substantiate guys who played in the league and those who didn't participate."

Baseball memorabilia is big business and Negro League players have become attractions on the memorabilia circuit. It is new and fertile ground, the focus of academic interest and of speculators, with historians poring over incomplete records trying to winnow myth from provable fact.

Yet the very popularity that is helping some old men put a few bucks in their pockets also drives the new scrutiny.

The living Washington's credibility is questioned because he passes out photographs of himself as a much younger man wearing a baseball cap with a "B" for Boston on it.

This publicity photo mentions he played in the Major Leagues with the Boston Red Sox from 1951 through 1959.

Only, there's a problem.

The Red Sox — the last Major League team to integrate — didn't do so until 1959 with a player named Pumpsie Green, not Johnny Washington.

Unfortunately, the Illinois Attorney General's office did not do anything and this Johnny Washington continued to make a living going on the circuit, saying he played under Duty as a member of the Giants. Johnny Washington autographed balls are on sale now on eBay for around \$40. But, thankfully, both the White Sox and Cubs have not brought this Negro League imposter back for another tour of duty. Since Duty's voice is now quieted, only Spearman remains around to speak the truth.

I know that one of Duty's wishes at the end of his rich and glorious life was to preserve the legacy of the Negro Leagues and not let anyone tarnish its history and profit from its legacy, unless one had really earned it the hard way.

The DD Classic will forever preserve the memory and legacy of Chicago's very own Negro League superstar.

And thanks to Duty for the lasting memory of his hands all over my mother, which makes me smile when I miss her.

Finally, shortly before his death, an NBC-TV interviewer asked Duty if he had any regrets.

Duty did not say that he regretted not playing in the major leagues during his prime, but simply said "I wish I had more (women)..."

That quote sums up the personality of Duty, who only trailed Satchel Paige as the Negro League's leading hard-living raconteur and expert at self-promotion.

Duty surely packed a lot in his 103-plus years of life.

Learn more at the [White Sox' Double Duty Classic page](#).