

Rap Dixon

By Ted Knorr & Chris Rainey

On December 12, 2018, at the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, Museum President Bob Kendrick, with historian Jay Caldwell, announced the Negro League Centennial Team. The team being a key part of the Museum's celebration in 2020 of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro Leagues. Ostensibly the team of 30 players, a manager, and an owner was to honor the greatest Negro League players of all-time. Of the nineteen position players on the team, there was only one named who was not already enshrined in the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York – his name is Herbert Alphonso “Rap” Dixon.

Further affirmation of Rap Dixon's greatness was provided seventy years earlier when in 1949, the greatest of all Negro League outfielders, [Oscar Charleston](#), was asked by a reporter from the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin for his all-time Negro League lineup, Charleston, whose career began before the Negro Leagues were organized, and ended several years after their demise as a major league, offered his team. In the outfield he placed future Hall of Famers [Martin Dihigo](#) in left and [Cristobal Torriente](#) in right ... between that pair, at his old position of centerfield, he inserted Rap Dixon. High praise indeed for a lesser known player among the pantheon of Negro League stars.ⁱ

A 6-foot-1, 185-poundⁱⁱ, dynamo who batted and threw right-handed, and played all three outfield positions, Dixon was a classic five-tool baseball player: hitting for both power and average, running, fielding, and throwing. He also had a knack for performing well on the big stage. During his 16-year playing career, he was a key player on great teams in the Negro Leagues as well as in off-season leagues and a tour of Japan.

Herbert Alphonso Dixon was born on September 15, 1902 in Kingston, Georgia, about 56 miles northwest of Atlanta. His parents were 23-year-old John Dixon and the 19-year-old Rosa Goodwin Dixon. Young Herbert had four siblings: Rachel, born about 1905; twins, Paul (himself also a future Negro League outfielder) & Pauline, 1907, and John W., 1909. Herbert and Paul developed their rudimentary baseball talents, hitting, running, catching and throwing in the rural farm country of Georgia.

Just prior to the first World War, Rosa's brother Oliver P. Goodwin accepted a position in Steelton, Pennsylvania as pastor of 1st Baptist Church. Steelton lies along the Susquehanna River south of the State Capitol of Harrisburg. Shortly thereafter, additional Dixon & Goodwin families, including John and Rosa Dixon, headed north for greener pastures joining approximately 1.6 million African Americans opting to leave the south as part of the Great Migration.

Starting in 1918, young Herbert Dixon's family in Steelton is listed in the City Directory. By the early 1920s there are two Dixon families and two Goodwin families living on Adams Street in Steelton which was the heart of the fast-growing African American community near Uncle Oliver's church.

The Dixon and Goodwin families settled on Adams Street near the church. Just down the street was the Hygienic School for Colored Children where Herbert began formal education. He graduated from 8th grade on May 23, 1919 before matriculating to Steelton High School. Herbert's extracurriculars, in addition to baseball; included boxing, where he performed at smoker's; football, as halfback for the Hygienic A.C.; and playing trumpet in the school band. In addition, Herbert worked part time in the steel mill once he was old enough. According to Chappie Gardner: "(Dixon) got his wonderful strength of arms and shoulder from throwing pig iron billets at the crane operators in the steel mills." ⁱⁱⁱ

Historian Jim Riley noted Dixon playing for the Keystone Giants of Steelton, a local semi-pro team, in the summer of 1916 at the age of 13. ^{iv} Dixon did not become a regular member of the roster until 1919. His status was revealed on May 31, 1919, when the *Harrisburg Telegraph* announced that "Dixon, the (Keystone) Giants new shortstop, played fast ball and made two healthy swats" in an 8-3 victory over the Middletown White Sox. ^v Dixon usually batted leadoff and clearly was one of the team's stars, even at age 16.

