DAWN SPORTS

Hall of Fame... Or Hall of Shame?

By Sam Lacy

I suppose right away one might want to know what gives this guy the idea that he can demean the sanctified edifice known as the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum — and get away with it.

Frankly, the same thought surfaces each August when it comes time to enshrine new members, such as Juan Marichal and Brooks Robinson.

This is because it has been only since 1962, that the Cooperstown (NY) shrine could claim credibility as a Hall of Fame. Before then, it was considered something akin to a Hall o' Shame.

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From its inception in 1936, to the year Jackie Robinson entered its portal 26 years later, only white players were eligible. For over a quarter-century, athletes on teams in the jim-crow black leagues — no matter how great they were — could not be given consideration.

Actually, Cooperstown can be only partially blamed for the snub since organized baseball, which fed the hall, was a racially restricted society.

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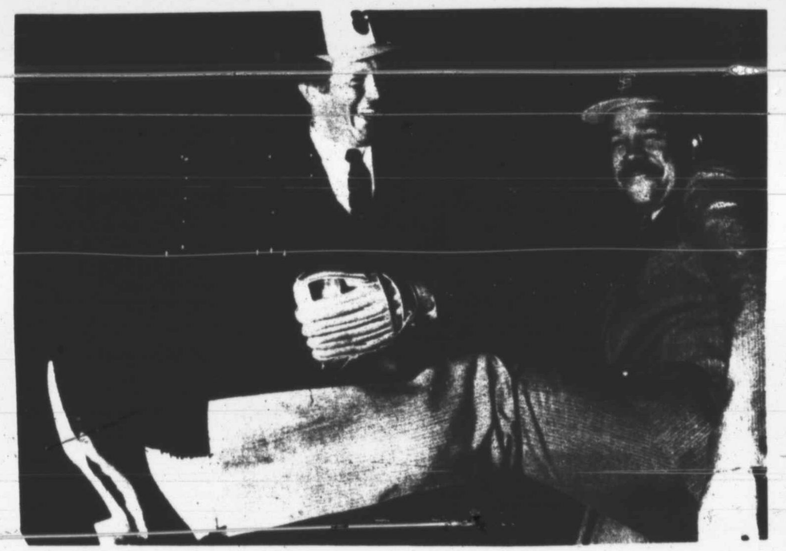
Truthfully, the majority of the museum residents are legitimate. One can hardly challenge the presence of Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, George Sisler and their like.

But there are some busts that would certainly not be there had it been necessary for them to compete with men playing at the same time on "the other side of the tracks."



Pitcher Juan Marichal does high kick to show Brooks Robinson he can still do it.

Ernie Banks

Cool Poppa Bell shouldn't have needed side-door concession.

Both were elected to the Hall of Fame in 1983.

Because they came along later and were given the opportunity to enter the competition eight more have followed Robinson to Cooperstown:

Roy Campanella in 1969, Roberto Clemente in 1973, Ernie Banks in 1977, Willie Mays, 1979; Bob Gibson, 1981; Hank Aaron and Frank Robinson, 1982, and Marichal this year.

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Emphasizing the impact these men had once they were given the chance to play, is the fact that six were elected to Cooperstown in the first year of their eligibility — Jackie Robinson, Banks, Mays, Gibson, Aaron and Frank.

And Clemente was conceded enshrinement while still an active player with the Pittsburgh Pirates. He lost his life ina plane crash while on a mercy mission for Nicaraguan earthquake victims.

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Also enshrined (in alphabetical order) are James "Cool Papa" Bell, Oscar Charleston, Martin Dihigo, Andrew "Rube" Foster, Josh Gibson, Monte Irvin, William "Judy" Johnson, Walter "Buck" Leonard, John Henry "Pop" Lloyd and Leroy "Satchel" Paige.

There have been attempts by some to cheapen the presence in Cooperstown of these 10 men, the assertion being that they got in "through a side door."

This is snide reference to the fact that they were chosen from among scores of outstanding players who played on all-black teams in black leagues prior to the 1947 desegregation era.

Some dissidents — black and white — hold to the suspicion that it was nothing more than acquiescence on the part of the white baseball hierarchy that led to the belated recognition.

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In truth, it was.

But that should not diminish the pure right of presence which belongs to these men. Had there been no racial ban in organized baseball when they were at the peak of their careers, there can be no question that they would have been members of the "establishment" and would have been "front door" arrivals.

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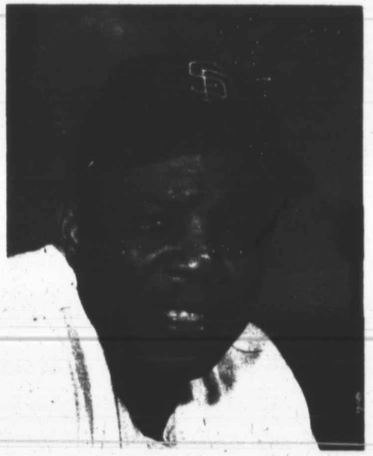
The sad fact is that there are many others who spent their baseball lives under the barrel of discrimination. And the reminder comes to this desk each August when the annual Hall of Fame ceremonies are held in the quiet town off Lake Otsego in upstate New York.

Brooks Robinson, the brilliant former third baseman of the Orioles who is a 1983 inductee, undoubtedly belongs in Cooperstown. His glove magic was spectacular. And, whether or not it is worth considering, he's a good friend.

Roberto Clemente, who was killed in a plane crash 11 years ago shows ball he hit for his 3,000th career hit.



Willie Mays

But, believe me, friends, there has been no third baseman — living or dead — who could surpass the defensive wizardry of Ray Dandridge of the old Newark Eagles. And Ray could hit with consistency.

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Former Giants righthander Juan Marichal who also is a 1983 enshrinee, could have witnessed tremendous pitching performances had he been around to see some of the other marvels of the mound in the Satchel Paige heyday: the Lincoln Giants' Smoky Joe Williams, the Chicago American Giants' and Bacharachs' Dick "Cannonball" Redding, and Kansas City Monarchs' Wilbur "Bullet" Rogan.

Roy Campanella, the incomparable, 3-time National League MVP catcher, readily admits he learned his trade under one of the game's most respected receivers, Raleigh "Biz" Mackey of the Hilldales and Baltimore Elite Giants.

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Another catcher who was definitely major league material — and possible Hall of Fame nominee — was Lou Santop, a man with a short but consistent batting stroke and an awesome throwing arm. Actually, his name was Louis Santop Loftin but he was known by the shorter name while playing with the Brooklyn Royal Giants and Hilldales.

Infielders Willie "Devil" Wells and slugging "Mule" Suttles were of big league calibre also, as was indeed John Beckwith who was comfortable at catcher, infield or outfield while playing for the Baltimore Black Sox, Homestead Grays and Chicago American Giants.

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In all probability there will be some who will question my assertions and my right

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