

'Not Bitter, Just Grateful,' Beams Shrine Bound Monte

By JACK LANG

NEW YORK, N. Y.—“My only regret,” said a grateful Monte Irvin, “was that I didn’t get a chance sooner. But I hold no bitterness. I’m just happy that I finally did get a chance. Baseball has been my whole life and it has been wonderful.”

Irvin stood on a raised platform in the Versailles Suite at the Americana Hotel here on February 1 and heard Commissioner Bowie Kuhn announce to a large press, radio, TV audience that Monte had been selected by the Special Committee on Negro Leagues for induction into baseball’s Hall of Fame.

Irvin looked at his attractive wife, Dee, and there was a slight moistening in the eyes of both of them. At long last, Monte had achieved recognition—not for what he is now or for what he did his seven years in the majors with the New York Giants and Chicago Cubs.

HE HAS BEING recognized for the great star he was in the Negro Leagues for 10 years before baseball broke the color line and permitted him to play Organized Ball.

“I’m just sorry I didn’t get a chance to make the majors at 18 or 19 like Willie Mays and Henry Aaron,” Irvin remarked. “I would have liked to play 18 or 19 or 20 years in the majors. I was way past my peak when I got the chance.

“But there’s no point in reminiscing or being bitter. I’m just grateful to have played seven years.”

In those seven years, Irvin was still some kind of hitter. His first full year in the majors he batted .299 and in 1951, when the Giants pulled off The Little Miracle of Coogan’s Bluff and overcame a 13½ game deficit, Irvin was their big man.

DOWN THE stretch, when the Giants were overtaking the heavily favored Dodgers, Irvin batted .365. He finished the season with a .312 average and led the league with 121 runs batted in. He was 32 years old at the time.

“I don’t think there ever was a better hitter than Irvin was those last two months,” said Carl Hubbell, the Hall of Famer who is director of the Giants’ farm system. “It seemed that every time he came to bat with men on base, he delivered.”

Roy Campanella, who beat Monte out for the National League MVP in 1951, spoke by phone from his bed at New York University Medical Center and commented on the Irvin he knew in both the Negro Leagues and in the majors.

“MONTE WAS the best all-round player I have ever seen,” Campy remarked. “As great as he was in 1951, he was twice that good 10 years earlier in the Negro Leagues.

“There wasn’t anything Monte couldn’t do and there wasn’t any position he couldn’t play. He was one of the fastest men for his size I ever saw and what most people don’t know is what a tremendous

arm he had. Oh, what an arm. He threw nothing but strikes.”

Campy went on to relate a conversation with Preacher Roe late in the 1951 season.

“I remember Preacher saying how much he hated to see Irvin come to the plate with men on. ‘I can get Willie Mays out, but I can’t get Irvin out.’ Monte was too tough.”

DESPITE THE fact that Monte said he was past his peak when he joined the Giants, he batted .300 or better for three consecutive seasons and had a lifetime average of .293.

In the 1951 World Series, he hit an astounding .458 with 11 hits in 24 trips.

Ironically, in that famous ninth inning of the 1951 playoff game when Bobby Thomson hit the home run that won the pennant for the Giants, Monte made the only out.

Irvin, who is now an aide in Commissioner Kuhn’s office, joked about that.

“NOW I PREFER to tell people I set the stage by not hitting into a double play.”

As good as he was in the majors, it was for his 10 years in the Negro Leagues that the Special Committee voted him into the Coopers-town shrine.

He played a decade in the black leagues, mostly with the Newark Eagles. Although permanent official records were not kept in the league, Monte is reputed to have won two batting titles. He batted .422 in 1940 and .386 in 1941. He once hit 41 homers in a single season.

Monte also won MVP titles in the Negro National, Mexican and Cuban leagues and was named to the Negro National all-star team five times . . . at four different positions.

IRVIN RECEIVED six votes from the eight-man Special Committee that votes on former stars of the black leagues. A three-quarters vote is required.

