

= Pancho Coimbre =

Francisco " Pancho " Coimbre Atilas ( 29 January 1909 ? 4 November 1989 ) , more commonly known as Pancho Coimbre , was a Puerto Rican professional baseball player . He was born in the municipality of Coamo and moved to Ponce early in his life . It was in Ponce where he would begin to actively participate in sports , both in sprinting and baseball . Coimbre played thirteen seasons in the Puerto Rican Professional Baseball League ( LBPPR ) , with the Leones de Ponce . During this period the team won five league championships . He finished his career with an average of .337 , and had an average of 2 @. @ 2 strikeouts per season , this included four consecutive seasons from 1939 to 1942 , without any strikeouts . Coimbre also won two LBPPR batting titles and the league 's Most Valuable Player Award in 1943 .

Coimbre traveled to New York City , after completing his first professional season in Puerto Rico , where he joined the Porto Rico Stars baseball team of the Negro Leagues . He was contracted by the New York Cubans , while playing with the Porto Rico Stars . He joined the NY Cubans and played several seasons for them . Coimbre 's batting average remained over the .300 mark , including two seasons where he batted over .400 . While playing in the Negro leagues he was selected to play in the league 's East ? West All @-@ Star games twice , where he played with several players who in the future would be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum . He also played with teams established in Colombia , Venezuela , the Dominican Republic and Mexico . Following his retirement Coimbre worked as a coach and manager of teams in both the professional and amateur leagues of Puerto Rico . Coimbre , who was eighty years old , died because he was unable to escape the flames of a burning building in which he lived .

= = Early years = =

Francisco Coimbre was born in Coamo , Puerto Rico , to Guillermo Coimbre and Zoila Atilas . Upon his birth , he was inscribed as a resident of Arroyo in his birth certificate , following a common practice at the time . In 1922 , he moved to Ponce along his mother , in order to live closer to his sister , Angela Coimbre . There he began playing baseball under the training and supervision of Miguel Caratini and Antonio Gordan , two hall of famers in the local league .

His first accomplishments in sports where in track and field , where he competed in the 50 @-@ yard dash , eventually developing his skills in other aspects of the sport . He continued practicing this sport while attending high school . Later he was transferred to another educational institution in Caguas , Puerto Rico , but when he tried to participate in an athletic competition he was denied permission because he was classified in a different division on the records of Puerto Rico 's Instruction Department .

This event led to a court case which marked the first time in Puerto Rico that a court hearing was scheduled for a case involving sports . He subsequently transferred to Ponce High School , where the Instruction Department tried to have him removed of the athleticism team based on allegations that he had received payment as a student athlete . Judge Roberto Tood Jr. determined that the evidence against Coimbre was insufficient during the hearing and the case was dropped .

= = Baseball career = =

In high school , Coimbre played in a school league in the positions of pitcher and second baseman . His incursion in organized baseball came about when he was recommended by a member of the Leones de Ponce , to the team officials . The Leones de Ponce was the local team of the Puerto Rican amateur league who was to play in a series against the San Juan Athletics . During that season the team needed additional players and he was selected by the team 's owner , Pipo Maldonado . He debuted in a game that took place in Ponce , where he was given the position of right fielder and he had four hits in five at bats . He continued in the team and in 1928 participated in a championship series between his team and the team of Guayama , where Ponce won on six games . In the last game of this series Coimbre pitched and won with a final score of 5 ? 3 , in a

game where the team almost lost following an error .

Coimbre 's first performance outside Puerto Rico was in the Dominican Republic , where he played with a team named Sandino in Santiago de los Caballeros in 1927 . He was accompanied by several Puerto Rican players during this stay . In 1929 , he played for the " Magallanes " a team in Venezuela where he played as a pitcher and outfielder . Four of his teammates , who now had homes in Caracas , had played with him in the Puerto Rican league . After having a solid performance in the 1930 season of the amateur league , he was recruited by the Tigres del Licey team to play in the Dominican Republic , which was coached by Charles Dore . Following that season , he continued alternating between both leagues , playing with Santo Domingo in 1931 .

