

# MLB Winter Meetings

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

**Jane Forbes Clark**

**Josh Rawitch**

**Dave Stewart**

**Tony Reagins**

**April Brown**

**CC Sabathia**

**Josh Barfield**

**Hall of Fame Press Conference**

JANE FORBES CLARK: I'm Jane Clark, chairman of the board of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, and I am so happy that you're all with us today as we unveil what will be a great celebration of Black baseball history during Memorial Day weekend in Cooperstown, New York. And over the weekend the museum will open a new exhibit, *The Souls of the Game: Voices of Black Baseball*.

And we will also host an incredible gathering of baseball talent for the Hall of Fame's first *East-West Classic* legends game. It's a tribute to the annual Negro Leagues All-Star showcase.

We're very excited about that weekend, and needless to say, we want all of you to join us for that.

And I would now like to introduce you to the special guests that are joining me up here on the stage, all of whom share in the enthusiasm for this initiative: A former All-Star player, coach, executive and agent, Dave Stewart; Major League Baseball's Vice President for Social Responsibility April Brown; Major League Baseball's Chief Baseball Development Officer Tony Reagins; a six-time All-Star and former Cy Young Award winner, CC Sabathia; and a former Major Leaguer, who is now assistant general manager for the Chicago White Sox, Josh Barfield.

Before you hear from them, I would like to ask the Hall of Fame President, Josh Rawitch, to say a few words about this really fun, great initiative that we're starting over Memorial Day weekend. Thank you.

JOSH RAWITCH: Well, thank you, Jane, and thank you guys for all being here today. As you can imagine, we are all really, really excited about this initiative, and *The Souls of the Game: Voices of Black Baseball* is something that the Hall of Fame has been working on for multiple years at this point. I can tell you that the event over Memorial Day is going to be something that truly everybody's going to want to be a part of.

Since we started this process, we've talked a lot about how this exhibit is going to differ from the incredible exhibit we've had at the Hall for the last quarter century, and really the big difference, I would say, is that this new exhibit — and this is not just updating an old one; this is really going to be a completely new exhibit — is going to be told from the experience of those who lived it, from players, coach, managers, umpires, executives, fans.

It's really going to be told in their voice, and it's going to tell a story that starts all the way from the beginning of baseball being played with the earliest Black players up through today. So as Jane noted, we have several key people up here, and a few of them have been a part of the 30-person advisory committee that we put in place about two years ago who have been guiding us through this process and making sure that we get it right.

I also want to note that in the crowd here we have Leslie Heaphy, who is one of our visiting curators, alongside Gerald Early, Larry Lester, Rowan Ricardo Phillips, and Rob Ruck. That group, along with our entire staff, it's really been an initiative-wide process, and really, really proud of everything that we've been doing.

So with that, I do want to kick it off with the one of the advisory members at the far right here, a former colleague of mine, and as Jane said, he's done just about everything you can do in the game of baseball, he's also known as one of the Black Aces, a four-time 20-game winner, Dave Stewart, just to talk here for a moment about his involvement in the process and his excitement for the initial initiative.

DAVE STEWART: Well, first of all, I was honored when Josh called and asked if I would be a part of the advisory committee for the Hall of Fame and The Black Baseball Initiative.

What I've learned through this process, and it's been really a learning experience more than it has been advising, is that there's a lot that's not known about baseball, Black baseball and where the game has actually come from, in all different regions.

I know when we say "Black baseball," you think Afro-American baseball, we also speak about the Latinos that have played the game.

And it's a deep process that I think that we have been able to get more than just the surface of, to understand the game, how the game has evolved and where we are today. God, we were just talking the other day on our call about getting a locker from Willie Mays and Barry Bonds that was an old San Francisco Giants locker. I thought that that was absolutely amazing.

But I think that this exhibit is going to be something that we can be very, very proud of. The detail, the intentionality of getting it right, finding out the things that we need to find out and being able to expose it and present it to the general public I think is going to be absolutely outstanding.

Like I said, I'm an advisor, but this process is being led by Josh, and I can't compliment him more on really focusing — as they say, small things really, really matter, and the focus has been on the small things, because the small things end up being immensely huge when it comes to the knowledge of the game, the people that have played the game, and the presentation to the public.

Like I said, I can't say anything more other than I'm really, really honored to be a part of this process.

JOSH RAWITCH: Thank you, Stew. And I will correct one thing, simply that it's not being led by me, it's being led by the entire staff. There are some incredible people working on this, so thank you.

