

RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 23, 2012 4:07 PM
To: 'Betsy.Ebeling [redacted]'
Subject: Re: Thought the following article would be interest...

Yes, it was, particularly on the North side!

Love the article and will share w the boys.



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From: Ebeling, Betsy [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, May 17, 2012 11:10 AM
To: H
Cc: Reines, Philippe I <reinesp@state.gov>
Subject: RE: Thought the following article would be interest...

And also, 1947 was a pretty important year in Chicago....

From: Ebeling, Betsy
Sent: Thursday, May 17, 2012 10:01 AM
To: 'H'
Cc: 'Reines, Philippe I'
Subject: Thought the following article would be interest...

To both of you as Cub fans and as a Chicagoan, HRC. And you might see the game on Saturday, correct? I love the Royko connection.

When Jackie Robinson Came To Wrigley

by Jonathan Eig, Editor-in-Chief May 17, 2012

Bud Selig, the future commissioner of baseball was there. He and his neighborhood pal Herb Kohl, a future U.S. Senator, took the train from Milwaukee to Chicago to see the Cubs play the Brooklyn Dodgers. Both boys were 12 years old.

Mike Royko, age 14, who would go on to fame as a newspaper columnist, was at the ballpark that day, too.

So was Lennie Merullo, age 30. He was the starting shortstop for the Cubs.

Later, many Chicagoans who cared about sports and history would say they were there, even if they weren't. Memory, like a knuckleball, can play tricks on you.

This much is fact: The date was May 18, 1947, 65 years ago this week, and 46,572 people crammed Wrigley Field. To this day, there has never been a bigger paid audience for a baseball game at the Friendly Confines.

Jackie Robinson was playing his first game in Chicago. Never before in the game's modern era had a black man stepped on a Chicago field to play big-league ball. In addition to the standing-room crowd in the ballpark, another 20,000 crowded outside, wishing for a way in.

Yet it was not the number of fans that startled onlookers that day. It was the color of so many of them. No one in the press box estimated what percentage of the crowd was black, but it was high—far higher than usual.

“The whites tried to look as if nothing unusual was happening,” Royko wrote years after the event, “while the blacks tried to look casual and dignified. So everybody looked slightly ill at ease.”

Slightly?

In 1947, black and white Chicagoans never mixed. Not like this.

If you were a white Chicagoan in 1947 and you interacted with a black man, it was probably to give him your drink order, or to tell him you wanted the pitching wedge, not the putter. You didn't rub elbows with him at the ballpark. You didn't sit politely while black men and boys seated around you cheered like wild for the Dodgers to beat your beloved Cubs.

Jackie Robinson changed all that. This was a year before the military integrated, seven years before Brown v. Board of Education, and eight years before Rosa Parks refused to step to the rear of a Montgomery bus. Jackie Robinson wasn't nudging people out of their comfort zones; he was shoving them with both hands. Some of his own teammates initially refused to take the field with him, and among the Cubs, too, there was talk of a boycott.

Fay Young, writing in the Chicago Defender, reminded black fans that they were on trial as much as Robinson. He urged them to behave. “The telephone booths are not men's wash rooms,” he wrote. “The sun and liquor, even if you drink it before you head north, won't mix.... The Negro fans can do more to get Jackie Robinson out of the major leagues than all the disgruntled players alive.”

Bud Selig told me he had never seen so many black people in one place. He sat in the upper deck feeling for the first time in his life like a minority. It was thrilling, he said. A completely new experience.

Royko told the story, perhaps apocryphal, of catching a foul ball off Robinson's bat and selling it to a black man for \$10. “When I left the ball park, with that much money in my pocket,” he wrote, “I was sure that Jackie Robinson wasn't bad for the game.”

Lennie Merullo, the shortstop, now 95 years old and living in Reading, Mass., also noticed how Robinson changed everything. The year prior, in Brooklyn, Merullo had engaged in a brawl on the field with Dodgers Dixie Walker, Eddie Stanky, and Pee Wee Reese. Now, he worried that if the fight were renewed, it would become a racial powder keg.

“It was very tense,” he told me last week. “We were spoken to before the ballgame and told don't do anything that could incite a riot. You had South Side against North Side. I was aware. I didn't want to be the instigator.”

There would be no riots that day. The Dodgers won, 4-2. When the game ended, black Chicago fans climbed on the roof of the Dodgers' team bus and leaned into its windows, trying to steal one more look at Robinson.

It didn't matter that their hero had gone 0-for-4. They had all the reason in the world to celebrate.

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Please note; the new IDHR website: www.illinois.gov/dhr

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