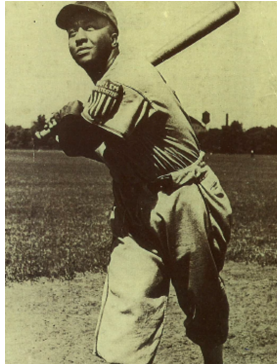




Herb Simpson, pioneering black baseball player & La. native, dies at 94

Dominic Massa / WWL-TV 5:19 p.m. CST January 9, 2015



(Photo: New Orleans Zephyrs)

Herb "Briefcase" Simpson, a New Orleans native who was one of the last living links to the Negro Baseball Leagues from before integration of the sport in the late 1940s, died Wednesday. He was 94.

Simpson, a first baseman and outfielder, played for such top African-American teams as the Chicago American Giants and the 1946 Seattle Steelheads, of which he was the last surviving member. The team was Seattle's entry in the West Coast Negro Baseball League, which was formed in 1945 to duplicate the success of other African-American leagues.

Simpson was born in Hahnville and grew up in Algiers, where his family moved when he was a baby. He grew up playing sandlot ball at playgrounds on the West Bank. His baseball career was put on hold as he was drafted into the military during World War II. He served four years in the service, stationed in Germany.

Later, Simpson became the first black player to integrate two different minor-league circuits, starring for teams in Spokane, Wash., and Albuquerque, N.M., where he married his childhood sweetheart at home plate before a game.

His career also included a stop in Birmingham where he played for the Black Barons. In 1947, he joined the Harlem Globetrotters baseball team. He also played for the Chicago American Giants and with semi-pro teams in New Orleans.

Local writer Ryan Whirty, who has studied and chronicled the history of the Negro League, called Simpson a key figure in the integration of organized minor league baseball on the West Coast in the mid-20th century.

"Herb played for the love of the game, and he enjoyed every minute of it, just like he enjoyed every minute of his life," Whirty recalled. "He wasn't just a great baseball player and a sports trailblazer, but he was also a gracious, humble man who served his community and became a local ambassador for the fading memories of the Negro Leagues."

After the league collapsed, Simpson toured with an all-star barnstorming aggregation overseen by sports promotion magnate Abe Saperstein, who had co-founded the West Coast Negro Baseball league and also owned the Steelheads and Globetrotters. In his Negro League days, Simpson faced Baseball Hall of Famer Satchel Paige and got two hits, prompting the gregarious legend to buy Simpson a Coke in congratulations.



After his baseball career, Simpson returned to New Orleans and lived at the same modest house in Algiers for more than 60 years while working as a maintenance superintendent for the New Orleans Public Schools.

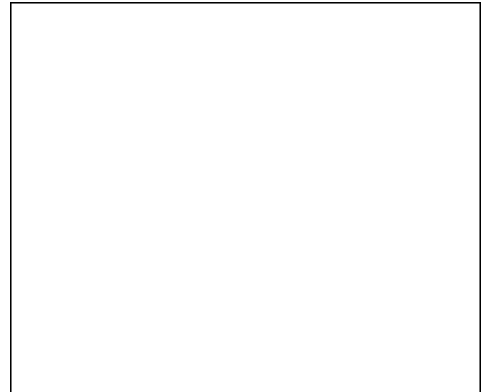
Recently, he had become something of a spokesman for the long-faded Negro Leagues. He was honored two years in a row by the Seattle Mariners on their African-American Heritage Day. The Mariners named him, Ken Griffey Jr. and Alvin Davis as the greatest baseball players in Seattle history.

"We're feeling very sad here in Seattle, but also happy to have had the chance to meet him and get to know him over the last couple of years. He was an important part of Seattle baseball history and a very dear man," Mariners spokeswoman Rebecca Hale said, adding that the team would have a moment of silence for Simpson on opening day in April.

Herb Simpson(Photo:
Baseballinwartime.com)

Funeral services will be held Jan. 15 in New Orleans, according to the Mariners.

Read or Share this story: <http://www.wwltv.com/story/sports/2015/01/09/herb-simpson-pioneering-black-baseball-player--no-native-dies-at-94/21512381/>



MORE STORIES



**Saints defensive coordinator
Rob Ryan to return, per source**

[\(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/07/new-orleans-saints-rob-ryan-to-return-as-defensive-coordinator/21386051/\)](http://www.wwltv.com/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/07/new-orleans-saints-rob-ryan-to-return-as-defensive-coordinator/21386051/)
[\(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/07/new-orleans-saints-rob-ryan-to-return-as-defensive-coordinator/21386051/\)](http://www.wwltv.com/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/07/new-orleans-saints-rob-ryan-to-return-as-defensive-coordinator/21386051/)

Jan. 7, 2015, 10:13 a.m.



**Loomis mum on Rob Ryan's
status; though staff changes
likely, sources say**

[\(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/new-orleans-saints-gm-mickey-loomis-mum-on-rob-ryans-status/21360413/\)](http://www.wwltv.com/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/new-orleans-saints-gm-mickey-loomis-mum-on-rob-ryans-status/21360413/)
[\(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/new-orleans-saints-gm-mickey-loomis-mum-on-rob-ryans-status/21360413/\)](http://www.wwltv.com/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/new-orleans-saints-gm-mickey-loomis-mum-on-rob-ryans-status/21360413/)

Jan. 6, 2015, 6:08 p.m.

Junior Galette's attorney explains incident that



led to arrest

(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/junior-galette-attorney-statement-says-video-witnesses-to-exonerate/21352059/)
(/story/sports/nfl/saints/2015/01/06/junior-galette-attorney-statement-says-video-witnesses-to-exonerate/21352059/)

Jan. 6, 2015, 3:42 p.m.

Representative
19.9% APR
Variable

Realise
the
potential

AMERICAN
EXPRESS

And up to 1.25%
cashback thereafter.*

The Platinum
Cashback
Everyday
Credit Card

Apply

*Terms apply

RAISING HOUSES ...
RAISING STANDARDS

Foundation Repair Servicing Louisiana

REQUEST
YOUR SURVEY
& ESTIMATE!