

PRESERVATION SNAPSHOT

This monthly feature highlights recent and fascinating National Register listings and eligible properties, tax act projects, compliance review success stories, as well as outstanding local efforts in New Jersey's historic preservation.

Hinchliffe Stadium in The Silk City

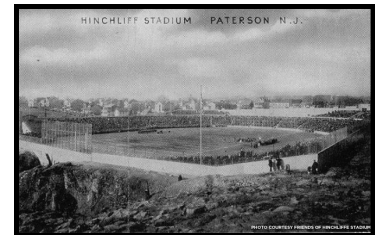
Paterson, NJ



Hinchliffe Stadium Entrance | Photo credit: Duncan Kendall

There stands a newly designated National Historic Landmark in Paterson, New Jersey, whose deteriorating appearance belies the remarkable talent and courage of its earlier inhabitants and what was accomplished within its walls.

Hinchliffe Stadium, the Art Deco, open-air sports arena was built during the Great Depression on a commanding bluff above the Passaic River. It overlooks the splendid Paterson Great Falls and has views of downtown ½ mile away. Its playing fields were intended for local football, baseball, and track & field events, although it has accommodated many other sports and performances.



Its most remarkable significance however, comes from hosting many of America's most distinguished Hall-of-Fame baseball players at a time when racial segregation in sports was the norm. As a result, African American ball players were forced to create their own professional teams and leagues, known as Negro League Baseball.

Hinchliffe Stadium played a major role in Negro League Baseball. It was the site of the Colored Championships of the Nation in 1933, and later served as a regular home field for the New York Black Yankees (sharing the honor with Yankee Stadium) for many seasons.

"It can be said to have launched the familiar, if twisted tradition of New York sports teams making their 'home' in New Jersey!" — Dr. Lawrence Hogan, author of Shades of Glory

THE NEGRO LEAGUES

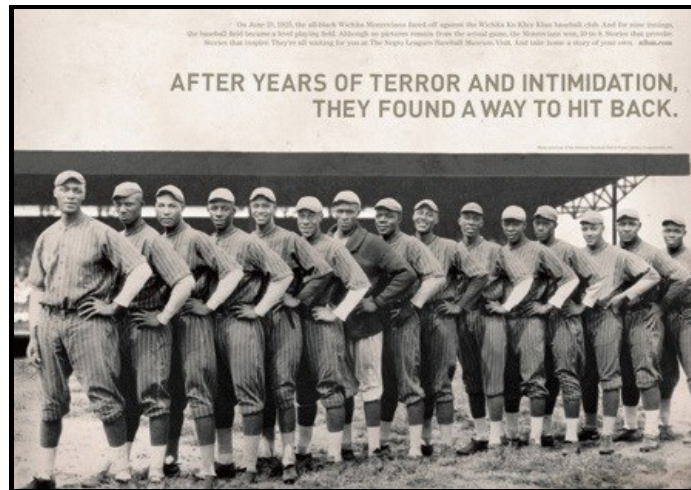
The Negro Leagues provided African Americans the first opportunity to participate in professional baseball in this country. Barred from even trying out with the major league teams simply because of the color of the players' skin, black businessmen created independent, barnstorming black teams in the late 1800s. By the 1920s, there were three black leagues and scores of teams.

Building their own community against the backdrop of segregation, "it created a sense of normalcy, a sense of acceptance and empowerment, a sense of belonging to America," wrote Raymond Doswell of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.

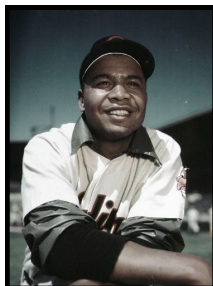


"It was in the Negro Leagues – where conditions were often second-rate but the play was anything but – that their long journey began."

– Eric Wills, "Preservation Magazine" Nov/Dec 2009



Poster courtesy of Negro League Baseball Museum



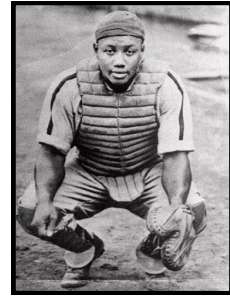
Larry Doby

HINCHLIFFE PLAYERS

The most significant player associated with Hinchliffe Stadium is hometown champion, Larry Doby – the first black player to play in the American League, and only the second black baseball player (after Jackie Robinson) to break the major league color barrier when he was signed by the Cleveland Indians in 1947. Doby (1923-2003), who became known as the "Silk City Slugger" (Paterson's nickname was the Silk City of America), attended Eastside High School, where he lettered in football, track, basketball and baseball. He led Eastside to the City of Paterson baseball title in 1941 & 1942.

