



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### Buck O'Neil (1911-2006)

John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil was born in Carrabelle, Florida, but made significant contributions nationwide by helping break down racial barriers throughout his lifetime. Additionally, his years spent playing baseball in Kansas City and speaking out as an ambassador of the game are why Buck will always be remembered as a local legend.



O'Neil began his baseball career in 1934 when he participated in several interracial semi-professional exhibition games. He was a teammate with other players who would go on to baseball greats, including Satchel Paige. In 1937, O'Neil's career took off when he signed with the Memphis Red Sox in the first year of the newly founded Negro American League.

The following year, O'Neil's contract was sold to the Kansas City Monarchs, where he would spend the remainder of his playing career. O'Neil played first base and became known for his stellar batting abilities. In both 1940 and 1946, he won batting titles hitting .345 and .350 respectively. He led the Monarchs to the Negro American League title in 1942 and was chosen to play in the East-West All-Star Classic during three seasons.

O'Neil served jointly as player and manager for the Kansas City Monarchs beginning in 1948. He continued to manage the Monarchs until 1955, leading the team to four league titles during his tenure. The following year, O'Neil was offered a position as a scout for the Chicago Cubs. Players nicknamed him Skip for his role as captain of the ship that led so many African-Americans to the Major Leagues. In 1962, O'Neil became the first African-American coach in Major League Baseball with the Cubs.



After 33 years with the Chicago Cubs, O'Neil returned home to Kansas City and began scouting for the Kansas City Royals in 1988. In 1994, O'Neil gained national recognition for his compelling narration of the Negro Leagues in Ken Burns' baseball documentary featured on PBS. O'Neil led efforts to create a Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, a dream which was realized when the museum opened in Kansas City in 1990.

O'Neil served as Chairman of the Negro Leagues Museum from the time of its inception on and as a member of the Baseball Hall of Fame Veterans Committee from 1981 to 2000. He also served on a special committee in 2006 that elected 17 Negro Leagues figures in the Hall of Fame. O'Neil fell just one vote shy of election himself but is considered a Hall of Famer in many ways by adoring Kansas Citians.



In the fall of 2006, O'Neil fell ill and was admitted to the hospital. On October 6, he passed away from heart failure and bone marrow cancer. O'Neil was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously on Dec. 7, 2006, for his contributions to society both on and off the baseball field.