Perhaps the biggest game for young Herbert with the Steelton Keystone Giants came on July 16, 1921 at Island Park, Harrisburg, when they took on the best of the local semipro ball clubs - Colonel W. Strothers' Harrisburg Giants. Strothers' Giants' franchise would eventually enter the Eastern Colored League (ECL). The upstart Steelton club held a 9-4 lead into the bottom of the 8th inning before the cream rose with the more polished Harrisburg Giants rallying for a run in the 8th and four more in the bottom of the 9th to tie the contest before winning it with a run in the 10th. ^{vi} Dixon played shortstop, batted third and had two hits in the loss.

Herbert Dixon completed only two years of high school. Purportedly Dixon's schooling ended and his "career in baseball started one day when his high school science teacher announced that the class was going to dissect a cat. Dixon, feeling squeamish, exited quickly and went straight to a sporting goods store; with the money he had earned working weekends at the Bethlehem Steel Company, he purchased a glove and bat, took a train to Atlantic City and joined the Bacharach Giants." ^{vii} Neither Seamheads.com nor Baseball Reference list him playing any games with the Giants that year. Eventually, he might well have earned a G.E.D. because the 1940 census indicates he was a high school graduate.

Herbert Dixon was briefly with the Keystone Giants in early May 1922 before Colonel Strothers recruited him for his Harrisburg Giants. Dixon's debut with Harrisburg occurred on May 20th against the powerful Hilldale Club when he stroked one hit in three at bats with a run and a ribbie in a 5-3 loss. ^{viii} The June 3rd edition of the *Harrisburg Telegraph* listed a rundown of the 1922 Harrisburg Giant roster including brief descriptions of the players ... among the listed players was "Dixon, Steelton". By mid-June, Dixon was a fixture on the Harrisburg Giants playing centerfield until the veteran fly hawk, Jess Barbour, returned to the lineup. After that Dixon played mostly right field and batted low in the order.

The 1922 season ended on an unhappy note for the Harrisburg Giants as they lost their City title in a 9-game series against another fast, semipro team called Motive Power. By season end,

Dixon had captured the right field job and continuously upped his place in the batting order from eighth to fourth.

As the 1923 season dawned, Colonel Strothers struggled to find talent for his independent team competing against 14 teams in two leagues. It seemed Strothers had to make a choice; invest in better ballplayers or play a lesser schedule. His decision became clear when it was announced that E.B. Lamar of the New York Bacharach Giants was going to join the administrative team of the Harrisburg Giants and bring with him several outstanding players including outfielder [Fats Jenkins](#), second baseman [Dick Jackson](#), and pitchers Harold Treadwell and [Nip Winters](#). In addition, Strothers brought in William Pettus of the Richmond Giants to anchor the infield at first and to manage the team.^{ix}

The right fielder for the '23 season was to be the same young local lad that won the position in '22 ... or was it? ... the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported the young fly hawks' name as "Rapp Dickson" ... this is the first time that Herbert Dixon's nickname, albeit misspelled, appeared in print.^x There are two suggestions as to the origin of the Dixon's nickname. One supposes it was derived from the Rappahannock River which flows through Virginia. How this relates to him is unclear.^{xi} A more plausible suggestion was offered by sportswriter Chester L. Washington that it grew out of Dixon's hitting ability while still in high school in Steelton. Washington claimed, "Rap hits the old apple with the same degree of which made William Tell famous."^{xii}

The Giants main opponent in 1923 would again be the local Motive Power team. John Brackenridge, manager of Motive Power, threw down the gauntlet in the off season saying he had, "signed the same aggregation of stars that annexed the City championship from Strothers' Harrisburg Giants."^{xiii} Unlike 1922, where the Giants got off to a slow start losing eleven of their first seventeen contests, the 1923 Harrisburg team had gotten off to a great start capturing a dozen victories in their initial seventeen game. They faced future Hall of Famer [Ben Taylor's](#) Washington Potomacs in four series during the season and emerged with six wins in nine tries.

Dixon started the season slowly at the plate before being sidelined most of July with an undisclosed illness. It was a harbinger of the future for Dixon who would be haunted by injury and illness during his career. He had developed powerful arms, but author James Riley called attention to spindly legs. Riley also suggests that drinking was an issue with Dixon especially later in his career.^{xiv}

The season culminated, as it had the previous year, with a series against Motive Power to determine the best ball club in the city. The Giants dropped the opener, 7-4, on the Island Park field. Dixon's bat led the team to an 8-3 victory in Game 2. The remainder of the series was dominated by Giants' pitcher Nip Winters who captured three complete game wins.

