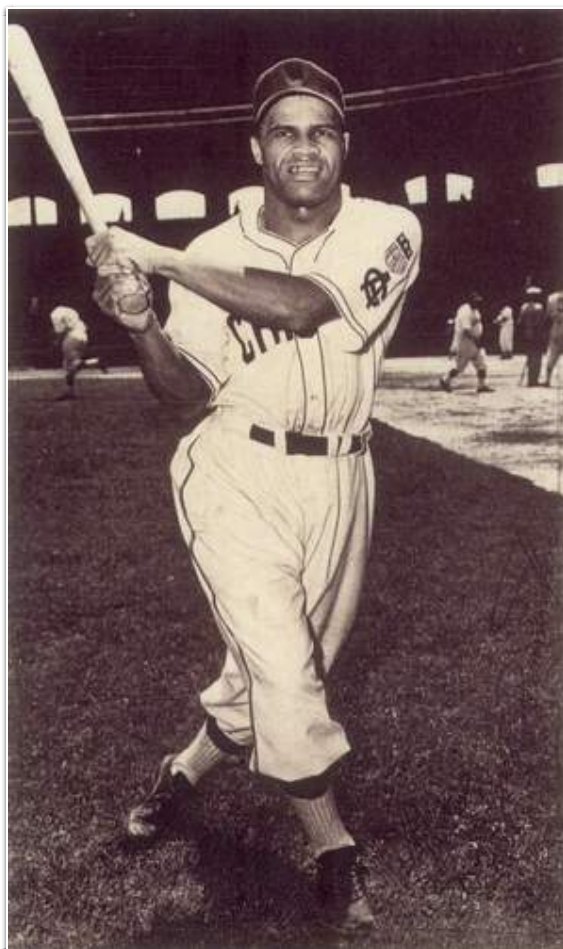


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Baseball legend Art Pennington dead at 93

Former Negro League found a home in Cedar Rapids



Art 'Superman' Pennington of Cedar Rapids was an outfielder for the Chicago American Giants from 1940 to 1946 in the Negro Baseball League.

Jan 5, 2017 at 11:41 am | [Print View](#)

Jeff Johnson

CEDAR RAPIDS — There's that old baseball one-liner that whenever a powerful hitter comes to the plate, you

*The Gazette*[More stories from Jeff](#)

make sure and get your married men off the infield. You've got to protect them.

Those who played against Art Pennington say it was the same thing with the man known as "Superman."

"If you were playing third base, you always stepped back about three or four feet," said Pinky Primrose. "I don't know how big of a bat he used. It was huge."

Primrose, the hall of fame former coach at Cedar Rapids Washington and a longtime member of the board of directors of the Cedar Rapids Kernels, was an opponent of Pennington's in the local amateur M&J League in the 1960s. This came after Superman had retired from professional baseball.

The former Negro Baseball League star died Wednesday night at the age of 93. He'd made Cedar Rapids his home since playing minor league ball here in 1953 and 1954.

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@JROgden Really saddened to hear the news of Mr. Pennington's passing. He was a great player & an even better person. He'll be missed!

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"He was good," Primrose said. "Could have played in the major leagues. No doubt."

But he never got that chance.

A Memphis, Tenn., native, Pennington signed with the Negro League's Chicago American Giants in 1942 at the age of 17, playing with the likes of Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Roy Campanella. He was a three-time league all-star.

Robinson broke baseball's color barrier in 1947, but the number of black players in the majors increased only incrementally. Pennington — who also played professionally in Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba and the Dominican Republic — retired in 1959, then worked for 25 years at Collins Radio in Cedar Rapids in part because of his baseball prowess.

The M&J was serious business.

"Like so many other famous and little known Civil Rights legends, Mr. Pennington (paved) the

way to brighter tomorrows,” his website says. “He truly is a Civil Rights legend and an American giant.”

Superman was a popular figure in town until his death, running for several political offices, according to his website. He opened the Home Run Club in 1963, Cedar Rapids’ first fully integrated restaurant.

He was honored publicly numerous times at Kernels games, regularly during baseball’s Jackie Robinson Day in mid-April.

“The one thing that always stuck out with me about Art was wondering what would have happened with him baseball wise if it had been 40 years later,” said former longtime Kernels General Manager Jack Roeder. “The one thing he always had was charisma. He walked into a room, and he took command.”

Pennington’s Southeast side home and all of his possessions were ruined by a major flood in 2008, with the home eventually rebuilt thanks in part to donations from friends and supporters. Superman was issued his own Negro League baseball card by The Topps Company in 2009 and given money for autographing some of them.

Fans sent unsigned cards to him, asking for them to be autographed and including money to help him out in a time of need.

“It’s been really nice of the public,” Pennington said in an August 2009 story in The Gazette. “They’ve really supported me since this happened ... They’ve helped me get back into my house.”

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