# In a time of segregation, the Eastern Shore had its own black baseball league

By BRIAN MUBOURNIE Staff Wilter

In the early 20th century, the Eastern Shore, like most of America, had baseball teams, both amateur and professional, popping up all over. There were town-bosed teams and barnstormers that traveled from town to town looking for an opponent.

The teams were of various degrees of talent and were members of countless different leagues with shifting territories and affiliation. One thing remained constant—blacks were not allowed on a white team. In a segregated country, the postime reflected its home. There were white teams and there were black teams. Rarely did they take the field against each other.

The dollowing is an excerpt of a story written by Dana Carn, published in The Record-Observer, Felb. 24, 1990;

After years of being shanned by white trams on the Eastern Shore, a new idea turned black hoseholl players into local heroes in a league of their own.

The Eastern Shore Negro-Baseball League was established in 1902 by J.O. Chapman, but blacks alreadyhad been playing on segregated baseball teares for docades, according to 80-year-old Leon Taylor.

"There was a boseball team in every hamlet, but there was no such thing as whites playing blacks, you wouldn't think of it," said Taylor, who managed the original Centreville Black Sox, which entered the beause in 1802.

And for Centreville as well as other Eastern Shore towns, baseball was the sport to play.

"That was all you had to do, there really was so football or basicetball then," Taylor said.

Taylor said "you couldn't buy a glass of water" on Wednesday afternoons when stores closed and everyone watched the Shore Orioles, Baltimore's farm team, play where Shore Lumber is located today on Glendale Ave.

But back lots, cornfields or "any clean place you can play baseball," were the baseball diamonds for many black tearns before the Negro lengue, Taylor said. Taylor, who returned to Centraville with a teacher's degree from Bowie State University, begun to manage the teemager's just as the league started.

"We had a very good team, but we put all the better playsers from Chestertown and Centreville on our team and the rest were scraps, so we played them first to build up our confidence," Taylor said. Chapenan traveled around the other towns getting other players. "We didn't call it recruiting then, but that's what we did."

The league's eight teams were from Centreville, Vienna, Easton, St. Michaels, Denton, Batts Nock (in Soversville), Cambridge and Bellevise.

The first Eastern Shore Negro Leaguse baseball game was played Easter Monday of 1932.

"Easter Monday was a big holiday for black folks," said Taylor, recalling big crowds, lemonade stands and homemade for cream of that day.

Randolph Hollis, a then 18year-old pitcher for the Elack Sots, said all their games drew big crowds.

That was a big time accound here, a black baseball league, said Hollis, a retired Acme employee.

Players were considered local heroes in the black commanite, he said.

"In those days there wasn't much moon, but there were a lot of black businesses in town, and if you were a buil player they would give you S2 if you got on first or second hase, and if you won a game, they would give you a party." Hollis

Win or lose, most games ended with a party "After the game was over everyone would flock down there to Theodore James' to dance," Hollis said.

"That was the only place for us to flock," quipped former manager Arthur Carter, 83.

"But the cosmical thing was that the boys would be dancing with their splor shows still on," laughed Hollis.

The teams played on Sundays and holidays until Labor Dup, Before the league it was illegal to play ball on Sundays, Carter said.

"We could play on Sundays but not until after church," Hollis said.

By then the teams played either on a lot where the American Legion Post 21 is located today or a baseball field where Kennard Annex has alove been half

The team needed new unitorms during the Depression, years, and the Centreville Black Sox didn't have any

"Those suits cost \$15, and we didn't have that kind of money then," Taylor said. A local man donated Shore Orioles baseball uniforms to the Black Sox.

Carter begun playing basetoil the name year baseball legend and Sodlerwelle native Jimmie Foxx started in the major leagues. But many of the local players could have made all kinds of mosen, Carter said.

Carter said the white teams wouldn't play the Negro League, except on one occusion.

"One time we had an allwhite team from Chester, Pacoron down. It was on the Fourth of July. They came into town and asked where the Black Sox headquarters were," Carter longhed.

"The sheriff told them they didn't want to play us, and they knew we were black, but they played us anyway."

"They are craits, chickens, beer, they had so much fun we had to drive them away," Carter loughed.

"We won the game though," Hollis said.

Hollis recognisered another game in which he made the winning save.

"We had Cambridge 4-3, in the last half of the ninth incolog, and this boy Cornish cracked the ball in centerfield and, to this day, how I ever caught the ball I'll never know," Hollin said, "All the players ma out and picked me up and carried me oil the field."

In 2007, little remains as evidence of the league. The baseball fields have disappeared under the plow or developed, and written records are very hard to find. The Eastern Shore Negro League exists primarily in the memory of an ever-dwindling list of players still living.

Like their white counterparts, the Negro leagues were organized by skill and geography. Many of the game's best

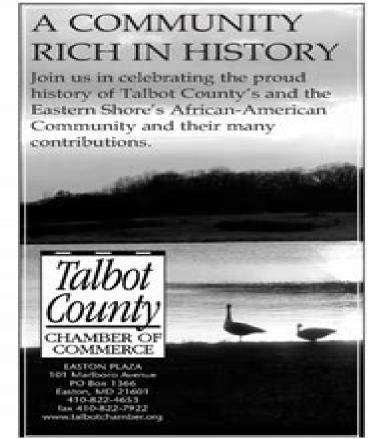
## ATHLETICS

players made their careers in these lengues. Leroy Robert 'Sanched' Paige, who in 1930 played for the Baltimore Black Son, was known as one of the best pitchers to ever take the mound. He played in both the Negro lengues and Major Lengue Baseball, playing his final game in 1968. In 1971, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Farse. He was the first Negro lengues player to have that honor.

Also in the Baseball Hall of Farpe is Hank Auron, who started his career in the Negroleagues before taking an offer from the Milwanisee Braves in 1964. Aaron went on to break Babe Buffi's career home run record, hitting his 755th and final in 1976. The record still stands today but will likely not for march looser.

Auron was the last Negro League player to hold a regular position in Major League

Note: Hank Aaron's major league home run record shood until just recently, when Barry Bonds, use of former major leager Bobby Bonds, hit number



# **Newspapers Of Marylands Eastern Shore**

**SA Dillow** 

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