Judy Johnson, a star third baseman in the 1930s and ‘40s, and Cool Papa Bell, an outfielder-first baseman during the same period, each received three votes.

Former Cuban star Martin Dihigo received two votes and Ray Dandridge and Willie Foster one each.

Irvin, who was all-state in four sports at Orange (N. J.) High School, began playing professional ball with the Eagles when he was only 17.

“I played under the name of Jimmy Nelson,” he recalled with a chuckle. “I didn’t use my right name until I was 19.”

In 1942, he played in the Mexican League and then went into the Army for three years.

“WHEN I CAME out I was signed to a contract by Clyde Sukeforth of the Brooklyn Dodgers,” he revealed. “I thought Mr. Rickey was forming a team to be called the Brooklyn Brown Dodgers. I later found out he wanted me to play Organized Ball. It was at that time that he was signing Jackie Robinson, Roy Partlow and John Wright.”

Monte might have gotten his chance earlier than 1949, when the Giants finally signed him.

“After I signed with Brooklyn, Mrs. Effa Manley, who owned the Newark Eagles, threatened to go to the commissioner if Mr. Rickey didn’t pay her for my contract. They couldn’t come to an agreement so he released me.”

Had Rickey come up with the money Mrs. Manley wanted, Irvin may very well have played for the



MONTE IRVIN receives an embrace from his wife, Dee, after announcement of his election to the Hall of Fame on February 1.

Dodgers instead of the Giants.

CAN YOU picture an outfield of Duke Snider, Carl Furillo and Irvin?

And playing in a little old band-box like Ebbets Field!

It’s enough to give a pitcher nightmares.

Although two of the men who received votes are on the eight-man committee, Commissioner Kuhn pointed out that both Irvin and Johnson abstained from voting when their names came up.

The make-up of the committee follows:

Everett (Eppy) Barnes, well-known semi-pro player in the East who played against all the great Negro stars. He served as athletic director at Colgate University and is now a member of the United States Olympic Committee.

CAMPANELLA, former great Negro league and major league

star who is himself in the Hall of Fame.

Frank Forbes, who played with the Lincoln Giants of the Negro leagues, scouts for the Giants and is a judge on the New York State Boxing Commission.

Eddie Gottlieb, former owner of the Philadelphia Stars and one of the first to book Negro teams into major league parks. He is a former owner of the Philadelphia Warriors.

Irvin, former Negro league and major league star and now an aide in Commissioner Kuhn’s office.

Johnson, a Negro National League star for 20 years and now a scout for the Phillies.

Sam Lacy, veteran sportswriter for the Baltimore Afro-American who covered the Negro Leagues.

Alex Pompey, owner of the Cuban Stars for 35 years and now a Giants’ scout.



PAST HIS PRIME after a decade in the old Negro National League, Irvin nonetheless starred for the Giants in 1951, when this photo was made, leading them to the National League pennant.



FIRST BLACK to hold executive baseball position, Irvin is shown in 1968 with late baseball Commissioner William Eckert after being named as a public relations assistant in his office.

Irvin, an Optimist, Sees Bright Future for Monte, Giants

Ankle Improving, Star Expects to Regain Speed; 'Great Chance to Win' With Help for Westrum

By ARCH MURRAY

NEW YORK, N. Y.

Monte Irvin, having experienced the longest and toughest season of his brilliant career this year, is anxiously awaiting the Giants' call to assemble for spring training. Back in his Orange, N. J., home after completing the 25-game tour with Roy Campanella's stars, Monte is working hard to do his part in the Giants' drive for a pennant when they open the season next April against the Phillies in Shibe Park.

"I think we've got a great chance to win next year," Monte said shortly after returning home from the long barnstorming tour, "and I want to be able to carry my share of the load right from the start. I'm absolutely confident now that I'll be fit to do it. I didn't do much playing on the tour.



Monte Irvin

The only action I saw was as a pinch-hitter. The rest of the time I coached at first base. I didn't want to take any chances with my ankle.

