

Celebrating a Legend

Revered Negro Leagues player Buck O'Neil receives a handsome Hall of Fame tribute.

By [Steve Aust](#) (11-19-2008)

John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil embodied the resilience and resourcefulness of the Negro Leagues. Born in Carrabelle, FL, in 1911, he was denied admission to high school because of the lack of educational opportunities afforded to African-Americans in segregated Florida. After spending a year picking celery on a farm with his father, he moved to Jacksonville and attended high school and college before leaving to play semipro barnstorming games with Satchel Paige and other Negro League luminaries.

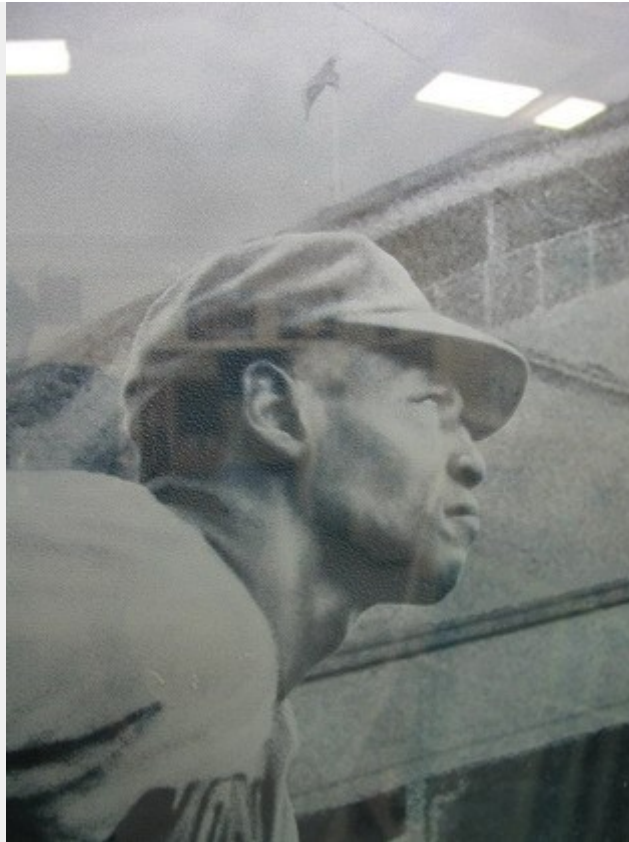
In 1938, he signed with the Kansas City Monarchs and starred for them for 12 seasons (during his prime, he missed the 1944 and 1945 seasons to serve in the military during World War II). He compiled a .288 career batting average, and hit a career-high .350 in 1946.



To complement a statue that honors famed Negro League baseball player John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil, Santa Rosa, CA-based Amri Studios created crystal panels measuring 5 1/2 x 10-ft. that celebrate his career and character.

After serving as the Monarchs' manager for three seasons, the Chicago Cubs hired O'Neil as a scout in 1955. He signed Lou Brock to his first Major League contract and played a role in shepherding Ernie Banks, who became known the beloved "Mr. Cub," to the big leagues.

He scouted for the Cubs and Kansas City Royals until the late '90s, and gained renewed popularity for tales from his playing days that appeared in Ken Burns' 1994 PBS documentary, *Baseball*. He served on the Baseball Hall of Fame's Veterans Committee, which helped induct several Negro League players whose accomplishments had been overlooked, from 1981 until 2000. He also spearheaded the founding of Kansas City's Negro League Baseball Museum, which opened in 1990.



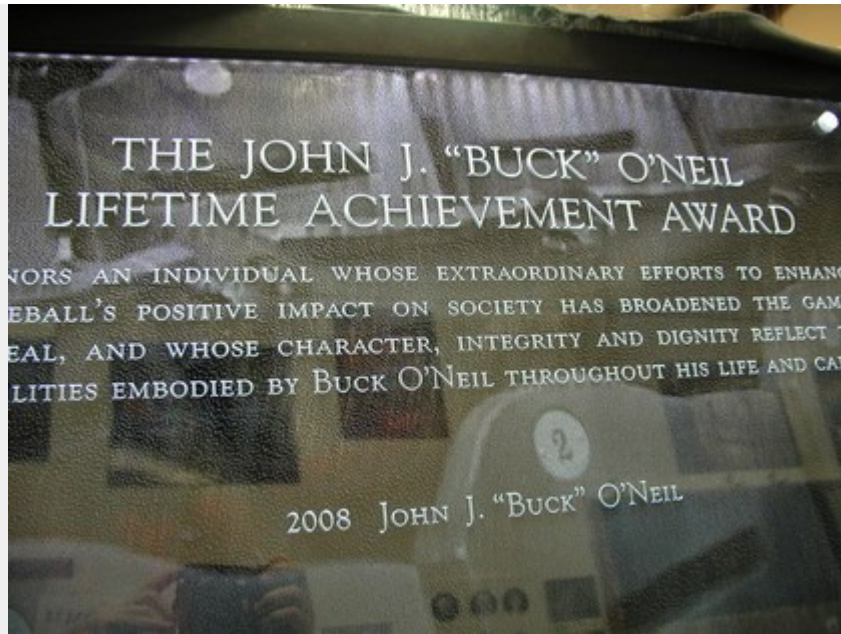
A closer look at one of the panels reveals the detail created by thousands of rounded chisel cuts. A dark background creates a sepia tone, and edgelighting from proprietary-design LEDs provides handsome accents.

Unfortunately, he wasn't inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. In 2006, when 17 other Negro League players were inducted into the Hall of Fame on a ballot designed to be the final, definitive induction of Negro League players, O'Neil himself fell one vote shy of induction, yet graciously accepted his fate. That October, he passed away.

Although officials at the Cooperstown shrine couldn't force O'Neil's induction, they rectified this oversight this past summer and commissioned Santa Rosa, CA-based Amri Studios, which fabricates

glass sculptures and carved-crystal signage, to build a 5½ x 10-ft., three-panel, crystal mural as part of an exhibit to be installed behind a life-size statue that pays tribute to a man known as a consummate gentleman on and off the field.

Christina Amri, the studio's principal, said she and her design and fabrication team consulted the Hall and O'Neil's archives for photos and information about his life and career.



Amri also created this crystal panel that conveys the Buck O'Neil Lifetime Achievement Award, which will be bestowed in the future to a baseball player or official whose career embodies O'Neil commitment to service.

"I've never been much of a baseball fan, but I've been amazed by the number of fans I know who've spoken so enthusiastically about Buck O'Neil," she said. "Looking at his character, his career and the contributions he's made to the game, it was an honor to take part in this project."

After an Amri designer created a 90-dpi Adobe Illustrator® file that integrates a collage of photos from O'Neil in action and as an elderly man, as well as a backdrop of the exterior of Chicago's Wrigley Field. Sculptors chisel-carved the ½-in.-thick crystal to varying depths – deeper for the letters, more shallow for imagery – until they'd created what Amri called "thousands of round dots into the glass." Proprietary-design LEDs encircle the panels' perimeter with edge lighting that complements surface details. For the panel's backdrop, Amri painted

the wall a plum-like color that refracts through the panels' incisions and creates a sepia tone.