During the offseason the big news in Harrisburg was that future Hall of Famer Oscar Charleston was going to guide the Giants and that they would enter the ECL. Charleston arrived in Harrisburg on March 3, 1924 after wintering in Cuba playing for Santa Clara Leopardos of the Cuban Winter League. Immediately he and Strothers began building a ballclub that Charleston

thought could be a dark horse contender. Retained were outfielders Dixon, Jenkins, and Barbour; and five others. Charleston brought four pitchers with him from the previous year's Indianapolis ABCs. Other new faces included first baseman Edgar Wesley from the Detroit Stars and pitcher Slim Branham, a teammate from the Leopards. The new manager gushed about the potential he saw. "We got the stuff, boy, we got the stuff."^{xv}

The season began April 19 with a non-league contest versus the York White Roses, featuring [Del Bissonette](#). The Giants lost a close encounter by a 3-1 score and Rap made his initial appearance of the season as a defensive replacement for Jackson, the second baseman Charleston had chosen to start in right field.^{xvi} Dixon saw little action early in the season as Jackson held down right field. At 21 Rap was the youngest member of the team and may not have won Charleston's favor yet.

Dixon's chance to impress came in early June in New York against the Lincoln Giants at the Catholic Protectors Grounds. In a doubleheader victory he supplied five hits off a quartet of hurlers.^{xvii} By late June, Dixon had cemented his place in right field joining Jenkins (left) and Charleston (center).

The trio would eventually be dubbed the "million-dollar outfield" and play together through the 1927 season. Combined they posted a stellar .351 batting average (898-2559) in the time together. The trio are one of only 12 outfield groups that played four or more years together while featuring a future Hall of Famer. Local sportswriter Wellington 'Welly' Jones simply said, "There is no better outfield than Dixon, Charleston, and Jenkins."^{xviii}

While Rap maintained his hold on the right field spot, his season was not up to his expectations as he hit only .259 in ECL action. His first ECL home run came on July 15th off Brooklyn's Pud Flournoy. Jenkins batted .336 and Charleston dominated league pitching with 15 home runs and a .405 average. A revolving door at third base and a struggling pitching staff doomed the Giants to a 30-31 mark.

The following season, 1925, was to be the highwater mark for the Harrisburg Giants with Charleston capturing his second consecutive triple crown (.427/20/97 in a 73-game ECL season). Jenkins hit .317 and scored 82 runs while Dixon made his presence known hitting .352/8/53. The team finished second (48-24-1 .664) behind Hilldale which captured the Negro League World Series over the Negro National League champion Kansas City Monarchs. The outfield trio was honored with both Charleston and Dixon being named 1st team All East and Jenkins honorable mention in left.^{xix}

That fall, Dixon accepted an invitation from Hilldale's [Biz Mackey](#) and joined the Philadelphia Royal Giants in the California Winter League. After a slow start, the team won the second half of the season with an overall record of 24-15-3 record (14-7 in second half).^{xx} Dixon batted just .271 and usually was in the bottom of the batting order. He did stroke four hits in the three-game, post-season battle with the White King Soapsters that the Royal Giants swept by scores of 5-1, 12-7, and 12-5.

The Royal Giants remained in the West after the season concluded playing local semipro squads as well as PCL teams preparing for the upcoming season. Dixon hit well in these exhibitions although the greatest impression his bat made was on the head of Portland catcher Frank Tobin. In a game on March 19, Dixon swung and missed but caught Tobin in the head, knocking him unconscious.^{xxi} The team wrapped up their stay in California in early April.

His fine 1925 season cemented Dixon's reputation as a star. Manager [John 'Muggsy' McGraw](#) of the New York Giants told the press during the winter hot stove that, "If that boy Dixon was not so black, I could make a Cuban out of him and the National League would have another star to talk about. He is without question, one of the greatest outfielders in the United States."^{xxii} Despite the glowing praise, Colonel Strothers listened to offers from [Rube Foster](#) that might have sent Rap to Chicago.