"But I ran hard every day before the game and it seemed to me that my speed was slowly coming back. I never felt a bit of pain. Carl Seibert, a director of athletics out here in Orange, was our trainer on the tour and he massaged it every day just like Doc Bowman used to do before the Giant season ended. It seemed to me that I was getting more mobility out of it all the time. I'm going up to the Medical Center to have Dr. Harrison McLaughlin—he's the guy who did such a wonderful job in bringing me along so fast last summer—check up on it.

"The way I feel about it is that I'll be almost as fast as I ever was by the time we start the season," continued Monte. "Naturally I'll start slowly in Phoenix but I'll pick up as I go along. Meanwhile, I'm using one of these electrical exercycles every day. It does wonders in strengthening weakened muscles and stimulating the circulation."

Willie Can Still Throw 'Em Out

Irvin said that the 25-game tour through the southland was a long one but it was a financially successful one and Monte enjoyed himself. But the biggest kick he got was watching Willie Mays perform in the games he played while on a brief Army furlough.

"You'd never have thought Willie had ever been away," Monte chuckled. "He looked as if he'd been playing every day all season. But I guess that's because he's just a natural. He can't look anything but good. He made one of those catches of his in Birmingham—the kind that you don't think are possible. The other team had a runner on third base with one out when the hitter looped what looked like a sure hit into left-center. It looked so much like a safe blow that the runner on third started for the plate. But Willie came in like a flash and somehow grabbed the ball off his shoe-tops. Then he straightened up and threw one of those patented strikes of his to third to double up the runner. You've never seen such a surprised guy in your life as that base-runner."

"Any more surprised," a guy asked, "than Billy Cox and the rest of the Dodgers were that day in August, 1951, when Willie spun around full-cycle and threw Billy out at the plate trying to score from third in the game that a lot of people think was the turning point of the 1951 season?"

"No, I guess not," chuckled Monte. "But this fellow couldn't believe it any more than Cox could."

Asked how Willie looked up at the plate, Monte beamed. "Better than ever," he replied. "He was really putting a lot of wood to that ball. Boy, what a hitter he's going to be with a little added experience."

Willie, though, won't be around to help in the coming season. He still has another year to go on his Army hitch and it won't be until 1954 that he'll be back to give the Giants a lift with his wizardry with bat, arm and glove. "Still," Monte added, "it was good to see that he hasn't lost anything in the Army."

Monte Had Six Hits in 15 Tries

Irvin wanted to know all about the stories he'd read down south to the effect that Leo Durocher was going to quit the Giant managerial helm after one more season. Told that nobody hereabouts really knows any more than was in the papers but that Leo sounded genuinely serious in a talk over the long-distance phone a couple of weeks ago, Monte shook his head sadly.

"I sure hope he doesn't mean it," he murmured reflectively. "He's just the best manager there is in the business. I can't believe he will quit. I just can't see Leo out of baseball. He loves it too much."

Though he was restricted to pinch-hitting chores with Campanella's crew, Monte showed that he hadn't lost his touch with a bat in his hand. "I sent him up there 15 times," Campanella revealed, "and he came through with six hits—all of them good, solid base-knocks."

Monte's feeling that the Giants can roar back to take it all next year is based on more than just a hunch. "We're going to have some real help from a couple of youngsters. Bill Taylor, who's coming out of the Army, can really powder that ball and he should strengthen the outfield a whole lot. The pitching figures to be better, especially if Larry Jansen recovers from his back miseries."

"As I see it, the big thing we need is a lift in the catching department. This kid Ray Katt they brought up from Minneapolis last September looks like a real prospect. But even if he needs another year of experience, we should get a lift from Sammy Calderone, another guy who'll be back from the Army. Sam was a good catcher in 1950 and I hear from fellows who've seen him playing Army ball the last two summers that he's improved 100 per cent. He always was a good man with the stick."

"The big thing, though, would be if Wes Westrum could stay sound and catch the kind of ball he did in 1951. There aren't any better catchers around than Wes was down the stretch that fall. There's no reason why Wes couldn't do it all over again if he could just stay healthy."

