



2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL  
NAAMANS  
CELEBRATES THE  
NEGRO LEAGUES  
MAY 13 – MAY 21, 2016

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Naamans Celebrates the Negro Leagues will be held from May 13 through May 21.

Like last year, the celebration features:

- Our Majors Division (ages 10 through 12) wearing replica jerseys commemorating seven Negro Leagues teams which, in the tradition of Major League Baseball (and as inspired by a Pee Wee Reese comment), will all bear the number “42”.
- Ten poster-size, museum-style exhibits about the Negro Leagues and its players on display at the complex and [continuously available on our website.](#)
- A showing of the Jackie Robinson movie *42* hosted by the Sigel JCC.

**In addition, on Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, Naamans is honored by the participation of:**

- **Maime “Peanut” Johnson**, the only woman of have pitched in the Negro Leagues (Indianapolis Clowns, 1953-1955), and subject of the children’s reader *A Strong Right Arm*, will throw out the first pitch of the 2:30pm game between her former team, the Indianapolis Clowns, and the Kansas City Monarchs. Maime will remain at the complex to enjoy the game, meet players, and sign books (which will be available for sale). Maime will also join us for that evenings’ showing of *42*, talk about her experiences, and sign books.
- **Sonny Hill**, member of the Philadelphia Sports Hall of Fame and WIP Sports Radio **host**, will bring his “living room” to Naamans for the afternoon and evening events. Well known as a basketball historian, Sonny is equally well versed in the Negro Leagues, and will share his knowledge with us prior to the showing of *42*.
- Prior and during the *42* showing, **The Judy Johnson Foundation**, commemorating Wilmington’s Hall of Famer Negro League player, will exhibit Negro Leagues memorabilia and sell memorabilia and books to support its continuing educational efforts.



## WHY NAAMANS CELEBRATES THE NEGRO LEAGUES

The character skills players acquire from their Naamans experiences become the League's most lasting and pervasive contributions to their development. Like all youth sports, baseball imparts the importance of effort, teamwork, perseverance, and preparation. Arguably more than any other sport, baseball also revels in its history, and when our players step on the field, they connect to this continuum. That historic connection offers unique opportunities for Naamans to coach character, and the Negro Leagues presents the most impactful of those opportunities.

Celebrating, rather than lamenting, the Negro Leagues perpetuates the effusive positivism of the remarkable Buck O'Neil, the long-time Negro League player and manager who would become the first black coach in Major League Baseball. We celebrate the Negro Leagues' joyous, aggressive, and improvisational style of play, and the skill, personalities, and legends of those that played it.

In *The Natural*, the protagonist, Roy Hobbs, expresses what in part motivates all great athletes: the dream of walking down the street and having people say "there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in this game." If Naamans families react to the names Oscar Charleston, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, and Wilmington's own Judy Johnson the way they react to Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Willie Mays, and Stan Musial, Naamans Celebrates the Negro Leagues will help create the legacy these players were denied by their some of their contemporaries.

Most importantly, a celebration of the Negro Leagues focuses on its absence. The Negro Leagues' greatest success was its demise due to integration. In celebrating the Negro Leagues, we introduce Naamans players to the stoic perseverance with which Jackie Robinson suffered injustice in order to end it, and Pee Wee Reese, who, with everything to lose but his sense of justice and humanity, crossed the infield to stand by, and perhaps embrace, a future lifelong friend. We also celebrate baseball fans collectively, who did not turn away from the game as it integrated, as Major League owners had feared, but instead embraced MLB all the more for the talent and joy the former Negro League players brought to the game.

Buck O'Neil advised: "don't feel sorry for the black baseball player. Feel sorry for the ones who didn't get to see them play." Naamans coaches and players are too young to have *seen* these players, but, the generous support of our sponsors provides the opportunity for our community to celebrate the players' legends, and in so doing assimilate some character lessons as well.

*Yet, when you look back, what people didn't realize, and still don't today, was that we [baseball] got the ball rolling on integration in the whole society. Remember, this was before Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka. When Branch Rickey signed Jackie [Robinson], Martin Luther King was a student at Morris College. We showed the way it had to be done, by just keeping on and being the best we could.*

*--Buck O'Neil*