In the 1926 season Dixon again put up nice stats, .323/6/40, while playing 47 of the 49 league games. Charleston's numbers dipped dramatically, and [John Beckwith](#) led the team with a .330 average. Perhaps it was his off-year or maybe the 5.00 ERA of the pitching staff, but Charleston "increasingly edged into hotheadness as the year dragged on."^{xxiii} The manager's attitude rubbed off on his players. Dixon tried to fight an umpire in Baltimore. Shortstop [Rev Cannady](#) went further by slugging an umpire in the jaw. Later in the season he hurled a bat through an umpire's car window.^{xxiv} The team finished fourth in the ECL at 27-22.

When the ECL season ended, once again Dixon joined Mackey in California. Now, however he was no longer a rookie in that off-season loop. He found himself once again in a spectacular lineup featuring holdovers Mackey and [Bullet Joe Rogan](#), plus [Turkey Stearnes](#), [Willie Wells](#), and [Andy Cooper](#). All five of those players are now enshrined in Cooperstown. After a decent but 2nd place 9-8 first half the Royal Giants added yet another future Hall of Famer in Willie Foster. The team caught fire winning 13 of 14 second half decisions to capture the playoff qualifying title. In the playoff they split four games but failed to capture the official league title when the deciding 5th game with Shell Oil was never played.

Dixon batted .349 third in the league behind Stearnes (.387) and Shell Oil's [Bob Jones](#) (.361) while leading the league in games and doubles. Rap finished second on the team (and league) in hits to Stearnes. As in the previous winter he was the team's left fielder.

After the season, the Philadelphia Royal Giants team owner/promotor Lonnie Goodwin desired to take the squad on a tour of Japan, Korea, and the Hawaiian Islands. With the core of his team under contract to Negro League teams such plans were not without controversy. Newspapers reported that ownership threatened a five-year suspension on any Negro Leaguers that failed to show for spring training. Of the 14 players on the Winter League team only five risked the potential punishment – Mackey, Cooper, Dixon, Frank Duncan, and Neal Pullen. The rest continued touring in California before heading to their respective teams.^{xxv}

On March 9, promoter Goodwin and his Philadelphia Royal Giants set sail on the *La Plata Maru* to Yokohama, Japan. The touring Royal Giants were not the same team that had participated in the California Winter League, but they remained a formidable unit. They arrived in Japan, March 29, ready to play and began a 27-game schedule (22 games in Japan: 5 in Korea) on April 1st.

The MLB tour of Japan in 1934 featuring [Babe Ruth](#) was highly influential in the birth of the Nippon Professional Baseball League. Writers also credit the two Negro League tours that preceded the Babe for creating a love for the game in Japan. It is vital to note that the “Negro Leaguers conducted themselves far better than their white counterparts.”^{xxvi} Years of barnstorming had taught them not to embarrass an opponent with antics or running up the score.

The tour opened on April 1 in Tokyo against the Mita Club of Keio University which five years earlier had defeated the Herb Hunter All Stars, 9-3. The Mita Club proved beatable but difficult falling 2-0 to Cooper and then 10-6 to Mackey the following day. No box score exists for the opener, but Dixon went three for three with a double, a walk, and a sac fly in the second game. He followed that performance with a five-for-five day (including a triple and double) in cavernous Koshien Stadium.^{xxvii}

The Japanese fans were in awe of Dixon’s bat, his speed and his throwing arm. He and Mackey, whose size and agility amazed the locals, became the most watched members of the team. Dixon’s eight consecutive hit was a mere appetizer for his next feat. Koshien Stadium had been built in 1924 with a left-center field gap that measured 128 meters (420 feet). No native batter had hit or cleared the fence but on April 6 Dixon smashed a ball that ricocheted off the wall for a triple. “The spot where Dixon’s blast hit the wall was painted white to commemorate his great hit for future generations.”^{xxviii} That wall has since been torn down and with it the white dot.

