

05/25/2016 - Ted Rasberry Field renovated to past glory, now the wait for baseball to return

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By Peter J. Wallner



GRAND RAPIDS – Even a great baseball man like the late Ted Rasberry would have struggled Wednesday to maintain composure at the outpouring of support to the field that bears his name.

"Ted said, 'Good guys don't cry, you just hang in there,' " Minnie Forbes, the niece of the one-time Negro League owner, said at the re-dedication of Rasberry Field. "... But on this day, if Ted was here, I know he would have shed tears of joy."

About 200 people, including officials from the West Michigan Whitecaps, the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids and Fifth Third Bank, were on hand for the formal ceremony to bring youth baseball back to the inner-city field by July.

There was also a representative from Major League Baseball, former friends and associates of Rasberry's and even a few people from the neighborhood stopped by.

Thanks to a \$54,560 grant from Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a year-long project was able to transform the field – located at 1010 Sheldon SE - back to its former glory days. The grant also covers equipment and uniforms.

"It may have only been \$55,000 but I think it's worth \$55 million" said Lew Chamberlin, co-owner of the Whitecaps. "It's really going to make a difference."

"He would have thought this was something," said Rex Jones, a former player with the Kansas City Monarchs in 1962-63 and helped establish the GAP (Grow, Achieve Progress) program and inner-city baseball with Rasberry.

"I've gone by many times and I've watched this take shape," said Johnny Walker, who learned baseball from Rasberry in Grand Rapids and saw his son play at the field.

Both still live in the neighborhood.

From 450 to 600 Grand Rapids kids, from ages 6-14, are expected to participate in the Y's free Inner-City Youth Baseball/Softball program this summer, said Luke Bronkema, sports director at the YMCA. Rasberry Field will be one of eight fields in Grand Rapids that will be utilized.

The others are Riverside Park, Richmond Park, Garfield Park, Aberdeen Park, Plaster Creek Park, Sibley Field and Martin Luther King Park.

Practices will start June 13 with the first games July 7 and the season runs until August, Bronkema said.

"The naming of Rasberry Field means a lot to us," Forbes said. "It's not the idea of Rasberry Field, but the purpose of what the field is going to be used for. And we thank you so much for that. That was Ted's favorite passion to work with the kids."

Walker and Jones promise they'll be there.

"Oh, definitely," Jones said. "There's a lot of kids in this area, a good mix, and thanks to all the support and interest that's been created, I'm sure that they'll come out."