You talked about where we are today. Obviously the Chief Baseball Development Officer Tony Reagins has also been on a number of these calls and helping us make sure we get these things right, so just want Tony to speak about that for a moment.

TONY REAGINS: Sure. I too share in the excitement and the process, extremely honored and excited to be a part of the advisory committee. The work that we put forth as a group over the last couple years has been tremendous.

I see this as a true collaboration. We've had former players, executives, umpires, historians, all involved in this process. I think to have a real process and a credible process, I think you have to have that type of input. I think that the Hall, Josh, I'm going to say led too, but led by Josh and his input and leading our group, has been tremendous.

To be able to shine a light on the contributions of Black baseball, Black players, specifically, in our great game, and be able to pass that along to the next generation is extremely exciting. It really dovetails nicely into what we're doing at Major League Baseball as it relates to Black players and trying to increase the number of Black players at the major league level in some of our youth initiatives.

So we are extremely excited to be a part of this. We know Memorial Weekend with the East-West Game is going to be the culmination of a lot of hard work, but a great event, and we're looking forward to being a part of it the rest of the way.

And just, again, extremely honored to be a part of this process. A lot of hard work has been put into it, and we're looking forward to being a part of it at the end.

JOSH RAWITCH: Thank you, Tony. I would like April Brown just to speak for a moment about some of the outreach programs that we're doing. Because really from the beginning of this, we wanted to make sure that while the exhibit is kind of the heartbeat, the thing that everybody's going to see when they come to Cooperstown, it's also really important to us that we make sure that we bring communities of color to Cooperstown, that we bring this exhibit and this whole initiative outside of our incredible village.

And so I just want April to give a little bit of insight into how that's gone about.

APRIL BROWN: Thank you, Josh. And congratulations to the Hall of Fame. This exhibit is going to be so impactful for the community.

As a young girl, I learned about the souls of Black baseball through my grandfather, who just loved the game. I grew up listening to games on the radio. So those are the sounds of summer for myself.

So, to be able to close equity gaps is what we prioritized through our MLB Together program. And it's together with our partners like the Hall of Fame that we are committed to young people learning about the history of our sport that we love, the history of the players, and to be able to feel proud about the African American presence that has been historical in baseball.

The Hall of Fame has already been committed to this work. They have had more than a thousand youth from all over Upstate New York visit the Hall of Fame, all inclusive, so

that is the most important part of this, at no cost to the school, at no cost to the organization, and at no cost for the student.

To be able to visit the Hall of Fame and learn about the history of the sport and the history of Black baseball is incredibly important, and through this new exhibit and the new initiative, that will continue for students to come from all over New York and all over the country.

So, I commend that effort. We stand behind you at Major League Baseball, and congratulations.

JOSH RAWITCH: Thank you, April. And obviously this is the first time that we've talked about the Souls of the Game opening up over Memorial Day weekend, and so I think it's important that while we kind of shift the attention here to the *East-West Classic* game, please know that this exhibit is going to be way more than just the Negro Leagues, it's really going to go back to the earliest days of the game all the way through modern times.

That said, we are really, really excited about what we've put together for this *East-West Classic* game. When this idea first came up, it was actually proposed by our late colleague John Odell, who we lost this year, and he kind of said — we were on the 90th anniversary, and he said, I think it would be pretty incredible if we found a way to do this.

So, we reached out to CC Sabathia, just to say, Hey, do you think people would do this? Do you think we could get players behind this? Man, he got on board, not only like within the first couple seconds, but he said, 'Trust me, you're going to have people like trying to get to Cooperstown, and you're not going to have enough spots in the game.'

He enlisted his former teammate Chris Young, and CY I guess is his kind of co-captain of sorts. They have put together an unbelievable group.

So, I just want to share some of the names who we expect with us in Cooperstown over Memorial Day weekend. From the Hall of Fame side, both Ken Griffey Jr and Ozzie Smith are locked in as coaches, and we're looking forward to adding several more names that we'll be announcing in the coming months.

As you know, Josh Barfield here, whose great uncle, Albert Overton, he's going to speak in a minute about his presence in the game, but he's joined us today. Then check out this list of players: We've got Tim Beckham; Ian Desmond; Prince Fielder; Dexter Fowler; Curtis Granderson; Tony Gwynn Jr., who of course is the son of Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn; we've got Jerry and Scott Hairston, third generation big leaguers whose

grandfather Sam Hairston played in the Negro Leagues; LaTroy Hawkins; Ryan Howard; Edwin Jackson; Jeremy Jeffress; Adam Jones, who has also been on our advisory committee; Russell Martin; David Price; Tony Sipp; B.J. and Justin Upton; Dontrelle Willis.

