

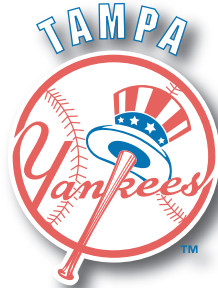
BUCK O'NEIL CELEBRATION



Saturday, April 14, 2007



VS



Pre game festivities will begin at 5:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. at Ed Smith Stadium

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Filmmaker Ken Burns will help celebrate the life and legacy of baseball legend Buck O'Neil at a series of community events in Sarasota on April 14.

At 3:30 p.m., Burns will help dedicate a memorial to O'Neil at the Buck O'Neil Baseball Complex in Twin Lakes Park, 6700 Clark Rd. The event is free and open to the public.

Burns will speak again during 5 p.m. ceremonies at Ed Smith Stadium on 12th Street. The ceremonies will precede a 6 p.m. Florida State League game between the Sarasota Reds and the Tampa Yankees.

During the game, players will wear uniforms of Negro Leagues teams, including the Kansas City Monarchs, for whom O'Neil was a star player and manager. Several former Negro Leagues' players will be introduced and will sign autographs. Game tickets are \$5 and \$6.

The day's festivities will begin at 1 p.m. with the dedication of a plaque in O'Neil's honor at Newtown Estates Park, 2800 Newtown Blvd. The public is welcome at this free event.

O'Neil, who died last October at age 94, grew up in Sarasota, where he worked in the celery fields east of town. He went on to become a standout in the Negro Leagues in the 1930s and 1940s. Later, when Major League Baseball was integrated, he became the first black coach and one of the first black scouts. Among the players he scouted were Ernie Banks, Lou Brock and Joe Carter.

In 1994, millions were captivated by O'Neil's charisma and humanity when he was a featured commentator in Burns' popular PBS documentary, "Baseball." Burns and O'Neil developed a close friendship, and Burns delivered the eulogy at O'Neil's funeral.

In the documentary, O'Neil said he wasn't bitter that he was barred from the majors because of his race. He felt he paved the way for the black stars who came later. "Don't feel sorry for me," he said. "I was right on time."

As chairman of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, and through his numerous public appearances, O'Neil kept the history of the Negro Leagues alive for future generations. He also championed the cause of Negro Leagues players while serving on the National Baseball Hall of Fame's Veterans' Committee.

In a Sarasota ceremony in 1995, O'Neil received a diploma from Sarasota High School, a school he couldn't attend in the 1920s because he was black. Also in 1995, the baseball complex at Twin Lakes Park was named in his honor.

In conjunction with the April 14 events, an exhibit about O'Neil, on loan from the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, will be on display through May 11 at the Sarasota County Visitors Center and History Center Museum, 701 N. Tamiami Trail. Hours are Monday-Saturday 10-4, and Sunday 12-3. A grant from the Friends of the History Center helped cover the shipping costs. Admission to the "Buck...right on time" exhibit is free.

Sponsors of the Buck O'Neil celebration include Sarasota County, the Sarasota Reds, SNN News 6 and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

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