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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 23, 2004

## **Buck O'Neil Negro Leagues Baseball Classic makes a pitch to get urban youth to "play ball!"**

*Twelve teams to compete in the 18-and-under wooden bat tournament.*

**Kansas City, MO**—He might be baseball's greatest pitcher. After all, Negro Leagues legend John "Buck" O'Neil has made his living in the game he loves for more than 70 years. But at age 92, O'Neil is saving his best pitch in hopes of encouraging more urban kids to play baseball.

Four years ago, O'Neil lent his name to a partnership between the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum (NLBM) and the Greater Kansas City Sports Commission that resulted in the development of the **Buck O'Neil Negro Leagues Baseball Classic**, a national 18-and-under wooden bat tournament that would be played annually at Satchel Paige Stadium (51<sup>st</sup> & Swope Parkway) in the heart of the inner-city.

The goal of the Buck O'Neil Baseball Classic is to educate youths about Negro Leagues baseball history; promote baseball in the urban core; and provide competitive opportunities for inner-city baseball players.

The 2004 tournament will be held June 25-26 in Kansas City and will see an expanded field of 12 teams vying for the coveted title. Games will be played at Satchel Paige Stadium, Rockhurst University (1100 Rockhurst Rd.) and Kansas City 3&2 complex (9600 Blue River Rd.). The championship game is scheduled for 7:00 p.m. Saturday at Satchel Paige Stadium.

As much as O'Neil is excited about the expanded tournament field, he's even more excited about the prospect that area kids will fill the stands to watch these talented youth play.

"My love for the game began by watching older kids play and wanting to emulate what they did," O'Neil said. "That's what makes this tournament so special. It's rare that a national-caliber baseball tournament is held in the inner-city. This event not only creates an opportunity for urban kids to compete, but allows them to see their peers playing a high-skilled brand of baseball."

The 12-team tournament includes teams representing RBI (Reviving Baseball in the Inner-City) clubs from Kansas City, St. Louis, Memphis and Atlanta. Tournament events get underway at 5 p.m. on Thursday (June 24) with players and coaches meeting O'Neil and touring the NLBM. Afterward, O'Neil and local Negro Leaguers will host a barbeque dinner for the teams.

*Other Buck O'Neil Negro League Baseball Classic events include:*

■ **Negro Leagues Skill Competition**—(7:30 p.m., Thursday, June 24) Satchel Paige Stadium: The event features the "Cool Papa" Bell Base Running Challenge; Oscar Charleston Throwing Accuracy Competition and the Josh Gibson Home Run Derby. *Admission is free.*

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■ **Wilbur “Bullet Joe” Rogan Youth Clinic**—(8:30 a.m. to 10 a.m., Saturday, June 26): A free youth baseball clinic for boys and girls 8-12 years old will be held at the baseball diamond at 43<sup>rd</sup> & Cleveland. To register, call (816) 474-4652 ext. 225.

Tournament pool play begins on Friday at 9 a.m. with games at each tournament site. Tickets cost \$5 for adults. Youths dressed in baseball uniforms and children (13-and-under) will be admitted free. All-session passes are also available.

*Sponsors/supporters: Thriftway, Sprint, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, NTDF, Gates Bar-B-Q, Metro Sports, Douglass National Bank, Thomas McGee, L.C., The Kansas City Star and Jackson County.*

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