

PRESS RELEASE

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DETROIT NEGRO LEAGUES CENTENNIAL SYMPOSIUM

“Why the Negro Leagues Still Matter”

DETROIT, MI (September 4, 2020) The Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium in conjunction with the Black Historic Sites Committee, the Detroit Historical Society, the Piast Institute, and the Detroit Chapter of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) will host a symposium via ZOOM to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the founding of the Negro Baseball Leagues.

WHO: A panel of Negro League experts, moderated by Detroit historian and educator **Jamon Jordan**, founder of the Black Scroll Network. Plus ten virtual presenters from across the U.S.

WHEN: Tuesday September 24, 2020, 10:00 -11:30 a.m. **Wayne County CEO Warren Evans’** opening remarks will kick off the event.

WHERE: Detroit Historical Museum. The symposium will be broadcast live via ZOOM from the Museum’s DeRoy Auditorium. ZOOM link will be posted on www.detroithistorical.org on September 23.

SYMPOSIUM PANELISTS

- Detroit native **Ron Teasley** played in the Negro Leagues in 1948 and is a member of the Wayne State Athletic Hall of Fame as well as multiple other Halls of Fame. Ron was a pioneering athlete at Wayne State and coached baseball, basketball, and golf at Northwestern High School.
- **Mitch Lutzke** is the author of the award-winning *Page Fence Giants: A History of Black Baseball’s Pioneering Champions* and a history teacher in Williamston, MI.
- **Mike “Tiger” Price** is a Detroit sports and music historian; the founder, co-host, and producer of TV6 Sportstalk; and a founding board member of the Detroit Sports Zone, which maintains the Detroit Public High School Hall of Fame.
- **Phil Dixon** is a prominent Negro Leagues historian, photo archivist, and nationally known speaker and event organizer. Dixon is written or edited ten books on the Negro Leagues.
- **Gary Gillette** is the founder and chair of the Friends of Historic Hamtramck Stadium. He is currently writing a new history of the Detroit Stars and Black Baseball in Michigan.

NEGRO LEAGUE FORMATION

On February 13, 1920, Andrew "Rube" Foster led a meeting of independent Black Baseball team owners at the Paseo YMCA in Kansas City, MO. The result was the birth of the Negro National League, the first successful professional Black Baseball League. The Negro Leagues prospered in the 1920s as the Great Migration swelled the African American populations of Northern industrial cities.

Born out of segregation, the Negro Leagues would become a driving force for social change in America by clearly demonstrating that African American players were good enough to play in the major leagues and had been excluded solely due to blatant discrimination.

DETROIT NEGRO LEAGUE BASEBALL HISTORY *By Gary Gillette*

- May 2, 2020, was the 100th anniversary of the first official Negro National League (NNL) game. The centennial of the Detroit Stars' first game in the new NNL was May 15, 2020.
- The Detroit Stars were founded in 1919 by Rube Foster, who is considered the "Father of Black Baseball". Detroit became a charter member of the NNL in 1920, playing at Mack Park on Detroit's East Side.
- The Detroit Stars first game was on Easter Sunday, April 20, 1919, at Mack Park on Detroit's East Side. They defeated the 1918 city champion Maxwell Internationals, a powerful White semi-pro team. The Maxwells included one former major-leaguer and at least four former minor-league players.
- The Stars were one of the most prominent Negro League clubs in the 1920s. They also regularly won the city's prestigious semi-pro baseball championship.
- The Stars featured five future Hall of Famers from 1919–1931, including Norman "Turkey" Stearnes (HOF 2000), one of the greatest home run hitters in baseball history—Black or White.
- A Nashville native, Stearnes came to play in Detroit in 1923 at age 22. He later made his home in Detroit, raising his family while working at Ford's Rouge plant for 27 years (1938–64). He became a UAW member in 1941 when Ford was first organized. He died in Detroit in 1979.
- Negro Leagues legend Satchel Paige called Turkey Stearnes "one of the greatest hitters we ever had. He was as good as Josh [Gibson]. He was as good as anybody who ever played ball".
- A major fire at Mack Park in 1929 led the Detroit Stars to relocate to new Hamtramck Stadium in 1930.
- In Hamtramck, the Stars won the NNL's second-half title in 1930, then played St. Louis for the pennant. Despite Stearnes heroics, St. Louis defeated Detroit in a hard-fought, seven-game championship series.
- The Detroit Stars folded with the Negro National League in 1931, victims of the Great Depression. In 1932, the Detroit Wolves played in Hamtramck for one summer in the short-lived Negro East-West League.
- In 1933 and in 1937, new Detroit Stars clubs joined the reborn NNL and the newly founded Negro American League (NAL), respectively. Playing at Hamtramck Stadium, each team lasted only one year.
- In 1954, a new, lower-level Detroit Stars club joined the faltering NAL, mostly barnstorming but sometimes playing at Briggs Stadium. After 1961, the Stars and the NAL, the last segregated league, folded.

Host Sponsors

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