

Negro Leaguer Herb Simpson passes away

Former Seattle Steelhead played 10 seasons of baseball after serving in World War II



By Greg Johns / MLB.com | [@gregjohnsmlb](https://twitter.com/gregjohnsmlb)
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SEATTLE -- Herb Simpson, the last known surviving member of the Seattle Steelheads of the West Coast Negro Baseball League, died Wednesday in New Orleans.

Simpson, 94, was a guest of the Mariners and threw out the ceremonial first pitch at their annual African American Heritage Day the past two seasons at Safeco Field.

Simpson died of natural causes at a New Orleans hospital, surrounded by family,

according to his niece, Lisa Broussard.

Broussard said her uncle was thrilled by his trips to Seattle the last two years to meet with the Mariners and be honored as part of Seattle's sports background.

"He was so excited that he was finally being recognized for his contribution to baseball," Broussard said. "He really looked forward to those trips. He loved the fact he could share his history with people. It was just overwhelming for him. He loved it. He really did. He came back with pictures and stories and we all sat around listening and hanging on every word."

Simpson served in the Army during World War II, then came to Seattle in 1946 to play for the Steelheads in the fledgling West Coast Negro League, which was formed by Harlem Globetrotters owner Abe Saperstein and Olympic track hero Jesse Owens.

Saperstein owned the Steelheads, but the league didn't last long. The Steelheads played two months at Sicks' Stadium in Seattle before folding in July of 1946. Simpson continued playing for Saperstein on a traveling Globetrotters baseball squad and later -- after Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier in 1947 -- Simpson played as a first baseman and outfielder in the Minor Leagues for the Spokane Indians and Albuquerque Dukes.

Simpson also played for the Birmingham Black Barons and Chicago American Giants, as well as some semi-pro ball in New Orleans.

After 10 years playing baseball, Simpson returned home to New Orleans and took a job as a maintenance superintendent of the New Orleans Public Schools, living in the same house for the final 60 years of his life.

Simpson was inducted last year into the Greater New Orleans Professional Baseball Hall of Fame.

Simpson was preceded in death by his wife, Sophie Harris, whom he married on the baseball diamond prior to a game in Albuquerque during his playing days, as well as sisters Mae Favorite and Isabelle Foucher and brothers Paul Simpson and Horace Simpson. He is survived by Broussard and two other nieces, Claudette S. Glapion and Jacqueline S. Antoine.

Services will be held Thursday at the First Free Mission Baptist Church in New Orleans.

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