It's just an unbelievable list, and we keep adding to it every single day, just the number of All-Stars.

I do want to say thank you very much to Major League Baseball who is helping with the funding to bring players in and put them up, as they do each year for the Classic. That's pretty critical.

So I just want to start with CC to say a few words of his involvement in this. As you see, they're both representing some pretty cool uniforms that we'll talk about in a minute. But, CC, if you could tell us a little bit about why you wanted to get involved in this.

CC SABATHIA: Yeah, thank you. Just when I got the call from Josh about the exhibit that they were doing and putting together a game, and he asked me, 'Do I think I can get players there?', I was like, 'You're going to have to try to beat people off with a stick not to have them come to Cooperstown.'

I got a chance to take a trip up there two summers ago, and it's just an incredible experience. Obviously, I went up there with my son, and getting a chance to visit the museum and now having the chance to bring all these players back that I'm so close with and that we're so close with and connected to actually play a game up there is going to be so much fun.

My career ended with me ripping my shoulder up and not being able to throw a baseball anymore, but I'm rehabbing myself to be able to come back and pitch an inning in this game.

So, I'm super excited to get up there and put on a good show with my friends that I know will really appreciate it.

JOSH RAWITCH: Awesome. Josh, if you can share a few words as well.

JOSH BARFIELD: Yeah, when Chris Young reached out about playing in this game, like CC said, it was a quick yes. He didn't have to give me any details. I was in.

So the opportunity to step out there on the field again with a bunch of guys that you grew up playing with, playing against, watching, it's truly special. I think also bringing awareness to the history of Black baseball, baseball's probably the most history-rich

sport in this country, and Black players play such a big part in that, and I think a lot of it has, you know, been forgotten, and I think being able to spotlight some of that.

Like Josh said, my great uncle played in the Negro Leagues, he played for the (Homestead) Grays, he played for the (Indianapolis) Clowns. Getting to hear, as a young kid, a lot of these stories about what they went through and some of the guys and talking about the Jackie Robinsons and guys like that.

Then, as a player, I got to meet Buck O'Neil before he passed, and he was like a walking almanac of the Negro Leagues, and just hearing the stories, and also him confirming that my great uncle actually did play, because we didn't really believe him for a long time.

So, it means a lot to go out there and be able to put this uniform on and represent what Black baseball means.

JOSH RAWITCH: Awesome. Thank you very much, Josh. I do also want to give out a shoutout to Boeing, who is the partner on the *East-West Classic*, as well as Ebbets Field Flannels who is going to be helping us with the uniforms. These are just two of the ones that they're going to be wearing out there. I will say that you cannot get breathable jerseys quickly enough, and so when I asked CC, 'Hey, is it going to be alright if you guys are wearing flannel?' He said, 'It's Cooperstown, man, I don't care, we're doing it, doesn't make a difference.' So you're going to also see some pretty amazing uniforms there.

We're also going to be building out the parking lot at Doubleday Field into a concourse. So you're going to see food trucks. You're going to see entertainment. One of the food options that we're really, really excited about is actually a barbecue catering company owned by Mookie Wilson, a former Mets legend, and his brothers. They're going to be doing barbecue in the parking lot there. When Mookie found out about this, he was all-in. He couldn't wait to be a part of it.

We do want to encourage our fans out there -- tickets are available right now. You can purchase them on [baseballhall.org](http://baseballhall.org). We also have a charity golf tournament that helps support the mission of the Hall of Fame. That will be on the day after this event.

Really, it's just going to be the first chance to see *The Souls of the Game: Voices of Black Baseball*, an incredible exhibit. We're grateful for everybody being here today, for all who have been supporting the initiative, and we want to open it up. If there's any questions, we're happy to answer anything from the audience now or any of them will be available after the fact in one-on-ones.

Anybody have anything they would like to ask?

**Q. What do you guys think it will mean to the Black players to wear those jerseys when you play?**

CC SABATHIA: That's what I told Josh. I mean, we want to wear the most authentic thing that we can, and having the game up in Cooperstown, the wool jerseys are the option. I think everybody is going to be excited to be able to put them on and represent these Negro League All-Stars.

