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Thursday, February 24, 2022

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Satchel Paige: Baseball's Larger-than-life Talent, Showman

Part 3: Larger than Life



Satchel Paige's final Major League appearance was for one game, for the Kansas City Athletics, in 1965. He was 59. He pitched three scoreless innings and played up his age by sitting in a rocking chair in the bullpen between innings.

He had various other official roles in Major League Baseball, including as a pitching coach for the Atlanta Braves in 1969.

On February 9, 1971, baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn announced that the first Negro League player to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame would be Paige.

Paige was married twice, to Janet Howard and Lahoma Brown, and had eight children. He died on June 8, 1982.

The name Satchel Paige is well-known throughout baseball circles. A statue of him has prominent place in Cooper Park, in Cooperstown, N.Y., home of the Baseball Hall of Fame. An elementary school in Kansas City is named for him.

He is widely regarded as one of the most talented players ever to play the game. Major League Hall of Famers Joe DiMaggio, Dizzy Dean, Bob Feller, and many others, say that Paige was the best they ever saw.

Complete statistics for Paige, and for many African-American players, are not available. Paige himself recalled that he had pitched more than 2,500 games and had thrown 300 shutouts and 55 no-hitters.

Among the stats that are verifiable are these:

- In 1933, he went 31-4, winning 21 straight times and pitching 64 consecutive scoreless innings.
- For the Indians in 1948, he went 6-1 and helped the team beat the Red Sox for the pennant by just one game and then defeat Hall-of-Famer Warren Spahn and the Braves in the World Series.
- In 18 seasons in the Negro Leagues, he won 100 games and lost 50. He struck out 1,170 batters and walked 240.
- He was twice named a Major League All-Star and five times names a Negro League All-Star.
- He played 16 seasons in the California Winter League, winning 56 games and losing 7.
- He played three seasons in the Puerto Rican Winter League and compiled a record of 23–11.

Paige's reputation as a great pitcher was more than equalled by his ability to command attention. He was easily the most famous player in the Negro Leagues. He was also one of baseball's most quotable figures. Among the many famous things that he said are these:

- "Age is a question of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."
- "How old would you be if you didn't know how old you are?"
- "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you"
- "I never threw an illegal pitch. The trouble is, once in a while I would toss one that ain't never been seen by this generation."
- "Ain't no man can avoid being born average, but there ain't no man got to be common."
- "You win a few, you lose a few. Some get rained out. But you got to dress for all of them."

How old would you be if you didn't know how old you was?



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