After the Puerto Rican league season came to an end in 1932 , Coimbre went to work as a security guard in a penal institution and only played with a semi @-@ professional team . Shortly after , he was offered a contract to play in La Guaira , with a team called Santa Marta . The season concluded with Buchipluma , a second team owned by Santa Marta 's proprietor winning the league 's championship . Following his participation with Santa Marta , he continued playing , both in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic . While playing with Licey , the team developed a rivalry with El Escogido , which gave Coimbre an opportunity to establish relationships with several players , from both countries . During this period the team continued to be coached by Dore , and included several known Dominican players . The team would win the league 's championship once , but Coimbre decided not to assist the ceremony where the trophy was awarded choosing to stay in his hotel room instead . Dore took the cup to Coimbre so that he could have it in his possession some days , but he rejected this and suggested that it be filled with money for a donation .

In 1935 , he moved to Maracaibo where he played for Pastora , in Zulia 's Stadium . The team reached the league 's final series but lost to Magallanes . Prior to this series , the team had to travel to Caimbas , an industrial city where the games where scheduled . The usual way of traveling there was by boat , but following Coimbre 's advice the team was transported there by airplane . After the season was over he moved to La Victoria , Aragua , where one of his friends resided in a hacienda . There he played in a series that served to determine what the final roster of Concordia , a team that was going to travel to Puerto Rico that year , would be . Coimbre participated in the series , but choose to play with Ponce instead of Concordia . In 1937 , he returned to the Dominican Republic and his team won the league 's championship in what he described as the " most powerful team in his memory " .

= = = Formation of the LBPPR and participation in Negro league baseball = = =

Later that year , when he returned to Puerto Rico , Coimbre discovered that the Liga de Béisbol Profesional de Puerto Rico ( LBPPR ) was being organized . When the league was organized they elected Teófilo Maldonado , a press writer , as their president . Coimbre joined the Ponce @-@ Kofresí team , that represented Ponce . The team was coached by Isidro Fabr   and owned by Juan Luis Boscio and the team 's roster included several players that were known by the local fanbase , After the season 's conclusion , Coimbre traveled to New York for the first time in his life , after being invited by a close friend . Coimbre 's original intention was to visit his sister instead , with whom he lived while in the city . In New York , he met Santiago Bartolomei who was the owner of a team named Puerto Rico Stars ( also known as " Puerto Rican Stars " ) . Bartolomei visited Coimbre along a group of players and offered him a contract to play with the team . He accepted and joined the team that included players from Puerto Rico and Cuba .

While he played for the Porto Rico Stars , Alejandro Pomp  z called him and made him an offer to play with the New York Cubans , which at the time he owned . Pomp  z became interested in Coimbre after hearing several reviews of his work , but he was skeptical of these claims and therefore he was hesitant to contract him at first and didn 't do so until a group of players recommended him . He debuted in a game against a team named Buschwick , in a game that took place in Brooklyn , New York . In his first two games with the team he connected four hits , three singles and a double . Following this performance Pomp  z informed him that he was going to stay with the team . After the season concluded he was instantly offered a second contract with the

Cubans , which by this time where playing in the National League of the Negro League . He also participated with Ponce during the 1940 ? 1941 season of the winter league and concluded the season with a batting average of .401 and no strikeouts . During his second season with the Cubans he had an average of .409 , and was included in the league 's All @-@ star Game for the first time in his career .

