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

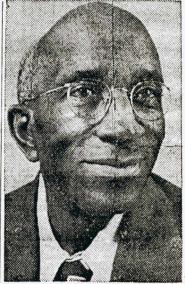
was 68 years old.
Jess was an institution in Grand Rapids. His Colored Athletics were known in virtually every hamlet and village in this section of the state. He was widely respected both as a competitor, baseball player and a showman. Through his efforts with his beloved Athletics, his patience and 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 com-

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 nonuniformed Negro players and they were drubbed 46 to to 6. In the lineup on this occasion was Elster, a 22-year-old stripling, a new-comer 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 managership of the Colored Athletics. The first thing he did was to visit W. B. Jarvis' sports goods stores and arrange to buy

out of his own pocket. Then he letics and their manager has alerews, R. Buffalo set about to build a list of games ways been honorable no matter 1. D. Buffalo and a stronger team. His efforts how rough the going might have R. Dunkirk a set of uniforms which he paid for 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 discourage-ments, 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 munities and he always accepted were reflected in other ways than the homage paid him with dignity, baseball. For example, Jess was

ued.

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 maffiliated with the Macey Co. of atrick, D... Bronx afriliated with the Macey Co. of atrick, D... Bronx atrick, D... Bronx are the matter of Werneke company in 1904 became been associated with the Macey mas, R. Hoosick Falls firm, with the exception of the one year he was on a farm in 1925. When he returned from that venwture he went back to work again in and his figure in tre cab of Macey trucks running about the city has been familiar to thousands.

Persistence Paid Off.

The history of the Colored Athbeen. There were times when the Athletics were the top baseball attraction in Grand Rapids, luring thousands to old Ramona park k. D. Fayetteville thousands thou 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 allment. His physician told him at the time Flushing

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