

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kalamazoo Public Library is Offering a New Program This Spring for Baseball Fans

Kalamazoo, MI—March 1, 2021. Calling all baseball fans! Kalamazoo Public Library (KPL) is offering a new program this spring called Baseball Books-on-Deck 2021.

*For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone
The flowers appear on the Earth
The time of the singing of birds is come
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.* - Song of Solomon 2:11-12

Baseball Hall of Fame broadcaster for the Detroit Tigers, Ernie Harwell, would recite the above verse at the start of every first spring training game. For many Tiger fans, hearing Harwell's voice indicated the beginning of spring. KPL will add to the celebration of the new baseball season with a series of authors and historians speaking on a variety of topics related to America's Pastime.

Join KPL and celebrate the beginning of the baseball season by attending four special author/historian presentations about America's Pastime. Hear about a little-known Tigers shortstop from Kalamazoo, spring in pre-Castro Cuba featuring rookie Jackie Robinson, learn about the lives of the great women of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League after playing baseball and Kalamazoo baseball from 1880-1920. Do not strikeout and miss learning about some of baseball's unique history! Register for all four, it's like hitting a home run!

Supported and co-sponsored by the Southern Michigan Chapter of the Society for Baseball Research (SABR). Attend all four events for a chance to win SABR prizes!

The following programs require registration to receive the Zoom link to attend. Please visit kpl.gov/events to register.

Thursday, April 8 | 6:30–8 pm | Online

Featured Book: *The Shortstop from Kalamazoo: The Life and times of Neil Berry* by William Christiansen

About the book: Neil Berry grew up on Walter Street in Kalamazoo across the street from Upjohn Park. He went from playing in a city park to winning state basketball championships at

Kalamazoo Central High School. While playing American Legion ball (Dr. Homer Stryker was his manager), Berry caught the eye of a Detroit Tigers scout, but did not sign with the team until after attending one year at Western State Teachers College, where he played in three sports. After a few years in the minor leagues, and over two years in the Army during WWII, Berry became the starting shortstop for the Tigers in 1948. Hear about a from Kalamazoo, not named Jeter, and his many brushes with baseball immortals like Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, Yogi Berra, Ted Williams, Bob Feller, and Hal Newhouser.

About the author: William Christiansen (spiderkazoo@gmail.com) is a local author, photographer, and life-long Tiger fan. Bill wrote his first book, *The Perfect Calm, The Titanic Disaster: A Case Study in Root Cause Analysis*, after his retirement following a forty-year career with The Upjohn Company and successor companies, including Pfizer. Born and raised in the Kalamazoo area, Bill currently lives in the Schoolcraft, Michigan with his wife and “Out of the Zoo” publisher, Deb and their cat, Mitchell.

Thursday, April 15 | 6:30–8 pm | Online

Featured Book: *Havana Hardball: Spring Training, Jackie Robinson, and The Cuban League* by César Brioso

About the book: In February 1947, the most memorable season in Cuban League history finished with a dramatic series between the league's eternal rivals, Almendares and Habana. As the celebration spread through the streets of Havana and across Cuba, the Brooklyn Dodgers were beginning spring training on the island. One of the Dodgers' minor league players was Jackie Robinson.

He was on the verge of making his major-league debut in the United States, an event that would fundamentally change sports--and America. To avoid harassment from the white crowds in Florida during this critical preseason, the Dodgers moved their spring training base to Cuba, where black and white teammates had played side by side since 1900.

It was also during this time that Major League Baseball was trying to bring the "outlaw" Cuban League under the control of organized baseball. As the Cubans fought to stay independent, Robinson worked to earn a roster spot on the Dodgers in the face of discrimination from his future teammates.

Havana Hardball captures the excitement of the Cuban League's greatest pennant race and the anticipation of the looming challenge to MLB's color barrier.

About the author: César Brioso (cbrioso@usatoday.com) is a digital producer and former baseball editor for USA Today Sports. In his thirty-one years as a sports journalist, he has written for the Miami Herald and the South Florida Sun-Sentinel. He also is the author of *Last Seasons in Havana: The Castro Revolution and the End of Professional Baseball in Cuba*, winner of the 2020 SABR Baseball Research Award.

Thursday, April 22 | 6:30–8 pm | Online

Featured books: *The All-American Girls After the AAGPBL* and *Isabell “Lefty” Alvarez: The Improbable Life of a Cuban American Baseball Star* by Dr. Kat D. Williams

About the books: The hit 1992 film *A League of their Own* made the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League famous. But the players' stories are still untold. The 600 women who played for the AAGPBL through the 1940s and 1950s enjoyed a rare opportunity to lead independent lives as well-paid professional athletes. Their experiences in the league led many to education and careers they never imagined.

As teachers, coaches, and role models, they strove to broaden the horizons of girls and young women. Many continued to be involved in athletics, supporting the efforts leading to Title IX and the women's sports revolution. Today, they are dedicated to preserving the history of women in baseball and creating opportunities for girls to play.

About the author: Kat Williams (williamskath@marshall.edu) is a Professor of Women's Sport History at Marshall University, author of *The All-American Girls After the AAGPBL: How Playing Pro Ball Shaped Their Lives*, and *Isabel Lefty Alvarez: The Improbable Life of a Cuban American Baseball Star*. She is a Fulbright Scholar, a lifelong baseball fan, and former shortstop. It is Kat's sincere belief that she accomplished all the former goals because of the latter. Through her teaching, scholarship and advocacy Kat has dedicated many years to the preservation of girl's and women's sport history, and to helping girls become independent, confident leaders. She continues that work as president and a founding member of the International Women's Baseball Center.

Thursday, April 29 | 6:30–8 pm | Online

Presentation: *Baseball in Kalamazoo 1880-1920 – A Contrast in Colors*, presented by Keith Howard

By the late 1800s, baseball had become America's favorite pastime, but that doesn't necessarily mean it was fair play for everyone. For this session we'll take a look at Kalamazoo's factory, college, and state league teams during the decades around the turn of the 20th century, as well as teams from Kalamazoo's growing African American community. From the 1897 Michigan State League champion Kazoos and the nationally famous Ganzel brothers, to the Kalamazoo Browns and the Colored Stars, we'll explore the local baseball scene as it was during the decades before the Great Depression.

Keith Howard (keithh@kpl.gov) is a Digital Preservation Specialist at the Kalamazoo Public Library, but one of his true passions is exploring and documenting local history. He has authored or contributed to more than fifty articles on the KPL website, and his work has appeared in several leading publications, including Michigan History Magazine, SW Michigan Spark, Brewery History Journal, and others. Forever fascinated by “what used to be,” Keith has

explored local baseball in a series of articles, from its first introduction in Kalamazoo during the 1850s to the community's current standing in the Northwoods League. Keith is a two-time Western Michigan University grad and an adjunct instructor of business communication and information technology at Haworth College of Business. He lives in Oshtemo, MI.

For more information about these, or other baseball-related programs at KPL, please contact Kevin King at kevink@kpl.gov.

The series is being supported and co-sponsored by the Southern Michigan Chapter of the Society for Baseball Research (SABR).

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