Giants Mail Ducat Applications to 40,000 Patrons

Monte knows, too, that a lot depends on a fellow named Irvin. The feeling around Our Town still is that even with all the other things that happened to the Giants last summer, they still would have taken all the money if Monte hadn't smashed up his ankle that fatal afternoon in Denver last April. They just couldn't do it, though, without his big stick. His absence put too great a load on the other fellows.

"All I know," Monte said, "is that I feel sure I'll be able to help and you can bet I'll be giving it the full try."

The Jersey Jolter never gave it anything less. The Giants have mailed out their three-ticket plan applications to 40,000 patrons. . . . Garry Schumacher, Horace Stoneham's righthand man, is back at his desk, refreshed after a long auto tour through the South. . . . The Giants expect to be very active at the major league draft in Phoenix next month. They have their eyes on some good prospects who are available.

Campy Made Money, Lost Weight on 25-Game Tour

Dodger Catcher's All-Stars Covered Over 8,000 Miles, Drew an Estimated 60,000

By ROSCOE MCGOWEN
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

If the Dodgers can do as well in their first 25 championship games in 1953 as Roy Campanella's barnstorming troupe did in the same number of exhibitions this fall, they will be off to a pretty fair pennant drive again.

Furthermore, if Campy can render as consistent service next year to the Brooks as he did his itinerant All-Stars, Manager Chuck Dressen is going to be quite contented.

"I played in every one of the games," said Campanella, talking about the trip after his return the first week of November. "I didn't play every inning, but I sure played in most of 'em. I even pitched in one," the National League's most valuable player of 1951 chuckled.

Campy laughingly brushed off the suggestion that Dressen might take advantage of that new skill and toss him in as a relief pitcher.

"We were in Doc's (Trainer Harold Wendler) home town, Baton Rouge," related Campy, "and after five innings the Negro American League All-Stars were ahead, 6 to 4. So I went in and pitched the last four innings."

What happened? Campy was asked. "Well," he said, grinning broadly, "we lost the game, but it was still 6 to 4. They didn't score off me and they only got two hits."

Queried about the sort of stuff he threw, Roy said he "had a little slider, but I couldn't get my curve ball over"—which was repeating a complaint he must have heard many times from Dodger pitchers.

Hank Thompson Also Pitched

A couple of nights after Campy's pitching effort he sent Hank Thompson in to pitch a game.

"Hank pitched five or six innings," said Campy, "and he thought he was through for the night. But I told him he had to go back and play the rest of the game at second base."

Thompson was the leadoff man, Campy said—probably the first pitcher ever to head a batting order. Monte Irvin, the other Giant on the tour, didn't play save as a pinch-hitter—"and he came through six times," said Campy—but Monte also tried his hand at pitching two innings in a game at Galveston near the end of the trip, "and did well, too," according to his temporary boss.

The trip, which covered between 8,000 and 9,000 miles, was made by bus and private automobiles.

"I had my car and Larry Doby and Irvin had their machines," said Campy. "The other fellows used the bus—we didn't use any trains at all. We won 18 games and lost seven and we did pretty well in attendance. I haven't got the figures yet, but I'd say it totaled better than 60,000. On a week-end in New Orleans we had 9,000, then we had 7,000 at Houston and more than that at Memphis."

"We'd have played more games but the commissioner (Ford Frick) told us we had to stop with the game at Waco on November 3. We didn't have any games rained out," Campy added.

Joe Black, the Dodgers' ace, and Hoyt Wilhelm, the star relief pitcher

Joe Black Adds Slow Curve to His Mound Repertoire

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—Back home after a 24-game barnstorming junket during which he appeared on the mound 15 times, Joe Black, Dodgers' relief star, revealed he discovered a new pitch, a slow curve, which he hopes to put into use during spring training at Vero Beach, Fla.

"It was rather cold in the South," Joe explained, "and I kept my arm pretty well bundled up. When I went out to pitch, I didn't put much on the ball. One day, I lobbed up a slow curve and the batter popped up. After that, I kept trying it on the hitters and they still didn't do anything with it."

