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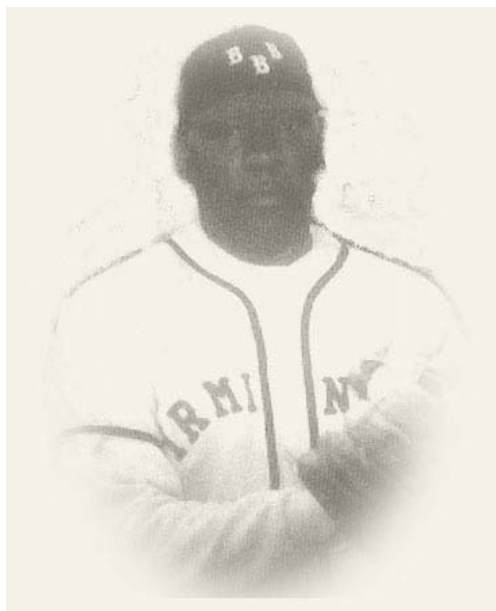
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Ernest Westfield



Negro Leaguer of the Month
April, 2001

Ernest Westfield

Position: pitcher
career: 1959-1965
Team: Birmingham Black Barons

HT: 6'-3"; WT: 160 lbs
batted and threw right
Born: Nov. 30, 1939 in Cleveland, Tennessee

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"I read my poems to kids and have them write poems about the Negro Leagues. They love it! I'm helping keep the history alive."

--Ernest Westfield

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To everything there is a beginning, a middle and an end. Last month's Negro Leaguer of the Month, Bingo DeMoss, was in his "salad days" when the Negro League was formed in 1920. This month's honoree, Ernest Westfield, "turned off the lights" as the Negro Leagues closed its doors.

Although many historians feel that the Negro Leagues ended as a Black Major League in the early 1950s, in name the Negro Leagues continued until 1961.

The very last East-West All-Star game at Comiskey Park was played in 1960. It still was a special event, still the crown jewel of the league.

Starters for 1960 East-West Game

East
Jesse Bass ss Birmingham
James Ivory 3b Birmingham
Rufus Gibson 2b Raleigh
Ralph Forston 1b Raleigh
Robert Worthington c Raleigh
Willie Harris lf Birmingham

North Dakota
baseball history

Contact me



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kyle@pitchblackbaseball.com

Brown Jackson rf Birmingham
John Mitchell cf Birmingham
Ernie Westfield p Birmingham

West

Nate Dancy 2b Kansas City
Don Bonner lf Detroit
Frank Williams rf Kansas City
Palmer Hubbard cf Kansas City
Ira McKnight 3b Kansas City
Pat Patterson 1b Detroit
Art Hamilton c Detroit
Ike Brown ss Kansas City
Bill Mathew p Detroit

Note: Ike Brown, the West's shortstop, was the last player from the Negro Leagues to make it to the Major Leagues when he broke the Detroit Tigers' lineup in 1969.

On August 21, 1960 Jackie Robinson threw out the ceremonial first pitch at the East-West game. A few minutes later the first pitch in the bottom of the first was thrown by a skinny flamethrowing 21-year-old named Ernest Westfield.

Westfield pitched 3 innings and left, down 3-2, two of the West's runs being unearned (Westfield himself had a throwing error). The West won 8-4.

There may have never been a player who was more oblivious to Negro League history when he was a player, and so awed by it in retirement. Westfield, though a footnote in the history of Black Baseball, has made the Negro Leagues his life's passion in recent years. He has a talent for writing poems that capture the essence of the Negro Leagues and its biggest stars.



Westfield had a live arm as a young man and was scouted by the Chicago Cubs. His break in professional baseball, though, came while he was pitching for a team in his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee. The Birmingham Black Barons came to town and Westfield pitched against them at Smokey Stadium, impressing them enough that they offered him a contract--Westfield remembers that he signed for a \$300 bonus and \$175 a month. "I don't think I ever saw the \$300 bonus," recalls Westfield. "But it was the best time of my life."

Besides traveling and playing the game he loved, Westfield spotted the woman who would become his wife while riding in a bus to a game.

Westfield played with the Black Barons for seven seasons, retiring in 1965. He did not, however, fully appreciate Negro League history until many years later.

Growing up, Westfield's baseball heroes were not Negro Leaguers. "I didn't know

anything about the history," he recalls. "My favorite player was Carl Erskine, the pitcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He threw that knucklecurve, just like I did. I was interviewed a while back and when I said that Erskine was my hero the reporter said, 'What about Joe Black and Don Newcombe?' They wanted me to say someone black."

In the last few years Westfield has studied the Negro Leagues and speaks at schools, passing along the history to receptive audiences.

Westfield, one of the youngest Negro Leaguers alive, still looks like he could pitch, in fact his fastball was clocked at 80 miles per hour a few years ago.

Westfield now is CEO of ELW Enterprises which sells Negro League memorabilia. You can purchase replica Birmingham Black Baron hats or special Negro League hats with his autograph. All hats are adjustable and sell for \$15. You may contact Mr. Westfield by mail or phone:

ELW Enterprises
P.O. Box 7091
Champaign, IL 61826
phone: 217-367-0317 or 217-351-8610