Hinchliffe highlights:

- With its opening, it was the regular home field of the New York Black Yankees team from 1933-45 (with the exception of 1938).
- Pittsburgh Crawfords played on July 28, 1934 with future Hall of Famers Josh Gibson, Judy Johnson, James “Cool Papa” Bell and Oscar Charleston.
- “Satchel” Paige appeared on the rosters here when several of his teams played in the 1930s & 40s – the Pittsburgh Crawfords (1933); Kansas City Monarchs; with a team of invitational All-Stars; and with the New York Black Yankees.
- Jackie Robinson played here in 1945 as a member of the visiting Kansas City Monarchs team, two years before he would break the color barrier in major league baseball in 1947.
- Hall-of-Famer, Monte Irvin from nearby Orange, NJ launched his career here in 1937 when he tried out and made the team of the Newark Eagles. He would later play major league ball for the New York Giants and Chicago Cubs.



Josh Gibson
Photo: AP

“Monte Irvin stepped into the batter's box at Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson, N.J., took measure of the stately new ballpark, and began depositing baseball after baseball over the outfield wall, some of his prodigious blasts traveling more than 400 feet.

It was the spring of 1937, and Irvin, a 17-year-old rising star from the nearby city of Orange with a .666 high school batting average, was at Hinchliffe trying out for a professional baseball team. Because Irvin was African American, and because of the color barrier in the major leagues, the team was not the New York Yankees or the Brooklyn Dodgers but a Negro League ball club called the Newark Eagles.

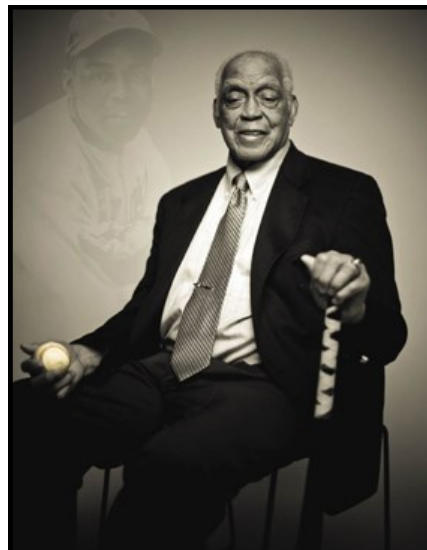
The sweet sound of home run after home run—crack, crack, crack—attracted the attention of Josh Gibson and Buck Leonard, two Negro League players preparing for a game at Hinchliffe later that day. Irvin was introduced to the two stars, whose grace, athleticism, and dapper uniforms and dress had inspired him. Indeed, Gibson had been called The Black Babe Ruth and Leonard The Black Lou Gehrig (though some wondered if Gehrig should have been dubbed The White Buck Leonard). And on this day, Irvin learned he would play alongside his two idols. He had made the Eagles.”
— Eric Wills, “Preservation Magazine” Nov/Dec 2009



Monte Irvin

Above photo: [baseballhistorydaily](#)

Right photo: [bucknell.edu](#)



THE STADIUM'S BEGINNING



Hinchliffe Stadium 1932 | Photo: Paterson Museum

The Depression-era stadium was built in 1932 with federal New Deal programs' assistance, and planned by the most successful school and stadium architect in the region – John Shaw, of Fanning & Shaw. Its landscape setting was designed by Olmsted Brothers. The Stadium's Moderne style is comprised of white concrete with red terra cotta roof tiles, with five gabled towers that used to fly flags. It is decorated with tiles, and bronze reliefs by Paterson sculptor, Gaetano Federici. The stadium has a seating capacity of 11,000.

The running track and baseball diamond share space on the field. Other sports, like football, soccer and boxing required the temporary revamping of the field.

“Hinchliffe City Stadium” was dedicated in 1932 honoring the mayor under whose direction it was built — John V. Hinchliffe and his uncle, the earlier, well-respected Paterson Mayor John Hinchliffe.



*Hinchliffe Stadium Ticket Window Tile
Photo: Robert Sciarrino*

Dr. Lawrence Hogan, author of *Shades of Glory*, summed it up nicely when he wrote, “Imagine a local high school athlete playing on the same field where Monte Irvin got his start, where Satchel Paige mowed down batters. That’s pretty special. You’re not going to be able to get out on the mound in Yankee Stadium. This ballpark; it’s part of the community.”



