

Pirates' Farm Club Breaks 50-Year League Color Bar

Satchel Paige's Protégé Wins First Game

By William P. Lanier

MAYFIELD, Ky.—Wilker Harrison Thelbert Stubblefield was signed to play baseball for the Pittsburgh Pirate's farm team at Mayfield in the Kitty League. The signing of Stubblefield, a 24-year-old righthander by Branch Rickey Jr., and Scout Bill Burrell, broke a 50 year barrier between Negro and white baseball players in this league.

In an interview last week Stubblefield said that he had no reason to know he was going to be signed to play professional baseball in his home town. He was employed by the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company and was given an order of soft drinks to deliver to the baseball park. Upon reaching the park he said that he carried the order to the concession stand. After returning to the truck two men called him. These two men were representatives for the Pittsburgh Pirates Baseball organization, Branch Rickey Jr., and Scout Bill Burrell. After an introduction an appointment was made to talk terms of a contract in playing ball with the Mayfield Clotheirs.

Stubblefield met with the two representatives and signed a contract June 26 and was requested to report to the baseball park that evening.

Upon reaching the park he went to the dressing room and took a seat along with the other players without saying anything to any one. A short time passed and the manager F. J. Barrett came over to him and said "You are Stubblefield, aren't you?". "The other players were informed that I was going to part of the team, he said." A uniform was given to the new player and lockers were assigned. After getting into the uniform the manager came over to the new player and said, "Are you in shape?" "Do you think that you could work tonight." "I (Stubblefield) informed the manager that I thought that I was in shape."

Realizing that this was a chance for me to make good as a player I was a bit nervous and excited at first. After the manager told me that I would probably start the game that night with Paducah, I found that I came to the park without my shoes and some other equipment that I would need in order to play. All of this equipment was picked up at my home by a friend. Before warm up time I was in uniform. After pitching four innings we (Mayfield) were out in front 4-2, but I was getting a little wild. The manager F. J. Barrett came to the mound and informed me that I was doing fine but that I was only trying too hard. He said, "take it easy," "this is your first time." At this point Stubblefield said that he was pretty wild

and was ready to come out, but he was left in the game. "When the sixth inning came up – felt better." The first batter to face him (Stubblefield) was struck out and the next bat was when the manager, third baseman of the Paducah Chiefs were thrown out of the game during a dispute with the umpire over a called third strike.

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...ter hit a home run. From here on through the 9th inning things were pretty smooth. Mayfield won the game 5-4.

Young Stubblefield is known in his hometown as "Mickey." His baseball goes back to when he was 14. He first started playing ball with the Mayfield Black Hawks.

The fact that Mickey's first start was at home made things pretty easy. The second largest crowd of the season about 1500 spectators watched this lad come through with flying colors to cop his first win. The only troublesome incident during the game...

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...to the Kitty League wasn't entirely unexpected. Several of the League owners went on record during the past winter as saying that it had to happen. They felt that there was no reason to continue barring Negro players in the minor Leagues when they have been very sensational in the major leagues.

Before signing with the Mayfield Clothiers, Stubblefield was playing the with Mayfield Black Hawks, on week ends and holidays. For this season he had pitched in three games and won all of them. In one fo the games he struck out 19 batters and 21 in one of the others.

He won 13 and lost 4 with McState League last year, and was also with the Kansas City Monarchs. While playing with Kansas City, Satchel Paige was mostly responsible for his development as a pitcher.

In 1948 while playing with the Monarchs Stubblefield won 20 and lost 5 games. In 1949 his record was 12-6. While with the McCook Cats of the Nebraska League his record as 13-6 in 1950 and in 1951 it was 8 and 4.

Mickey Stubblefield is five feet and nine inches tall, weight is 165 pounds. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Stubblefield. He is married and has three children. Attended Dunbar High School in Mayfield and West Kentucky Vocational college at Paducah. He is a veteran having served two years in the Navy.

Caption:

GETTING SOME pointers from the manager of the Mayfield Clothiers before game time is the newly assigned pitcher, left, W. H. T. Stubblefield. The manager is F. J. Barrett, Stubblefield won his first game against Paducah 5-4. Defender photo by staff photographer.