

Jess Elster's Career Ends

Famed Negro Baseball Figure of Grand Rapids Dies

(By Roscoe D. Bennett.)

Jess Elster, for almost a half century the best known baseball figure in Grand Rapids and western Michigan, is dead.

The lanky Negro manager of the Colored Athletics passed unexpectedly at his home at 43 Lexington-av., SW, Sunday evening. He had been suffering from a heart ailment for more than a year. He was 68 years old.

Jess was an institution in Grand Rapids. His Colored Athletics were known in virtually every hamlet and village in this section of the state. He was widely respected both as a competitor, baseball player and a showman. Through his efforts with his beloved Athletics, his patience and his ability to accept defeat along with victory, Elster and his team were always welcome competitors. He has been the honor guest at "Jess Elster days" in scores of communities and he always accepted the homage paid him with dignity.

Started in 1905.

It was back in 1905 that Jess Elster became associated with baseball in a big way in Grand Rapids. At that time the famous Ceresotas, probably the strongest independent team here, played a group of non-uniformed Negro players and they were drubbed 46 to 6. In the lineup on this occasion was Elster, a 22-year-old stripling, a newcomer to Grand Rapids. He played just fair baseball that day at first base but, a zealot always, Jess decided that something could be done with his mates. The next year he assumed management of the Colored Athletics. The first thing he did was to visit W. B. Jarvis' sports goods stores and arrange to buy

a set of uniforms which he paid for out of his own pocket. Then he set about to build a list of games and a stronger team. His efforts were not successful at first but he persisted until the Athletics were able to hold their own with any of them and tradition has persisted through the years.

A Steady Workman.

With the exception of one year, when Jess turned former, he has always been at the helm of the club. He overcame discouragements, malicious interference and obstacles many times that could have wrecked the Athletics many times over, but Jess, a very steady character, persisted.



JESS ELSTER.

Jess' steadiness and persistence were reflected in other ways than baseball. For example, Jess was

never unemployed. Down in Sterling, Ky., where he was born and raised when 18 years old Jess was working for the Werneke Co., manufacturers of bookcases. The Werneke company in 1904 became affiliated with the Macey Co. of Grand Rapids and moved here and with it came Elster. He was then a cabinet maker. He has always been associated with the Macey firm, with the exception of the one year he was on a farm in 1925. When he returned from that venture he went back to work again and his figure in the cab of Macey trucks running about the city has been familiar to thousands.

Persistence Paid Off.

The history of the Colored Athletics and their manager has always been honorable no matter how rough the going might have been. There were times when the Athletics were the top baseball attraction in Grand Rapids, luring thousands to old Ramona park weekly and they were profitable but even in these lush days the Elster tradition was preserved. There were times also when the fortunes of his team were not so good and very few watched them play but it made no difference, he carried on just the same.

A little more than a year ago, at the close of the 1949 season, Jess was stricken with a heart ailment. His physician told him at the time

ued.
Reno
Wakefield
Temple
 ger, R. Passaic
 enney, D.
 Cliffside Park
 ley, Jr., R. Kearny
 ecchia, R. Newark
 Lehlbach, R. Newark
 ton, D. Jersey City
 art, D. Jersey City

.....Santa Fe
Rye
Flushing
 kley, D. Bronx
 atrick, D. Bronx
 lard, R. Tarrytown
 Jr., R. Garrison
 win, R. Coxsackie
 D. Albany
 mas, R.
 Hoosick Falls
 r, R. Schenectady
 ell, R. Potsdam
 cin, R. Oswego
 D. Whitesboro
Afton
 ncock, R. Syracuse
Auburn
 e, R. Bath
 ffy, D. Rochester
 sworth, Jr., R.
 Genesco
 rews, R. Buffalo
 r, D. Williamsville
 t, D. Buffalo
 R. Dunkirk

k, D. Fayetteville
 th, D. Thomasville
 ghton, D.
 Laurel Springs
 inkle, D. Gastonia
 er, D. Asheville