



'Vitally important for future generations'

Jerry Reinsdorf lauds Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago in its local public television premiere.

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By Paul Ladewski

The Chicago Baseball Museum documentary [Buck O'Neil](#) and Black Baseball in Chicago played to highly favorable reviews in its local premiere on WYCC-TV this week.

Written and produced by John Owens, the film offers a unique look at the early days of local minority baseball, much of it through the eyes of O'Neil, the one-time Negro League legend.

"The premiere of Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago went above and beyond our expectations," said [Dr. David Fletcher](#), Chicago Baseball Museum president. "The significance of Buck O'Neil and Negro League baseball has been overlooked far too long, and we feel privileged to give them their proper due. The history of Chicago baseball is ripe with great stories, and this is the first of many that we hope to share in the future."

White Sox board chairman [Jerry Reinsdorf](#) lauded the film for its historic value for future generations of baseball fans.

"John Owens' Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago documents a rich cultural and historic time for baseball, our city and our country, and it is vitally important that this history was recorded for future generations before it was too late," Reinsdorf said. "As you watch this documentary, you realize several themes remain constant in the history of black Baseball -- Chicago, old Comiskey Park and Buck O'Neil."

"The documentary brought to light the struggles that black players faced in those days, a side of baseball that many people wouldn't be aware of otherwise," said Chicago Vocational Academy product **Marvin Freeman**, who pitched in the big leagues for 10 seasons. "Hopefully, it will serve as motivation for the black community to maintain those traditions and even start news ones."

Said Ken Zarzynski, a Buffalo Grove resident, "After viewing it, I realized once again the importance of the Negro Baseball League to the development of the game and the role that both the Cubs and White Sox organizations played in it. There is a section in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., devoted to the Negro Baseball League, and this documentary should be included in that exhibit. Congratulations to all involved in it."

The film features O'Neil's last known in-depth interview, which took place in Kansas City in 2004, two years before his death at 94 years of age. In the sitdown, he reminisces about Negro League baseball in the days of segregation as well as the major leagues in the early stage of integration.

Born in Carabelle, Fla., John (Buck) O'Neil went on to spend more than 30 years with the Cubs as a scout and the first black coach in the major leagues. He was instrumental in the development of Cubs stars **Ernie Banks**, **Lou Brock**, **Lee Smith** and **Billy Williams** among dozens of African-American players. He also had close relationships with **Minnie Minoso**, **Oscar Gamble** and other White Sox personnel over the years.

Although O'Neil fell one vote short of induction before he passed away, many recognize his to be a Hall of Fame career. As a first baseman with the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro American League, he claimed a pair of batting titles. As Monarchs manager, his teams captured four pennants. Later in his career, in the role of scout, coach and good-will ambassador, O'Neil did much to bridge the racial gap that existed in the game.

In his youth, O'Neil was a frequent visitor to the South Side, where he watched the Chicago American Giants play in Negro League games at the Southside Grounds at 39th and Princeton, the original White Sox home. As the affable O'Neil once said, "The South Side was outstanding, man."

After the 1940 season, the Giants relocated to Comiskey Park at 35th and Shields, where they competed against O'Neil and his Monarchs teams often. He also took part four in East-West All-Star Games, which were played at Comiskey Park annually.

"Anyone who knew, or had the pleasure of meeting, Buck O'Neil saw the character of the man -- honor, integrity, passion for the game of baseball and love for people," Reinsdorf said. "Buck O'Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago illustrates just how powerful Buck's role was in connecting the history of the game, from Rube Foster to Satchel Paige to Jackie Robinson to Ernie Banks to today's stars to tomorrow's superstars. Viewed this way, Buck's influence truly will never end, and our game is so much better for it."

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