JOSH BARFIELD: I think putting these on right now -- I got chills putting this jersey on right now knowing what it represents and what the guys had to go through that wore this jersey before us. I think everybody that's going to be part of this game is going to understand and have a real appreciation for what it's about.

**Q. CC, this is mostly for you. Hank Aaron's 50th anniversary of breaking Babe Ruth's record is April 8th, 2024. That's going to be just about a month before your new exhibit opens. Is there any coincidence, any tie-in with that exhibit? Because Hank Aaron already has a beautiful exhibit at the Hall of Fame.**

CC SABATHIA: That's a question for Josh.

JOSH RAWITCH: Certainly we've been in touch with the Braves and the Aaron family pretty regularly, and I'll just say we're going to go ahead and save the answers to your question for a later date.

But, yeah, you can imagine we're very close with the family, and we will definitely be engaging in ways that are still to be announced.

**Q. I'm not sure who this be will for, maybe Dave or CC or Josh. What kinds of stories do you think still need to be told about the Black experience in baseball and maybe that will be told in this new exhibit and this new initiative? What do you think needs to be said about this topic?**

DAVE STEWART: It's one of my favorite movies. That's the best way I can put it. One of my favorite movies is "The Godfather," and if "The Godfather" is playing, I'll stop immediately and watch it no matter how many times I have watched it. I have probably watched it 1,000 times.

So the stories have been told, and we think we know the stories, but the more we dig into the stories, we find out there's something that hasn't been told. So when you say what do I know? I don't know what there is, but we're finding out more and more through



what we're doing, the research, and the work that we're doing that there's stuff that we don't know.

But when this exhibit happens, I can't even say that we'll know the whole story, but we'll know more in the replay than we did in the original story. I guess that would be the best way to put it.

JOSH RAWITCH: Tyler, I would simply add that I think one of the things that's been important to us is that the exhibit that we had there — I know you're very familiar with — is an incredible exhibit. And when it opened in 1997, groundbreaking.

Obviously the way in which the world views baseball, Black baseball, race relations has changed in 25 years. I think some of those stories are certainly going to be in there, but it's also really important to the curatorial team and everyone else involved that it's not just stories of struggle and challenges. It's also the celebration and the great things that have happened over 150 years of Black baseball history. And that's the sort of stuff we're uncovering and sharing.

I don't know if you wanted to add something, CC.

CC SABATHIA: Just following up on what Josh said, I think that's the biggest thing for me, I guess. As a kid growing up, I thought Negro League baseball was backyard, barnstorming baseball. These guys were the best athletes in the game and in the world at the time.

So just continuing to tell that story from the light of, you know, these guys were the LeBron James of that time. And me not really understanding that until I got a chance to go to the Negro League Museum and meet Buck O'Neil and actually really hear the story. I think there's a lot more to be told for sure.

**Q. Josh, were you able to communicate and talk to families of the Negro League players, and what's been their reaction so far?**

JOSH RAWITCH: Bob Kendrick is on our advisory committee as well, and he has been an incredible help, and his museum doesn't need my promotion. It's an incredible place. He's been helpful in a lot of ways. We are still reaching out to a lot of families to understand kind of what people's availability is.

Honestly, there's not been a person that we've talked to who isn't very excited about this. Again, as I kind of pointed out, it isn't just the Negro Leagues. It's obviously all of the years before and after that. But, yes, I would say we've been in touch with several, and there is a lot of excitement for what we're doing.

**Q. Is this an annual event or just one time?**

JOSH RAWITCH: This is really all about the launch of the exhibit and that initiative. We haven't really thought about what we would do in '25 and beyond. I think we're going to see how this goes and go from there.

**Q. Does this replace the annual Hall of Fame Classic this year? Is it the same thing?**

JOSH RAWITCH: For this year it's the same weekend that we normally host the Classic, and this will replace that event, and then we'll figure out where we go from there.

**Q. CC, which team Shohei needs to sign to help him join the Hall of Fame in the future?**

CC SABATHIA: Kansas City Monarchs.

JOSH RAWITCH: There you go. Yes, if we could get Shohei on the Kansas City Monarchs, he can play on May 25th. That's a perfect ending. Thank you.

If anybody has any questions for the participants up here, you're welcome to ask them one-on-one afterwards. Hope to see you all there. Please check out [baseballhall.org](http://baseballhall.org) for all the information.