

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: MONTE IRVIN

If you were a New York Giants fan in 1951, the strains of TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME had probably never sounded sweeter. That was the year of the Giants miraculous comeback, overtaking the Brooklyn Dodgers' thirteen-and-a-half game lead for the National League pennant and going on to the World Series against the Yankees. That amazing feat was sparked by Monte Irvin, who that season had 24 home runs and a league-best 121 runs batted in.

Monford Merrill "Monte" Irvin was third youngest of thirteen children born to his parents in Haleburg, Alabama. When Monte was very young his parents decided to take their rather large brood to West Orange, New Jersey, where they figured the children would have a better chance at education and success. His father worked as a custodian and eventually went into business for himself in lawn maintenance. He was very proud that his youngest four were all able to finish college and pursue professional careers. Only one of the siblings other than Monte survives today, an 87-year old who in his time was a college football coach and Athletic Director.

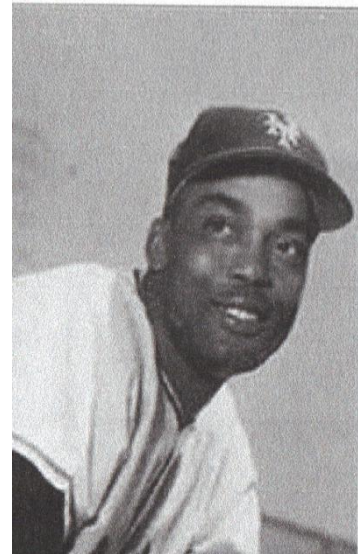
A natural athlete, Monte as a high school student starred in four sports: football, baseball, basketball and track. He also set a state record in the javelin throw.

Monte had thought he would like to be a dentist, but when college time came the

best scholarships were in athletics so he took that direction and attended Lincoln University with a major in history. He was a star college football player

His professional baseball career began with the Newark Eagles (Negro League) in 1938. In 1942 he led the Mexican League with a .397 batting average and 25 home runs in 63 games, and the Most Valuable

Monte Irvin



Player award. After military service in World War II (1943-45) he returned to the Eagles and in 1946 was instrumental in beating the Kansas City Monarchs in a seven-game Negro League World Series, batting .462 with three home runs. He was a five-time Negro League All Star between 1941-48.

The New York Giants bought his contract in 1949 and he was assigned to Jersey City (International League). After batting .373 there he debuted as a pinch-hitter with the Giants in July of 1949 but went back to Jersey City. In 1950, after hitting .510 with

ten home runs in eighteen games he was called up by the Giants to play first base and outfield. The rest of his career was with the Giants, except for one season with the Chicago Cubs in 1956.

In 1973 Monte was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame and continues to serve on their Veterans' Committee. He goes yearly to the Museum and supports it faithfully. He considers many of the men there as best friends. He also actively campaigns for recognition of deserving Negro League veterans.

The now San Francisco Giants retired his number 20 uniform officially in a pre-game ceremony opening the 2010 World Series. He was joined by fellow Hall of Famers Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Juan Marichal, Gaylord Perry and Orlando Cepeda.

Although the very name of Monte Irvin brings up thoughts of baseball, this man is by no means one-dimensional. He speaks lovingly of his family—first his family of birth with his devoted, hard-working parents and twelve siblings, and then of his own immediate family.

In 1942 he married his high school sweetheart Dorinda in a love story that lasted sixty-six years until her death in 2008.

In his major league career, Monte Irvin had 99 home runs, 443 RBI, 366 runs scored 731 hits, 97 doubles, 31 triples, and 28 stolen bases, with 351 walks for a .383 on base percentage, and 1187 total bases for a .475 slugging average in 764 games played.

They had two daughters, Pamela, who graduated from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Patricia, who received a Master's degree in Education from Boston University. Pamela has continued to live in New Jersey, but Patricia lives with her physician husband in Houston, and it was their presence, along with one granddaughter, that drew him to Houston and Treemont. Another granddaughter recently moved to Seattle, Washington, with her husband.

A contented Treemont resident since

August, Monte lists as things he enjoys: family nearby, friendly people all around, pleasant apartment, good food, good friends, and good care.

Now 93, Monte is the oldest living African American ever to have played in the big leagues.

Asked what makes him "tick" he answers with quiet dignity, "I guess you could call it the Golden Rule. I just try to treat people the way I like to be treated."

Modest and unassuming, Monte is a blessing to all who know him. Welcome, Monte.