Dixon next wowed the fans at Jingu Stadium on April 28 after a 14-0 win. He stood at home plate and threw balls on target to players in the left field seats. Reporters had heard him boast earlier that he could and now he had proven it to the fans. Talent demonstrations like that caught the fancy of the serious fans according to Sayama.^{xxix} Emperor Hirohito commemorated the tour of Dixon and his mates by presenting them with a trophy.

After 22 games in Japan the team headed for Korea for seven games. Dixon pitched the May 19 game in present-day Daegu picking up the victory, 14-2. From there the team traveled to Honolulu where they played for two weeks before heading back to the mainland.

Dixon finally returned to Harrisburg from his travels on July 22. Things were vastly different on the Giants as Oscar Charleston was in the midst of being dealt to the Hilldale club and John Beckwith was manager. Charleston’s departure fell through and he took the field with Dixon against a Brooklyn Royal Giants team that was rattled from an auto accident in route to the game.

Brooklyn’s late arrival and a rain shower held the game to just four-and-a-half innings with Harrisburg on top, 8-7. Rap had a hit and scored a run while batting in the seventh spot and playing his traditional right field.^{xxx} Harrisburg had finished the first half with a 25-20 mark. They were 0-3 in the second half before the victory over Brooklyn. With their million-dollar

outfield again intact the team finished second and posted a 16-9 record after Dixon's return. Dixon hit .282 in 21 league games.

Dixon returned to the California League that winter, but circumstances were far different than the previous year. A second Black team was entered, called the Cleveland Stars, with a roster that included Dixon's former Royal Giants teammates Stearnes, Newt Allen, Crush Holloway, and Wells. In addition, Commissioner Landis of the MLB had imposed restrictions on major-leaguers playing in the circuit.

Besides the newly minted Stars, the main competition for the Royal Giants again came from Pirrone's All-Stars. Anchored by [Babe Herman](#) and [Bob Meusel](#) Pirrone's squad beat Dixon's team early in the campaign, but then Herman and Meusel had to stop play to comply with Landis' edict.^{xxxii} After their departure the All-Stars faded leaving the race was between the Royal Giants and the Stars with the Giants running away with the title.

After his lackluster season with Harrisburg, Dixon exploded in California. His .380 batting average was second in the league behind teammate Jess Hubbard (.442). He exhibited power with a league leading six doubles and three triples in just 79 at bats. His five home runs were second to Stearnes' seven.^{xxxiii}

Dixon would play with the Cleveland Giants in California in 1928-29. His .360 average was only sixth on the team. Beckwith hit .485 for the squad but that was topped by [Earl Averill's](#) .500 average. After a winter in Cuba, Dixon returned to California in 1930-31 with the Royal Giants. In five seasons on the coast he batted .326 (156-479) and had 21 home runs.^{xxxiii}

Citing poor attendance, Colonel Strothers disbanded his Harrisburg team in March 1928. Dixon signed with the Baltimore Black Sox and turned in two of the finest seasons ever seen in baseball. In 1928 he posted a line of .398/15/58. They were nearly Triple Crown numbers had teammate [Jud Wilson](#) not hit .399 (they were separated by .0006 points.) He also led the circuit with 34 walks. Using modern statistics, he posted an OPS of 1.180 and an OPS+ of 190.

The following year found the team in the American Negro League where they captured the flag in both halves of the year and posted a 55-25 record. In 76 games Dixon produced even better numbers: .415/16/92. His OPS rose to 1.204 and his OPS+ to 191. Dixon's marvelous season was jeopardized in July when he was beamed in a game with the Homestead Grays. Not only did he shake off the injury he fearlessly returned to the lineup the next day and proceeded to rap out 14 consecutive league hits during the week. The streak started against the Grays and culminated on July 28 when he collected eight hits in a doubleheader versus Hilldale.^{xxxiv} The MLB record for consecutive hits is 12. Including two walks against the Grays, he had 16 consecutive on-base appearances which is bested only by [Piggy Ward's](#) 17 in 1893.^{xxxv}

Dixon did not go west in the offseason, opting instead to play in Cuba with Almendares. He showcased his power and speed, leading the league in stolen bases (19) and the team with five home runs. ([Mule Suttles](#) led the league with 7) One of his teammates was a young [Johnny Allen](#) who would go on to 13 seasons in MLB.

