

John Donaldson, Glasgow's Negro League Baseball Hero

BY: J. Y. NILLER

John Wesley Donaldson was born in Glasgow, MO on 20 FEB 1892. His mother, Ida Hurt, did not want him to indulge in frivolous things like baseball, especially on Sundays. As you can see from the name she gave him, she was a quite religious AME church member. John's father, James Donaldson, evidently did not have much contact with John as he grew up.



This is the Glasgow in which John grew up. The picture was taken after a big storm, which explains the debris in the street. It was both very different from today's Glasgow and, in many ways, much the same. The African-American population was larger than it is today. There were some serious examples of discrimination, but there were also examples of acceptance and tolerance between the races.

Donaldson began his baseball career playing for the Hannaca Blues, and all black team sponsored by the then mayor of Glasgow. They played on Hannaca Field, which was located on what we now call Stump Island Park. Donaldson played there from 1908 thru 1910. His mother had to be persuaded to come and watch him play. But seeing how he was received with cheers, she became a fan.





In 1911, he pitched for Brown's Tennessee Rats, which was managed by W. A. Brown of Holden, MO. They traveled with a group called Brown's Tennessee Minstrels. This group of about 20 men crisscrossed the upper Midwest. They played ball during the day and performed a minstrel program in the evening. The ticket buyers were mostly white. If you know the type of acts in the old minstrel shows, it must have been demeaning. It did put money in their pockets, however.

Donaldson also played for the Higbee Black Tigers. This began a career of playing for at least 25 teams in the Midwest that spanned 30 plus active years.

In 1912, he pitched for the All Nation's team based in Des Moines, Iowa for the sum of \$150.00 per month. He was the star attraction on this team which included a female player who called herself, Carrie Nation, as well as players of several different races or ethnic heritage. An interracial team was somewhat daring, but was a success as they thrived traveling through the Midwest from 1912 to 1917.

ALL NATION
Baseball Club
Will Play
OWATONNA
Sunday, June 28, 1914

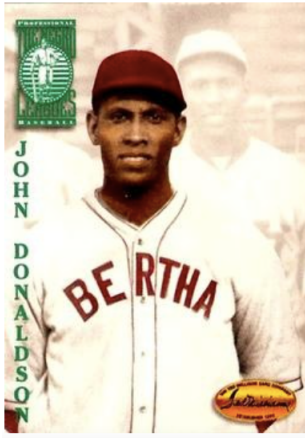
The first time in history that every nation in the world can be seen in a ball game.

John Donaldson, the phenomenal colored pitcher, who pitched 85 games the last two seasons, winning 80 of them, will pitch in the Owatonna game.

During the 1915 season, he struck out an average of 18 players per game and in one 18 innings contest, he struck out 30 batters. They did not worry about pitch counts in those days.

Most of the games were against other semi-pro teams, but they also played against white major league teams and he conducted himself well. In one game, he struck out Ty Cobb three times. Mr. Cobb was known for a temper and I suspect that he was somewhat exasperated that afternoon. Research has found records of well over 5000 strikeouts by Donaldson and several no hitters and perfect games.

His most long lasting association was with the Bertha Fishermen in Berth, Minnesota. His salary with the Bertha team was \$1,478 per year. That was \$18 more than the combined salaries of the rest of the team including the coach.



His wife, Eleanor Watson, was from Minneapolis. This is their wedding announce in a Minnesota paper.



Donaldson registered for the draft for World War I in 1917. He listed his occupation as baseball player. After the war, he joined the American Legion. He also helped form a team in Kansas City, MO. It was Donaldson who suggested the name for that team, the Kansas City Monarchs. He played for them at different times during the 1920s.

When not on the mound, he often played center field. One Kansas City player described a pre game practice in which Donaldson squatted like a catcher in center field and played catch with the catcher, throwing the ball on line from that squatting position.

It was during this time, that he played with Satchel Paige. Satchel described him as “the greatest left handed pitcher who ever lived”. Paige also said that he learned a lot about pitching from Donaldson. The greatest pitcher comment was often used in news reports and advertising posters for Donaldson’s games.



Donaldson can be credited by at least 13 no hitters, a perfect game, and dozens of one hitters. He pitched two 30 strikeout games, 11 games with more than 25 strikeouts, 109 games with more than 15 strikeouts and a total of 203 double digit strikeout games. He could also hit well. In over 1,800 at bats, his batting average was .334.

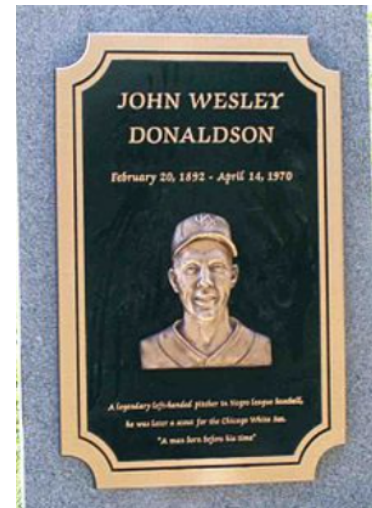
Major league manager John McGraw of the New York Giants offered Donaldson an opportunity to play Major League Ball. Baseball was segregated, but Cuban players were permitted to play, regardless of their complexion. McGraw suggested that Donaldson go to Cuba, pick up a little Spanish, change his name, never contact his family, avoid association with “colored people” and play Major League ball as a Cuban.

Donaldson responded “I love my mother and am proud of my race.....,and will not pretend to be something I am not”

Not only was John Donaldson a great athlete, he was a man of great integrity and honor. In 1949, when baseball dropped the color ban, Donaldson was hired as the first African-American professional baseball scout by the Chicago White Sox. He scouted Willie Mays, Earnie Banks, and Hank Aaron and was responsible for the hiring of many other young black players.

John Donaldson died of pneumonia at age 79 in Chicago on 4 April 1970. He had retired from baseball and was working for the post office. His grave was unmarked for years before money was raised to buy a marker. He was survived by his wife, Eleanor. Over the years, he often visited his family in Glasgow.

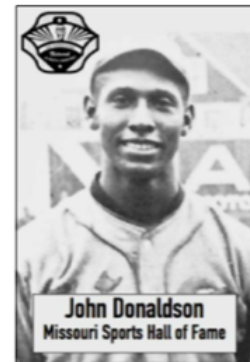
Peter Gorton heads up “The Donaldson Network”. Mr. Gorton has collected much information on Donaldson and was the leader of a successful movement to get Donaldson admitted to the Missouri Sports Hall of fame. Work continues to get him into the major league hall of fame.



John Donaldson was a great athlete and a great man. Glasgow can be proud of him and can be reminded of his legacy when we visit Donaldson Field at the high school and see his 8 foot tall bronze statue. statue.



2017
Missouri Sports Hall of Fame
Nomination
John Wesley Donaldson



“One player always stands out in our memory –
that of graceful, polished and classy
John Donaldson.
He was the poetry and rhythm of baseball.”
-Lake Wilson (MN) Pilot