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Jim Jaworski  
General Manager  
Daytona Tortugas  
Jackie Robinson Commemorative Site Act  
July 9, 2024

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jim Jaworski, General Manager for the Daytona Tortugas Professional Baseball Team, Single-A Affiliate of the Cincinnati Reds located in Daytona Beach, Florida. This is my 15th year with the organization, and I am honored and extremely excited to be here with you today. Thank you for the invitation.

Today, I am here to talk about Jackie Robinson and a historic event that took place in Daytona Beach. Baseball has been played on City Island in Daytona Beach since 1914 making it the third oldest, active professional baseball field in the United States only behind Wrigley Field and Fenway Park.

On March 17, 1946 Jackie Robinson broke the professional baseball modern era color barrier when he stepped to the plate at then City Island Ballpark (later to be named Jackie Robinson Ballpark) in Daytona Beach as a Montreal Royal, the Brooklyn Dodgers' top farm club, in an intra-squad game against the Dodgers. This historic event took place at what is now called Jackie Robinson Ballpark and was largely made possible by the local advocacy of Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune Cookman University, with the local city commission.

On that Sunday morning in Daytona Beach, black churchgoers listened to sermons about Robinson before heading to the ballpark hand in hand. Dodgers officials invited African-American veterans from an Army hospital to attend the game. These veterans, about 250 in number, sat wherever they wanted for the game, disregarding the segregation of the bleachers. Thus, before the game even began, City Island Ballpark was integrated.

One year after his debut, Robinson began his Major League Baseball career in Brooklyn, demonstrating that African American players could excel in the league. He led in stolen bases, won the National League Rookie of the Year award, and later earned the Most Valuable Player title, made six All-Star appearances, and secured a World Series victory in 1955. His achievements swiftly earned him induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.

In 1990, City Island's historic field was renamed Jackie Robinson Ballpark and features a statue of Robinson behind home plate. The statue portrays Robinson passing a baseball to two young children, symbolizing his enduring impact on future generations.

Each year on Jackie Robinson's Major League Baseball debut anniversary, baseball honors his monumental contributions. In 1997, Commissioner Bud Selig retired Robinson's No. 42 across Major League Baseball at a ceremony before a Dodgers-Mets game. In addition to the number 42 being retired, Daytona Beach also retired Robinson's No. 9, worn during his time in Daytona Beach. On April 15<sup>th</sup> all of Major League Baseball honors Robinson by wearing the number 42. In a similar way, the Daytona Tortugas honor Robinson and commemorate the events of the barrier breaking game by wearing the number 9. In 2022, Minor League Baseball launched "The Nine," an initiative and outreach program celebrating black baseball pioneers and civil rights leaders, named after Robinson's minor league number in Daytona Beach.

As we look forward to continuing to champion Jackie's legacy in Daytona Beach and across the country, the passage of H.R. 8012, The Jackie Robinson Commemorative Site Act, would be of enormous benefit to this effort and our community.





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Designating Jackie Robinson Ballpark as a National Landmark would provide even more opportunities to showcase all he did for the game and for bettering the communities we live in.

To this day, home plate at Jackie Robinson Ballpark stands in the same spot that it did on that historic day in 1946. Every year, hundreds of athletes step up to the plate and into Jackie Robinson's footsteps. The story continues at Jackie Robinson Ballpark as the HBCU, Bethune-Cookman University's baseball team continues to practice and play their games at the ballpark. This is a partnership that Mary McLeod Bethune, recently memorialized in Statuary Hall, would certainly be proud of. As a Single-A affiliate for the Cincinnati Reds, Jackie Robinson Ballpark continues to be the first step for Minor League Baseball players and a memorable one at that.

As we take Jackie Robinson Ballpark into the future, our goal is to preserve the history that took place on the grounds and showcase it for years to come. The ballpark is currently undergoing roughly \$30 million of improvements to ensure that baseball will be played for generations to come in Daytona Beach. This private/public effort, being led by Mayor Derrick Henry and City Manager Deric Feacher in Daytona Beach, the club, and leaders from the Cincinnati Reds and Major League Baseball. These improvements are transformational for us and envisioned to include a Jackie Robinson Museum on-site. A National Landmark designation will further increase visibility and traffic to the ballpark making the local economic impact of the park even more compelling.

Jackie Robinson Ballpark is so much more than baseball and as Jackie famously once said, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives." The National Landmark status and passing of the Jackie Robinson Commemorative Site Act would only help cement this philosophy, through shining a light on his life, for generations to come.

Thank you.



















