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Wednesday, July 6, 2011

## Double Duty Classic features future stars

by [Jordane Frazier](#)



Chicago Defender/Thomas Robinson

Thousands of children and families gathered in sweltering U.S Cellular Field June 29, but not to cheer on the home team.

The Chicago White Sox joined with the Black McDonald's Operators Association to host the 4th Annual Double Duty Classic.

The event, held in honor of the Negro League All-Star Game's 78th anniversary, showcased the nation's best of the best minorities in high school baseball.

The Double Duty Classic, named after the late Negro League all-star Ted "Double Duty" Raddliffe, included over 40 high school all-stars from 11 different states from California to D.C. Every year the selected young men are given a chance to face-off against each other in front of family, young admirers and more importantly a section of Major League Baseball scouts.

Since the classic started in 2008, 10 participants have been awarded MLB contracts including Chicago's own Dontrell Rush of Harlan Academy high school, who was recently drafted to the Chicago White Sox just shy of his high school graduation.

"Growing up you always say you want to play for a major league team but to actually do it is big," Rush, two-year Double Duty Classic participant and 2009 MVP, told the Defender. "The classic definitely got me that exposure and got me out there more so people could see what I could do."

A small corner of the large U.S Cellular Field was full of eager bodies as the event kicked off by honoring former Negro League players, which included former White Sox baseball legend Minnie Minoso, as they approached the field. Following the Negro League legends was violinist Lee England, who gave a stirring performance of the Black national anthem, Lift Every Voice and Sing. The classic players had a heavy Midwest presence, with over half of the boys coming from Chicago-area high schools.

"It's a great opportunity to play in the stadium in front of scouts," four-year Double Duty Classic participant Kevin Phillips told the Defender. "You have to be relaxed and play your game or you're going to be nervous and do what you don't want to do."

Phillips, of University City, Missouri, said to be successful on the ball field, you have to close your mind to the stands.

"Just forget about everybody in the stands and play ball," he said.

But the classic has much more in store for its participants than just suiting up in the major leagues. BMOA hopes that events such as the Double Duty Classic will bring more minority faces back to the sport on all levels, in school as well as professionally.

According to an annual study released in April by Richard Lapchick's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports at the University of Central Florida, the percentage of Blacks in major league baseball dropped to 8.5 percent at the start of this year's season from just 10 percent last year. The classic, for the past four years, has shined a light on Blacks and minorities who still play the game and step outside of basketball and football.

"Nobody would have figured a Black kid from Chicago would stick with baseball when it's a lot of violence going on," Rush said. "It's not a lot of Blacks playing so for them to play baseball and stick with it would be a big thing."

But White Sox General Manager Kenny Williams said if it doesn't provide anything else, he hopes the classic will teach the young participants leadership on and beyond the field.

"Leadership skills, character," are traits Williams listed when asked what he wants the boys to gain from this experience. "Focus on not just the athletics in their life but the things that athletics can teach them, and the focus that education can take you to greater places than athletics could ever take you," said Williams.

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