



To Dave a friend  
from  
Double Duty Radcliff

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Jack Gibson

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August 12, 2005-----

## TED 'DOUBLE DUTY' RADCLIFFE - 1902-2005

With a name like Theodore Roosevelt "Double Duty" Radcliffe, the son of a shipyard carpenter had to be destined for adventure. The Negro League baseball legend died Thursday in his Chicago home of complications from cancer. He was 103. Mr. Radcliffe was thought to be the oldest professional baseball player.

Mr. Radcliffe was born in Mobile, Ala., a baseball port that also would deliver Henry Aaron and Satchel Paige. He was one of 10 children who played baseball with his brothers by making taped balls of rags.

As a teenager, Mr. Radcliffe and his brother Alec embarked on a two-week hitchhiking trip to Chicago. They settled near old Comiskey Park, a legendary mecca for Negro League baseball. He threw his first pitch in Chicago for the Scrub Packing Co. in a game against the Armour Stockyard Co.

Mr. Radcliffe entered the Negro National League in 1928 with the Detroit Stars. He went on to play for the Chicago American Giants, Homestead Grays, Brooklyn Eagles and other stops in the Negro Leagues. In his prime, Mr. Radcliffe stood 5-9 and weighed 210 pounds.

He was built like a boxcar and had the heart of a steam engine.

Mr. Radcliffe was given the nickname "Double Duty" by New York sportswriter Damon Runyon in the 1932 Negro League World Series when he played both games of a doubleheader for the Pittsburgh Crawfords. In the first game, he caught a Paige shutout; in the second, he pitched a 6-0 shutout.

"There were 46,000 people in Yankee Stadium," Mr. Radcliffe told me in 1991. "It was the first recognized Negro League World Series against the Lincoln New York Giants. Satchel pitched a three-hitter in the first game. I caught him and hit a home run with two men on base. After resting 20 minutes, I pitched, shut them out and hit a bases-loaded double."

Negro League statistics are sketchy, but Mr. Radcliffe played for or coached 30 teams in his career, recorded an estimated 4,000 hits and 400 home runs and won 500 games with 4,000 strikeouts as a pitcher. What is undisputed is that he appeared in six East-West All-Star Games, pitching in three and catching in three. He compiled a 13-5 record for the 1932 Crawfords, which included future Hall of Famers Josh Gibson, Oscar Charleston and James "Cool Papa" Bell. Mr. Radcliffe was best man at Bell's 1928 wedding.

"The most I ever made was \$1,000 a month," Mr. Radcliffe said. "And I was the

catcher, a pitcher, one of the best hitters, the secretary and the bus driver. I even changed the tires."

Even late in life, Mr. Radcliffe's fingers were short, thick and as hard as tree trunks. He shook hands as if you were coming instead of going.

In 1937, Mr. Radcliffe managed John "Buck" O'Neil for the Memphis Red Sox. O'Neil, 93, is board chairman of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Mo.

"He had a good baseball mind," O'Neil said Thursday from Kansas City. "As a catcher, he knew how to run a ballclub."

While playing with the Kansas City Monarchs in 1945, Mr. Radcliffe roomed with Jackie Robinson and later was credited with integrating two semipro leagues. Ty Cobb liked to tell people that as a catcher, Mr. Radcliffe wore a chest protector that said, "Thou shalt not steal." In 1994, Kyle McNary and Mr. Radcliffe self-published the biography Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe: 36 Years of Pitching and Catching in Baseball's Negro Leagues.

It was Mr. Radcliffe's dream to be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. When the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee met in March, Elston Howard, Minnie Minoso and Mr. Radcliffe were among those on the ballot. No one was voted in.

"He should be in the Hall," said O'Neil, a member of the Veterans Committee from 1983 to 2001, when the rules were changed to include only living Hall of Famers on the committee. "Double Duty was good enough. He was a good hitter, and he had hard stuff as a pitcher. He didn't have a slider; we called it a nickel curveball. A curveball was a drop. He threw it overhanded."

At 96, Mr. Radcliffe became the oldest man to appear in a professional game when he threw a single pitch for the Schaumburg Flyers of the independent Northern League. His pitch counted in the game, and Mr. Radcliffe appears on the Flyers' all-time roster. Former White Sox slugger Ron Kittle was the Flyers' manager.

"He walked out with his cane," Kittle recalled Thursday. "The umpire said, 'You can't use the cane.' I said, 'Hell, he can't.' And he did. He tried to wind up and throw the ball. He got his arm up to where it was sideways and the ball bounced in."

"I escorted him out there on my arm, and I took him out arm-in-arm. It meant the world to him. I was his last manager -- how cool is that?"

Every year since his 99th birthday (including his 103rd birthday July 7), Mr. Radcliffe threw a ceremonial first pitch for the Sox at U.S. Cellular Field.

"Double Duty shared such a love for baseball and a passion for life," Sox chairman

Jerry Reinsdorf said in a statement. "We all loved to listen to his stories and share in his laughter. He leaves such a great legacy after experiencing so much history and change during his long life."

In his final months, Mr. Radcliffe's great-niece Debra Richards became his caretaker. They attended the July 22 and 23 games of the White Sox-Boston Red Sox series at U.S. Cellular Field. Mr. Radcliffe took ill after the game and was hospitalized.

"After he got home from the hospital, he wanted to go back to another game," Richards said.

Two weeks ago, Mr. Radcliffe was scheduled to travel to Alabama to be honored by the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame at 95-year-old Rickwood Field, where he played for the Birmingham Black Barons in the mid-1940s.

Mr. Radcliffe lived in a retirement center about a half-mile from U.S. Cellular Field and recently had moved in with Richards. In 1989, Mr. Radcliffe and his late wife, Alberta, were moved from a gang-infested apartment building on the South Side to a rent-subsidized senior high-rise at 38th and King Drive. Their rent was paid for by BAT (Baseball Assistance Team).

In 2003, Raelee Frazier cast Mr. Radcliffe's large, twisted hands in bronze as part of the "Hitters' Hands" series of baseball sculptures that toured America in "Shades of Greatness," sponsored by the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. It was those hands that took Mr. Radcliffe on a unique American journey, hitchhiking from the South into the deepest soul of baseball.