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/ SOX, HIGH SCHOOL PLAYERS HONOR NEGRO

LEAGUES

History, next generation of inner-city players focus of Double Duty Classic

By // Melody K. Hoffman

The Chicago White Sox recently hosted the third annual Double Duty Class — an event celebrating the history and tradition of Negro League baseball in Chicago and promoting the next generation of inner-city baseball players.

The game, played at U.S. Cellular Field, featured the top high school players from across the country (Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin). The White Sox Amateur City Elite (ACE) high school travel team represented Chicago in the All-Star showcase.

“Really this concept is a great idea that the White Sox came up with to give the kids an opportunity to play on the field as well as be seen,” says Antwoine Brown, a coach with the ACE program. “The objective is to get more Black kids playing baseball. Theoretically, if they don’t make it to the Major Leagues, the whole idea is to at least get a college scholarship via the baseball route.”

A special forum on the history of the Negro Leagues and African-Americans in the game of baseball was held prior to the baseball game. Former Negro League players, White Sox general manager/senior vice president Ken Williams, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum president Greg Baker and Hall of Fame Negro Leagues legend Josh Gibson’s great-grandson Sean Gibson were among those who participated in a question-and-answer session with the students. The message was focused on education and life outside and after baseball.

“They’re learning about the Negro Leagues, but we’re trying to teach them a few messages about life,” Williams says. “Whether it be about responsibility, family, character, education all of the things that make you a productive good citizen in life. I think that we have so many young men that have dreams of sports too prevalent in their heads, that I’m just hoping that some of them hear the message to work as vigorously on their minds as they are their bodies and their sporting dreams.”

“What we do every year is we try to further [the students’] education of why they’re playing and let them know more about the Negro Leagues and the people that came before them,” explains Kenny Fullman, ACE’s program director. “This program is not all about baseball, it’s about education. We have to start somewhere. We’re getting African Americans kids back to playing at a high level, getting them exposure...and using baseball as a stepping stone to further their education.”

The Negro League East-West All-Star Game was historically played at Old Comiskey Park and all players dressed in uniforms honoring past Negro Leagues’ East-West All-Star teams. Gibson was impressed by the number of Black talented players.

“I see the majority of the players here are African American. That’s good because Major League Baseball today doesn’t have that, but that shows that the future is bright for us,” says Gibson. “That’s the goal, trying to get these kids to play baseball and hopefully they can excel and get to that next level.”

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