Following this , he returned to Puerto Rico and had an average of .372 with his team . This season marked the first time that Ponce won the LBPPR championship . The next season Coimbre won his first batting championship in the Puerto Rican Professional Baseball League , finishing with an average of .342 after he connected hits in 22 consecutive games . In 1943 , he had his best season in the Negro leagues in the United States , when he was selected to the East 's All @-@ Star team for a second occasion and had an average of .428 , the highest one in his career with the Cubans . That year Coimbre received a tribute in the Yankee Stadium , where hundreds of Puerto Ricans reunited and awarded him a scroll and a ring recognizing his performance . That same year , he led the LBPPR in runs batted in , scoring 27 RBIs . He was subsequently invited to play in the Liga Mexicana de Beisbol ( Mexican Baseball League ) for the first time in his career , where he joined a team called Puebla . In the beginning , he had problems adapting to Mexico 's climate however , his average improved over the course of the season , eventually finishing as one of the league 's leaders . Coimbre experienced a similar pattern in the 1944 ? 1945 LBPPR season , where he was unable to score a hit in the first games , but finished winning his second batting championship .

Later that year , he joined a team named El Torices , which was organized in Barranquilla , Colombia . His participation with the team mostly consisted of managing work since he was unable to play due to a previous injury . During his time of inactivity , he worked in the Administration of Parks and Recreation , supervising softball games organized by local businessmen . Another injury product of an accidental pitch ended Coimbre 's participation in the 1946 LBPPR season , the injury 's treatment required hospitalization and recovery treatment . After recovering from the injury he traveled to New York in 1948 , originally with the intention of joining the Baltimore Elite Giants or the New York Black Yankees . During this visit he was contacted by Chebrook , a team of the Canadian league to play in the right field position .

Coimbre was not able to play in his full capacity because he still experienced problems with the injury on his knee . He ended the season batting an average of .316 , in a season where the team won the league 's championship . Coimbre spent the 1948 ? 1951 working as a designated hitter in the LBPPR . His final season in the league was in 1952 , when he was reassigned to play in the right field and was the fourth player in the batting lineup . His last game was against the Cangrejeros de Santurce , where a wild pitch re @-@ injured his knee , prompting Coimbre 's decision to retire as an active player .

= = Retirement , death and legacy = =

Following his retirement Coimbre began working as the coach of the Leones de Ponce , leading the team to two championships as well as extending his work to the Caribbean Series , a tournament where the champions of each Caribbean league participate . He received an invitation from the team owner of the Caguas @-@ Guayama team , which was established in Panama , to work as the team manager . Coimbre also worked in the administration of the Indios de Mayagüez , when the team traveled to play in Havana , Cuba . He subsequently decided to work as a coach in the amateur league , while continuing his participation with the professional Ponce team and began coaching a team that represented Juana Díaz , Puerto Rico .

Coimbre began promoting an idea that focused in the performance of the team , instead of the success of individual players . In his first day as an amateur coach , Coimbre summoned the players to a conference , where he noted that if all of them felt like " stars " and played for statistics their collective performance would suffer . He won a national championship with the team , but decided to leave it and work with the Cachorros de Ponce , where he won another championship . During this time he also worked as a talent scout with the Pittsburgh Pirates . As a scout he was directly responsible for the hiring of Roberto Clemente , when he urged the Pirates to draft him in the first

draw of the Major League Baseball Draft , even though Clemente was under a minor league contract with the Brooklyn Dodgers .

Coimbre died on November 4 , 1989 , when he was trapped in a house fire . The fire originated in the house 's kitchen while he was cooking , consuming the structures wooden frame . When Coimbre tried to escape he was unable to open the front door , because he had locked it with a padlock .

The City of Ponce honored the memory of Coímbre by naming its sports museum the " Museo Pancho Coímbre " . The museum , which contains a large collection of sports memorabilia , is located on the Calle ( Street ) Lolita Tizol . Also , in Ponce , he is honored at the Park for the Illustrious Ponce Citizens . Also the building housing the Secretaría de Recreación y Deportes on Avenida Las Américas in Ponce is named " Francisco ? Pancho " Coímbre " . The town of Coamo also honored Coimbre by naming a sports complex " Complejo Deportivo Francisco Pancho Coimbre Park " after him .