

Anesthesiologist Leads Negro Leagues Baseball Grave Marker Project*

Jeremy L. Krock, D.O., a Peoria, Ill., anesthesiologist, has founded the Negro Leagues Baseball Grave Marker Project. This humanitarian effort recognizes the talented baseball players who necessarily played in a segregated national pastime until the color barrier was broken in 1947, when the Brooklyn Dodgers brought Jackie Robinson to play in the major leagues. Before then, African American baseball players had to compete in their own Negro leagues.

After their careers ended, many of even the greatest Negro players had to take menial jobs with minimum wages and, being impoverished, were buried in unmarked graves and without fanfare. Eight years ago, Dr. Krock embarked upon a crusade to change that segment of history when he discovered that one of his heroes, John William Crutchfield, “the most famous guy” from Ardmore, Mo., a small mining town where Krock’s great-grandparents lived, was forgotten in death.

Mr. Crutchfield had been a coal miner who later played as a star in the Negro leagues. When Dr. Krock went to pay him homage by visiting his gravesite in Burr Oak Cemetery in Chicago, he was stunned to find an unmarked grave. He decided to correct this injustice by dedicating a grave marker for Mr. Crutchfield. “They played in anonymity, and I don’t want to see them buried forever in anonymity.” Indeed, they were “denied proper recognition in life, but then suffered from a final indignity in death: an unmarked grave,” according to Phil Taylor, *Sports Illustrated* columnist.

Dr. Krock’s project has added 22 more gravesite memorials for other past Negro league stars, and he anticipates many more to come. Larry Lester, chairman of the Negro League Committee for the Society of American Baseball Research, has ably aided his mission. Historians consider these players to have served as pioneers of the civil rights movement. Dr. Krock, who previously hadn’t been particularly interested in baseball history, now does extensive research to uncover the information leading to the memorials, helps raise money for the headstones, collaborates on their design, and often travels great distances to be present at the installations. “We’re never going to get everybody,” but that will not weaken Dr. Krock’s passion and determination to fulfill the project’s goal of “respect, redemption and recognition.” Anesthesia—as well as baseball—caps off to Jeremy Krock!

**Information culled from a report, “Negro Leagues’ Heroes Finally Get Their Tombstones,” on msnbc.com by Ron Mott (July 19, 2011), and an opinion column by Phil Taylor, “Baseball’s Ghost Hunter,” Sports Illustrated, July 25, 2011.*