

BILLY ROWE'S NOTEBOOK

JACKIE'S SPIRIT LIVES ON

NEW YORK CITY --- They made Jackie Robinson a living legend. They resurrected him from the Valhalla of immortality and placed him on the dais at the Jackie Robinson Award Dinner, jampacked with celebrities and just plain folk at the Hotel Pierre. Jackie was there, listening to UN Ambassador Andrew Young and to NAACP director Benjamin Hooks. And he nodded recognition to William A. Shea, builder of the N.Y. Mets Stadium, now dinner chairman, to Althea Gibson, to Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, to Newark Mayor Kenneth Gibson and to Mr. and Mrs. Elston Howard. He waved to his Brooklyn Dodger teammates Joe Black, Roy Campanella and Carl Erskine, and to Larry Doby and Commissioner Bowie Kuhn. He wiped a tear when Joe Williams intoned a Blues rendition of the Lord's Prayer. But the high point, the culmination of a year-long celebration memorializing the 30-year span since he became the first black to make the majors, was when his widow, Rachel, yet trim and beautiful, got up to thank the benefactors including those who must have been there in spirit if not in person -- Joe DiMaggio, Willie Mays, Henry Aaron, Don Newcombe and Reggie Jackson.

"Jackie (is) enormously pleased, honored and grateful", she said. "Your presence here reflects your concern about the plight of minority and economically disadvantaged youth." The Jackie Robinson Foundation and the New York Civil Liberties Union Foundation, dinner sponsors, have assumed these goals as a national objective. Mrs. Robinson told us how she first met Jackie on the UCLA Campus --- "he was a superb athlete but with little hope that existing barriers would permit him . . . to become a potential leader. He planned to be a coach in the local high school." But fierce determination and an unquenchable will to win drove him inexorably towards flashing spikes, a sensational career with the Dodgers starting in 1947 and six pennants later, Most Valuable Player (1949) and finally the Hall of Fame (1962).

HUMAN RIGHTS AT HOME

Jackie's path to the majors was filled with thorns. Rachel told how he was "engaged in his own struggle to become somebody"; how he felt that young people "were a potent source of agony" as he worked and played with them, fought for them and, if necessary, with them . . . always striving to assist them as he had been assisted. We now carry on, basking in that spirit." Then she continued: "As I work and travel in this and other cities it hurts me deeply to observe the cynical attitudes wasting our youths, and to be aware that our nation, so vocal about human rights abroad, is failing to apply its concern and resources to this extraordinary problem at home . . . youngsters no longer just stand aimlessly on street corners but are lining streets caught in the grip of deep despair because their lives hold little meaning or direction, because they don't have homes, jobs, guidance or appropriate education . . . (we) should seek ways of helping these young people rescue themselves . . . The Jackie Robinson Foundation aims to meet this challenge through programs that provided training, financial assistance and guidance."

The foundation does this through scholarships funded primarily by private corporations and institutions. It also maintains a summer internship program aimed at creating a social consciousness among young people, educating them about social activism so that they can work with civil rights, labor and community organizations. Beginning next year JRF plans to sponsor 50 high school seniors who demonstrate these concerns. They are to get an orientation on activism and the workings of government, and then will be assigned to activist groups for on-the-job training in their home towns. Some will get high priority for scholarship help. Another JRF goal: it hopes to acquire a building in New York named after Jackie Robinson. It would then become a facility for a variety of educational, historical, cul-

tural, recreational and commercial enterprises, a center of importance to children, families, communities and visitors to New York. JRF has already launched a national fund-raising campaign supported principally by community, corporations and major sports. "BUY A BRICK"

Rachel said these programs "will not be built and solely maintained by an elite group". She told how \$1 memberships are mushrooming. But she left unsaid a budding national campaign to "Buy a Brick" in the structuring of the Jackie Robinson building. We had offered the idea in the hope that the foundation will initiate a "Brick for Jackie" Drive carrying a contribution price tag of modest dimensions to attract non-elites. She didn't mention bricks in her speech. Rachel called them "fundamental support structures for our children and their families".

A smile creased Jackie's cheeks as at his mythical dais perch, he heard his wife express "bravos" to Ellen Azorin "for a superb job of coordinating the dinner". And he beamed when Rachel said she was accepting the Florina Lasker Civil Liberties Award "with a deep sense of humility," adding that "in a symbolic way it is my firm belief that a vital link can be forged between this assemblage and those youngsters hanging out on 116th St." She concluded to thunderous applause. It ended just as it had begun with an ovation, after Benjamin Hooks delivered an oratorical masterpiece introducing Ambassador Young and supersongster Joe Williams voiced the Lord's Prayer . . . STAY LOOSE for a Happy New Year.

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