Dixon entered the 1930 season as a 27-year-old, an age than many consider the beginning of a player's prime years. Rather than improving on the two impressive seasons he tailed-off and found himself packing bags to go from team to team. He opened 1930 with the Black Sox and played the first Negro League games at Yankee Stadium with them on July 5.

Dixon had a reputation for saving his best for big occasions. The double-header against the Lincoln Giants was a prime example. He opened the scoring in the first game with a home run in the first inning off Bill Holland, but the Giants prevailed easily, 13-4. In the second game Dixon again homered in the first then added an inside-the-park blow to deep left center in the third as Baltimore won, 5-3.^{xxxvi}

There were 15 Black ballclubs in 1930: nine in the NNL and six Eastern Independent teams. The competition between the two leagues led to quite a few players jumping from one circuit to the other. Dixon was one of three big names (Suttles and Jenkins) to leave the Black Sox as he skipped to the NNL Chicago American Giants. He hit .305 with eight home runs in a combined 49 games.

Dixon opened the 1931 season playing left field for the Hilldale club that also featured Mackey and [Martin Dihigo](#). He struggled to a .226 average in 44 games before joining the Black Sox late in the season.^{xxxvii} In 1932 he reunited with manager Oscar Charleston on the Pittsburg Crawfords. He wowed the fans at Greenlee Field on May 28 with a single and double, stole two bases and scored four runs in a 13-4 win over Birmingham. The Crawfords featured 20-year old catcher [Josh Gibson](#) whose eight home runs took the team title over Dixon's seven blows.

Dixon married Rosa (aka Rose) Yarbrough in August 1931 in Richmond, Virginia. The couple were divorced in October 1934 also in Richmond. The decree listed desertion as the cause and noted that Rap had not contested the proceedings.^{xxxviii} Dixon's death certificate shows a second wife, Edith Dixon. Oddly his obituary in the Harrisburg *Evening News* makes no mention of Edith.^{xxxix}

Dixon joined the independent Philadelphia Stars in 1933 and came out slugging. He hit a robust .360 finishing second on the team to Jud Wilson who batted .376. The Stars finished out of contention with a 22-13 mark. Dixon was rewarded by fans for his excellence with a spot on the East roster in the first East-West All-Star game. While the East squad lost 11-7, Dixon had a strong game going 1-for-3 with a walk, sacrifice fly, and stolen base against future Hall of Famer [Willie Foster](#).

In November 1933 Dixon joined Josh Gibson and league players on a boat trip to San Juan Puerto Rico. The players formed a team that the *Pittsburgh Courier* called the Ramirez Stars. Following the Puerto Rican season, Dixon and Gibson joined the Concordia team from Venezuela for a series of games. Dr. Leyton Revel lists Dixon with 21 at bats with Concordia.^{xl} It has often been suggested that Dixon injured his back badly during the winter of 1933-34. The Concordia team played in four series, one of them going nine games, so it appears that Dixon was injured while with Concordia. We can further pinpoint the timing by noting that the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported a trade offer of Cool Papa Bell for Dixon in early February

1934.^{xli} News of a serious injury had presumably not made its way back to the States by that time.

In the spring of 1934, the Philadelphia Stars released Dixon while he was in the hospital. Was he being treated for the back injury which would plague him the remainder of his life? ^{xliii} Dixon's numbers when he returned to action from 1934-37 indicate a severe downturn. He batted .272 in those seasons, 50 points below his career average.

