

Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe

1902 - 2005

Was oldest living Negro leagues vet

[Chicago Final Edition]

Chicago Tribune - Chicago, Ill.

Author: Fred Mitchell, Tribune staff reporter

Date: Aug 12, 2005

Start Page: 1

Section: Sports

Document Types: Obituary

Text Word Count: 1027



Document Text

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BASEBALL.

He was 6 years old when the Cubs last won the World Series. And he was 15 when the White Sox last captured it all.

That should help long-suffering Chicago baseball fans put into perspective the remarkable life span of Theodore Roosevelt "Double Duty" Radcliffe, believed to have been the oldest living former Negro leagues baseball player. He succumbed to cancer at his South Side home Thursday at the age of 103. He was an all-star catcher and pitcher in the Negro leagues for half a century, including a stint with the Chicago American Giants in 1934, 1941-43 and again in 1949-50. He played in Negro leagues All-Star games in front of 50,000 people at the old Comiskey Park. He also played in an exhibition game at Wrigley Field in 1945, the year the Cubs went on to win the National League pennant.

"I played against Andy Pafko and all of them," Radcliffe said two years ago. "Some of them were better than others, you know that. The boy who played third base . . . what was his name? Stan Hack? He was good. And Andy Pafko was a good ballplayer."

Radcliffe, who played for more than 30 Negro leagues teams in 36 years, is estimated to have had more than 4,000 hits and 400 home runs while batting .303, according to biographer Kyle P. McNary. He also won about 500 games and had 4,000 strikeouts. He later became a manager.

Damon Runyon gave him the nickname "Double Duty" because Radcliffe performed as a catcher and as a pitcher in successive games of a 1932 Negro League World Series doubleheader between the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Monroe Monarchs at Yankee Stadium. Radcliffe caught for pitcher Satchel Paige for a shutout in the first game, then pitched a shutout in the second game.

Runyon wrote Radcliffe "was worth the price of two admissions." Radcliffe considered his year with the '32 Crawfords to be one of the highlights of his career. The Crawfords beat the Monarchs 5-1 in the best-of-nine series.

"I would like everybody to know Double Duty was a great ballplayer and he had a great sense of humor," said Johnny Washington, 75, who was a left-handed pitcher on the New Orleans Eagles when Radcliffe was the club's player/manager. "He was very patient and helpful with young players like me. I will really miss him."

Radcliffe pitched three and caught three of the six East-West All-Star Games in which he played. Radcliffe also pitched in two and caught in six other All-Star games. He hit .376 (11-for-29) in nine exhibition games against major-leaguers years before blacks were allowed to play in the major leagues.

Born July 7, 1902 in Mobile, Ala., Radcliffe, began his professional career with the Detroit Stars in 1928. He went on to play for the St. Louis Stars (1930), Homestead Grays (1931), Pittsburgh Crawfords (1932), Columbus Blue Birds (1933), New York Black Yankees, Brooklyn Eagles, Cincinnati Tigers, Memphis Red Sox, Birmingham Black Barons, Chicago American Giants, Louisville Buckeyes and Kansas City Monarchs. Radcliffe managed the Cleveland Tigers in 1937, Memphis Red Sox in 1938 and the Chicago American Giants in 1943.

Hall of Famer Ty Cobb once reported Radcliffe wore a chest protector that said "thou shalt not steal" when he was catching an exhibition.

At 5 feet 9 inches and 210 pounds, Radcliffe was remembered as having a strong throwing arm and good reflexes. As a pitcher he was known to throw many pitches now illegal, including the emery ball, the cut ball and the spitter. Radcliffe was one of 10 children. One of his brothers, Alex, also achieved renown as a ballplayer while playing third base. His oldest brother, Earnest, lived to be 105.

"Alex was a better hitter than Double Duty," said Charles Johnson, 96, who was an outfielder for the Chicago American Giants.

Johnson, who had been friends with Radcliffe since 1928, said, "Alex and Double Duty would get into arguments all the time about who was the better ballplayer."

As youngsters, the Radcliffe boys used to play baseball using a taped ball of rags with their friends, including future Negro leagues All-Stars Paige and Bobby Robinson.

Ted and Alex hitchhiked north to Chicago in 1919 to join an older brother. The rest of the family soon followed to live on the South Side. A year later Ted signed with the semipro Illinois Giants for \$50 for every 15 games and 50 cents a day

meal money. This worked out to about \$100 a month. He traveled with the Giants for a few seasons before joining Gilkerson's Union Giants, another semipro team for which he played until he joined the Detroit Stars in 1928 and entered the Negro National League.

Radcliffe was the regular catcher for the Detroit Stars for the first half of the season. When the pitching staff became weary, he began pitching and helped lead the team to championship. His career- best batting average was .316 for the 1929 Stars.

The 1931 Homestead Grays, according to Radcliffe, was the greatest team of all time. That team included Josh Gibson, Oscar Charleston, Jud Wilson, and Smokey Joe Williams. Gibson and Charleston joined him on the '32 Crawfords. Radcliffe managed the Memphis Red Sox in 1937, in addition to catching and pitching for them. In 1943, at the age of 41, he rejoined the Chicago American Giants and won the Negro American League MVP award. The next season he blasted a home run into the upper deck of Comiskey Park to highlight that season's East-West All- Star Game.

Renowned for his fun-loving personality, Radcliffe also was known for being "a real ladies man," Johnson said. "I always told him he did all of the wrong things as far as partying and stuff, yet he lived a long, full life," Washington said.

Funeral services for Radcliffe will be 11 a.m. Wednesday at the Apostolic Church of God at 63rd Street and Kenwood Avenue. Visitation will be at 10 a.m.

fmitchell@tribune.com

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