"I'll add this pitch to my fast ball, slider, curve and change-up on my fast one, but if they hit the slow curve, I'll junk it."

Catching Up on His Sittin'



ROY CAMPANELLA . . . "We won 18 games and lost seven and we did pretty well in attendance."

of the Giants, saw action in the games. Wilhelm pitched for a team of minor leaguers piloted by Whitey Lockman, which played Campy's troupe twice and lost both games, the first one in Charlotte, N. C., where the tour started, the other later in Knoxville, Tenn.

Wilhelm worked a few innings in relief in each of these games. Black pitched only one complete game, the one before the biggest crowd in New Orleans.

"Joe had a no-hitter until two were out in the fifth," related Campy, "and I think they only got two or three hits after that."

Mrs. Campanella Went Along

Mrs. Campanella, who made the entire trip with her husband, said they ran into a lot of cold weather.

"It was very cold much of the time," she said, "but the people just brought blankets and came to the games anyway."

Campanella had one big surprise on the tour, he said.

"We stopped at Farmville, Va., on the way down," he said. "That's where my wife's mother lives. They knew we were coming, so when we got there Newcombe was there and we had a little banquet. Mewk came over from Camp Pickett, where he's stationed."

"Newk looked good. I'd heard that he weighed 270 pounds but that's a lot of malarkey. He looked in good shape and like he didn't weigh more than 235 or 240, which is what he weighed when he pitched for the Dodgers. He's been playing ball a lot, he said."

Campanella doesn't figure that Newcombe will get out of the service short of "the spring of 1954."

Campanella drove the 1,700 miles from Waco to New York in three days, stopping at Nashville and again at Farmville.

Asked if he picked up any weight on the trip, Campanella pretended to be indignant as he replied.

"No sir! As a matter of fact I lost a few pounds."

That should interest Dressen, who has been obsessed with the idea of taking weight off his catcher ever since Chuck took over the management of the Brooks. He has had Campy on a spring diet for the past two years and Roy, who has a healthy appetite, never has been happy about dieting.

"I'm going to Hot Springs, along with Black, about February 1," said the round man, "and I'll be ready when I get to Vero Beach."

In the Campanella tone could be de-

Pitcher With Classy Curve Among Roy's Discoveries

BROOKLYN, N. Y.—In addition to making several thousand dollars for himself and the players in his troupe during his post-season barnstorming tour through the South, Roy Campanella may have discovered a great many more thousands of dollars worth of young baseball talent.

"I found a pitcher," the Dodger catcher said, "and he's really something. I can't tell you his name because I don't want to tip off some of the other scouts. He's only 19, he's big—about six-one, 180 pounds, he's fast and he's got the best natural curve I've ever seen."

"It ain't no thumb-cock curve, either," said the expressive Campy, "like a lot of pitchers throw. It's a real breaker. Oh, I'm tellin' you," and Roy heaved an almost ecstatic sigh, "he's really got it."

Campanella reported his findings on this mystery youth, along with three other young players he scouted, a few days after returning from his tour, to Dodger Veep Buzzie Bavasi.

"It was no special assignment for Campanella," Bavasi commented. "Did you know we have about 700 scouts? We have. All our players are scouts and a lot of them have recommended players whom we've signed in the past. Little Al Gionfriddo has recommended four or five boys we've signed and so have other fellows on our minor league clubs."

Buzzie makes it sound like a monopoly in restraint of equitable distribution of baseball talent. He may hear from Congressman Emanuel Celler.

ected a note of hopefulness that his manager will not put him on another one of those diets at spring training camp.

But Campy had better not bet against the diet, for he will have to have a sylph-like figure to prevent Dressen from handing him that typed food list, which, to Campy, represents diabolical deprivation, and warning him:

"And you stick to that, too, all the time we're down here."

P. S.: Campy tossed a dinner for his barnstorming team shortly after he got home. It was also a bit of an advance celebration of his thirty-first birthday—November 19.