The Baltimore Black Sox entered the NNL for the second half of the campaign and Dixon served as their player/manager for their short tenure. Confident in his recovery he used himself as utilityman even playing third base in a win over the Homestead Grays.^{xliiii} That was one of just three wins the team earned. His managerial style won praise for his work with the young, unknown players including a rookie, [Leon Day](#). Dixon's reputation was rewarded with a spot on the East roster in the all-star game. He replaced [Vic Harris](#) midgame and went 1-for-2 in the East's classic win, 1-0.^{xliv}

The following year Ben Taylor of the Brooklyn Eagles invited Dixon to training camp in Gadsden, Alabama. Soon after his arrival, Dixon was referred to a dentist who discovered four infected molars. Once they were removed Dixon's health improved remarkably and he showed flashes of his athletic talent.^{xlv}

Dixon split the season with Brooklyn and the New York Cubans batting .301. The Cubans were the second-half champs and faced the Crawfords in the championship. In the spotlight for the final time in his career, Dixon responded by leading all hitters with a .421 average and 1.079 OPS but was on the losing side. He joined the Grays in 1936 then finished up with a few games with the Crawfords in 1937. He joined the all-star contingent, often labeled the Ciudad Trujillo team, that captured the crown in the Denver Post tournament that August. He played sparingly in the games, quite possibly serving as the manager of the team. Upon leaving that team the 35-year-old returned home to Steelton for the first time of any real duration in over a decade. Dixon took a job with Bethlehem Steel then in the 1940s he took a job with the county. Later he operated a pool hall in Steelton.

While his professional days were over, Rap still played semipro in the Harrisburg area. He also did some managing but mostly he dreamed of bringing the NNL back to Harrisburg. To that end he became a great advocate for the game in his area throwing his support and reputation behind numerous efforts to keep the sport alive during the Depression and ensuing war years. This included managing an American Legion team in 1940 and an integrated semipro team.

In 1943 Dixon made an unsuccessful run as a Republican nominee for Constable. Finally, after the election defeat and a burglary at his pool hall, he left Steelton for greener pastures in Detroit, Michigan ... supposedly for a job coaching a baseball team. Besides his second marriage we know little of his life in Detroit until a heart attack hospitalized him on July 18 followed by his death on July 20. His body was returned to Harrisburg for funeral services that were attended by his parents, two brothers, a sister and other family and friends. On June 8, 2007, a citizen's group dedicated a fitting grave marker in the Midland Cemetery where he had been laid to rest. The Orioles sent [Paul Blair](#) and [Curt Motton](#) to honor the former Baltimore Black Sox.

In the years following his death Dixon was listed by Charleston, Taylor, Day, [Monte Irvin](#), and [Cool Papa Bell](#) as one of the greatest Negro League outfielders of all-time. Those lists recognized nine different outfielders, seven of whom are in Cooperstown.^{xlvi}

Sources

Statistics and records that are uncredited come the Seamheads.com site. Extensive use of the Harrisburg newspapers provided background.

Notes

ⁱ“Jackie, Larry Snubbed in All-Time Team Poll,” *New York Age*, July 16, 1949: 16.

ⁱⁱ Rap can be found listed anywhere from 5-foot-11 to 6-foot-2.

ⁱⁱⁱ W. Rollo Wilson, “Sports Shorts,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 2, 1930: 14.

^{iv} James A. Riley, *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 240.

^v “Keystone Giants Win,” *Harrisburg (Pennsylvania) Telegraph*, May 31, 1919: 15.

^{vi} “Local Giants Take First Game,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 18, 1921: 11.

^{vii} Phil Dixon and Patrick J. Hannigan, *The Negro Baseball Leagues, A Photographic History* (Mattuck, New York: American House, 1992), 97.

^{viii} “Saturday Games,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, May 22, 1922: 15.

^{ix} “Snow and Rain Spoil Ball Games,” *York (Pennsylvania) Daily Record*, April 16, 1923: 7.

^x “Baseball Activities,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 14, 1923: 11.

^{xi} James A. Riley, 239.

^{xii} Chester L. Washington, “Ches’ Sez,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 3, 1935: 14.

^{xiii} “City Champs to Meet Fast Foes,” *Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), May 5, 1923: 9.

^{xiv} James A. Riley, 239-40. Dixon’s supporters discount this theory although some wonder if as the pain grew in his body, perhaps Dixon did some self-medication.

