

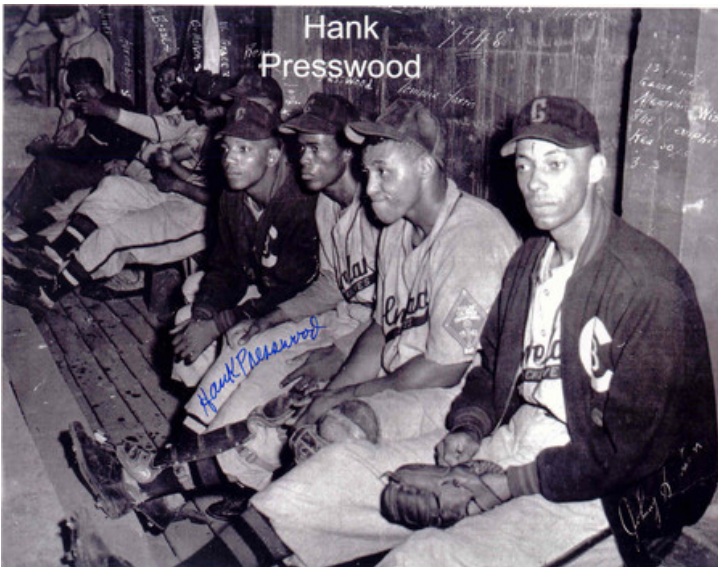
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Hank Presswood, Negro League player with Cleveland and Kansas City, dies at 93

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Hank Presswood signed this 1948 photo playing as a member of the Cleveland Buckeyes

Author's Collection

Another ballplayer has taken his stories of the playing in the segregated [Negro Leagues](#) to the grave. On Monday, I was informed by Bob Kendrick, Director of the Negro Leagues

Baseball Museum that **Hank Presswood**, a former shortstop in the Negro Leagues with the Cleveland Buckeyes and the Kansas City Monarchs, **passed away on December 27, 2014 in Chicago at the age of 93.**

Born October 7, 1921 in Electric Mills, Mississippi, Presswood cut his teeth playing for sandlot clubs in his hometown. Content with playing locally, it wasn't until after he returned from serving in the Army during World War II that the professional leagues snatched him up ... literally.

"Willie Grace went to the Buckeyes and he was the one who told them about me," Presswood said to me during a 2010 phone interview. "He was from Laurel, Mississippi. One day I was working and who was at my job, Grace and the foreman! He asked me about going, and I wanted to go you know. ... I said, 'What in the world are you doing here, I thought you were with the Buckeyes?' He said, 'I am with the Buckeyes, but I told them about you. I came after you.' I was really surprised. I accepted and went on up there."

Presswood left for Cleveland in 1948 and immediately he was installed as their shortstop, playing alongside such greats as Sam Jethroe and Sam "Toothpick" Jones. It was a big step for a first-year player to crack the lineup of the defending champs of the Negro American League.

"Cleveland had won the championship the year before I came in there, but I was their shortstop!" he said. "I ain't braggin', I could play any position,

but my regular position was shortstop.”

At 27, Presswood was at the peak of his career physically. He said that his gifts on the field helped carry him through the game as he learned his way around the league.

“At that time I was fast,” he said. “I could do what I wanted to do because I was fast. I had a good throwing arm too. I used to play deep shortstop. As I learned the hitters, I might move over towards second or third, or come in; it depended on the hitter. As you learn the fundamentals of how to play your position, it helps out. Sometimes you see different hitters which way they hit the ball.”

Presswood played with Buckeyes until they folded in 1950. He was picked up by the Kansas City Monarchs, who were coached by the legendary Buck O’Neil. The skipper gave him the nickname of “Baby,” which stuck with him well after his career was over.

"I played two years with the Monarchs," he said. "That's when I got my nickname. Buck O'Neil called me 'Baby'. Everyone calls me now Hank 'Baby' Presswood, and I'm two years younger than Santa Claus!"

Presswood held the late ambassador of the Negro Leagues with the highest esteem. O’Neil was his mentor both on and off the field.

"He was the greatest," he said. "He was a good ballplayer himself. He was something else. When he passed, that really hurt because he was like a

father to me."

He remained active by playing fast-pitch softball after stepping away from the Monarchs in 1952. His experience as a professional ballplayer in the Negro Leagues made him a standout on the softball diamond.

"I went to the Steel Mills and played fast pitch softball," he said. "I have trophies on top of trophies. They couldn't fool me being an old ballplayer."

The old ballplayer received his due recognition as an octogenarian, when in 2008, he was "drafted" by the Chicago White Sox in an honorary Negro Leagues draft. Two years later in 2010, Topps honored him with a baseball card in their Allen and Ginter set. At the age of 88, he remarked about finally having a "rookie" card.

"I was really grateful for it," he said. "It was really nice man. They even have when I played softball on that card. They had everything about my ball playing."

The set, which is popular with collectors, kept Presswood busy answering his mail. He enjoyed obliging the fans.

"I get a pile of letters every day," he said. "Sometimes I can get them right in the mail, other days, it takes a day or so. I'm enjoying it. I'm proud that people are interested."

The increased popularity of the Negro Leagues allowed Presswood to experience the adulation of the younger generation. He just returned from

an appearance at a local high school when we caught up on the phone.

"Seeing the kids is the best thing that ever happened," he said. "I feel really proud when we talk to the kids. It's really exciting. They get a big bang out of us being there. We're gone all the time, at different places and ball games."

Well removed from his playing days, Presswood remained passionate about the game that consumed him. Once baseball season came around, Presswood was back to doing what he loved, watching baseball.

"I'll tell you what," he said, "I just love the game. When the Cubs and the White Sox are playing, I don't care what I have to do, I finish what I have to do, get my seat and watch the game."

Funeral services will be held Saturday January 3, 2015 at True Believers Baptist Church, 7801 S. Walcott, Chicago, Illinois, 60620.



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