Hinchliffe Construction 1931 | Photo: NJ State Archives

OTHER SPORTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Hinchliffe Stadium was always a popular community gathering spot. When built, the mayor boasted it stood within 15 minutes' walk for 70% of the population in Paterson. It was host to a wide variety of sporting and entertainment events throughout the 20th century.



Hinchliffe Ticket Windows | Photo: Tariq Zehawi

Aside from track & field, and football (the Paterson Panthers played there from 1933-50), boxing was also a major spectator draw, with championship bouts enabling careers in world-class events. Celebrities and stars of screen and radio came to the matches to see, and be seen.

Midget car racing was also an early arrival at Hinchliffe from the 1930s until 1951. The auto racing proved very lucrative, at times drawing crowds exceeding 10,000 people.

Entertainment was popular with the audiences here. Performers with star-studded events knew the crowds Hinchliffe could draw, sometimes exceeding capacity. Many stars performed here often:

- Abbott and Costello (1941, 1944, 1947)
- Dick Jurgens (1942)
- Ted Huesing (1943) to a crowd of 5000
- Henny Youngman
- The Andrew Sisters (1947) sang to 7000
- Duke Ellington
- Sly and the Family Stone
- Tito Puente



*Midget Auto Racing 1930s
Photo: Paterson Museum*

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

Out of a grand total of 188 venues that hosted professional black baseball, Hinchliffe is one of only 12 surviving parks in the U.S. classified with significant play hosting Negro League games, that retain their physical integrity.

There is no doubt that Hinchliffe Stadium is in dire need of restoration after years of neglect and vandalism. Honored with its recent, well-deserved designation as a National Historic Landmark, and its incorporation into the adjacent National Park site of Paterson Great Falls, there are national, state and local leaders working diligently to provide a new, economic life for the “municipal bowl.”



*Hinchliffe Stadium
Photo: Connolly & Hickey*



Hinchliffe Stadium National Historic Landmark Dedication 2013; National Park Superintendent Darren Boch & Paterson Mayor Jeffrey Jones | Photo: Robert Sciarrino

Future uses under consideration include hosting of school sporting events, a possible minor league baseball team, public events and concerts, and/or the site for the New Jersey Hall of Fame.

Restoration efforts are underway. Phase One will focus on the stadium’s iconic entrance and sections of seating. Paterson’s current mayor, Jose Torres has vowed to see the stadium restored by the end of his term in 2018. A comprehensive market analysis and feasibility study is being written, and several major grants have been received.



Hinchliffe Stadium

Photo: abandonedabandoned.com

Many fans across the nation look forward to the day when the crack of a bat, and the words, “Play Ball!” are heard once again at Hinchliffe Stadium.

It will be a fitting tribute to the careers of the superb African American ball players who were instrumental in laying the groundwork of the Civil Rights movement on this very field.



Hinchliffe Stadium | Photo: Duncan Kendall

Additional Sources: US Department of the Interior, National Historic Landmark Nomination, "Hinchliffe Stadium;" US Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places Registration, "Hinchliffe Stadium;" "Historical Significance Investigation Report Evaluating the National Significance and Integrity of Hinchliffe Stadium," Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects, LLC, 2011; "Hinchliffe Stadium – A National Black Baseball Venue, Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects, LLC, 2011; "Field of Forgotten Dreams," Eric Wills, "Preservation" November/December 2009.

Links:

Friends of Hinchliffe Stadium—hinchliffestadium.org

Paterson Friends of Great Falls—patersongreatfalls.org

Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park—nps.gov/pagr/index.htm

Paterson Museum—patersonmuseum.com

Paterson Historic Preservation Commission—patersonnj.gov/departments/division.php?fDD=21-81

Paterson Historic Preservation Society—facebook.com/patersonpreservation/timeline



Jackie Robinson 1954 | Photo: Library of Congress

PRESERVATION SNAPSHOT ARCHIVES

2016

- Trenton's Pottery Industry, Trenton, NJ February 2016
- Art Deco & Art Moderne Architecture in NJ January 2016

2015

- Buildings in the Battles of Trenton, Trenton, NJ December 2015
- Hinchliffe Stadium in The Silk City, Paterson, NJ November 2015
- Harleigh Cemetery and its Famous "Residents," Camden, NJ October 2015
- School's Out at the Boylan Street School, Newark, NJ September 2015
- Catboats ... Jersey Cats ... A-Cats, Barnegat Bay, NJ August 2015
- Lucy, the Elephant, Margate, NJ July 2015
- Mount Tabor Historic District, Parsippany-Troy Hills, NJ June 2015

If you enjoy Preservation Snapshot, you may also enjoy:

New Jersey 350 Archives