^{xv} “Giants Planning for Big Season; Manager Arrives,” *Evening News*, March 4, 1924: 15.

^{xvi} “Gardner Blows and York Wins,” *Evening News*, April 21, 1924: 15.

^{xvii} *Standard Union* (Brooklyn New York) June 3, 1924: 14.

^{xviii} “Tuning in With Fans,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, August 14, 1924: 15. Other million-dollar outfielders included Harry Hooper, Duffy Lewis, and Tris Speaker who played six seasons with Boston. Babe Ruth, Earle Combs, and

Bob Meusel played five seasons together. The Philadelphia Phillies had 3 HOF- Ed Delahanty, Billy Hamilton, and Sam Thompson from 1891-95. The other example in Negro League ball was Bell, Wilson Redus, and Branch Russell with the St. Louis Stars.

^{xix} W. Rollo Wilson, "Fans of Country Select Mythical All Eastern Team," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1925: 14.

^{xx} William F. McNeil, *The California Winter League* (Jefferson: MacFarland & Co. Inc., 108-110).

^{xxi} "Portland Beavers Hold Royal Giants Squad 12 Innings," *Bakersfield (California) Morning Echo*, March 20, 1926: 2.

^{xxii} "M'Graw Praises Herbert Dixon, Star Outfielder," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, February 2, 1926: 15.

^{xxiii} Jeremy Beer, *Oscar Charleston, The Life and Legend of Baseball's Greatest Forgotten Player* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 178.

^{xxiv} Jeremy Beer, 178.

^{xxv} "Charleston Still in Fold of Harrisburg," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 19, 1927: 17.

^{xxvi} Robert K. Fitts, *Banzai Babe Ruth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 10.

^{xxvii} Kazuo Sayama & Bill Staples, Jr., *Gentle Black Giants* (Fresno: NBRP Press, 2019), 37-46.

^{xxviii} Sayama & Staples, Jr., 56.

^{xxix} Sayama & Staples, Jr., 90.

^{xxx} "Extra Basehits Feature Game," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 23, 1927: 12.

^{xxxi} McNeil, *The California Winter League*, 124-25.

^{xxxii} McNeil, 127.

^{xxxiii} Numbers are taken from McNeil's *The California Winter League*, 306.

^{xxxiv} "Blacksox Double Win Over Hilldale Settles Top Place; Rivalry Keen," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 3, 1929: 16.

^{xxxv} Newspapers trumpeted the 14-hit mark. For some reason two games with the Bachrach Giants on July 27 were not recognized as league games.

^{xxxvi} William G. Nunn, "Diamond Stars Rise to Miracle Heights in Big Game at Yankee Bowl," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 12, 1930: 14.

^{xxxvii} "Old Sox Slugging Stars Rejoin Team for Stars' Series," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), September 25, 1931: 46.

^{xxxviii} Commonwealth of Virginia, 34-002086, issued on October 22, 1934 in Richmond.

^{xxxix} "Former Baseball Player Here, Ralph (sic) Dixon, Dies," *Evening News*, July 27, 1944: 12.

^{xl} Dr. Leyton Revel and Luis Munoz, *Forgotten Heroes: Herbert "Rap" Dixon* (Self-Published, 2012).

^{xli} Randy Dixon, "Baseball Magnates Convene in Parley Here," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 15, 1934: 10.

^{xlii} Dixon would begin suffering from consumption in the mid-to-late 1930s. Lung issues cannot be definitively ruled out as the reason for the hospitalization. It should also be noted that John Holway termed the problem a stomach ailment.

^{xliii} "Rap Dixon is Inspiration to the Blacksox," *Pittsburg Courier*, August 4, 1934: 15.

^{xliv} Larry Lester, *Black Baseball's National Showcase: The East-West All-Star Game, 1933-53* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 61.

^{xlv} "Rap Dixon's Return Gives Team New Life in Training," *Chicago Defender*, April 27, 1935: 16.

^{xlvi} Dixon appears on each of the lists, he and Wild Bill Wright are the two players not enshrined.