

MLB Winter Meetings

Monday, December 9, 2024

Dallas, Texas, USA

April Brown

Councilman Cedric Norman

Michael Mays

Jeff Bleich

Shana Daum

Jake Peavy

Charity Auction Press Conference

APRIL BROWN: Good morning. Thank you for joining us this morning. My name is April Brown. I'm the senior vice president of social responsibility and diversity at Major League Baseball.

It is my true honor to make this year's announcement of the 2024 Major League Baseball Winter Meetings Charity Auction. Held each year during baseball industry's largest gathering, this special announcement and this annual auction was first started by our public relations groups of all the MLB clubs and the office of the commissioner to support causes that were really close to our sport and close to those that we honor in our game.

Through this effort over the last 11 years, MLB, together with our clubs, have raised more than \$2 million to organizations focused on causes like ALS and supporting families and individuals who have been diagnosed; to opportunities to support our historic museums like the Jackie Robinson Museum, the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum; a scholarship fund that was incredibly special to us as it honored the great Katy Feeney, who was really an icon in our sport; the establishment right here in Texas for a new Boys & Girls Club in Uvalde after the tragedy a few years ago; and, of course, last year, we supported again our partner, Stand Up to Cancer.

These previous charity auctions were all inspired and honored to remember those who we've either lost in our game or who have been battling through chronic diseases.

This past June we lost an iconic hero in our sport, the great Willie Mays. Fittingly at that time, we were in Birmingham at Rickwood Field, Willie's original professional baseball home. We were there literally at the point we heard the



2024 BASEBALL WINTER MEETINGS DALLAS

news, and quickly this incredible event that was designed to play tribute to the legacy of the Negro Leagues players turned both into a tribute and a celebratory memorial of Willie.

Through MLB at Rickwood Field, we gave back to the Birmingham community in countless ways, between Alabama native Ryan Howard literally going to homes of living Negro League players to invite them, especially to the game, and to give them that experience.

In addition, we worked with the iconic and historic A.G. Gaston Boys & Girls Club to support the youth that walk through those doors each and every day, and countless other opportunities that led into the event and after.

We never saw our time there as one-and-done or a one-time engagement for our sport. That's why we're so fortunate and excited to have this current opportunity right in front of us right now, right in the town where the great Willie Mays grew up, at the field that was renamed in his honor in 1985, a field that after a few decades of wear and tear and use could use a little love.

With that, I am proud to formally announce that this year's winter meeting auction will benefit the refurbishment of Willie Mays Park in Willie's hometown of Fairfield, Alabama.

(Applause.)

This effort will not just be MLB alone. We have the blessing of so many connected to his legacy and that have the mission to instill the love of our game that Willie had to all of the youth in the area growing up in the neighborhood where he grew up. This will be a collaborative process between Major League Baseball, the city of Fairfield, and those connected to preserving and celebrating his giant-sized legacy.

We've begun the process of mapping out a vision for the fields, which will include access for all levels of players, from the very youngest being introduced to our game to those in the advanced levels. So we're so excited to get this process started today. With this announcement, the clock begins.

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

With that, I want to bring up some supporters to say a few words. First and foremost, let me introduce to you our first speaker, councilman of district 4 in the city of Fairfield, Cedric Norman.

(Applause.)

CEDRIC NORMAN: Thank you all. Good morning. I bring you greetings on behalf of Mayor Eddie Penny, council president Herman Carnes, Jr., the Fairfield City Council, and the citizens of Fairfield.

In Fairfield, Alabama, we are proud to carry the name of one of baseball's greatest heroes and Fairfield's beloved son, Willie Mays. The park, originally called 66th Street Park, was built shortly after World War II to accommodate Fairfield's growth in population. Decades later the park fell into disrepair and was renovated in the 1970s. In 1985, 66th Street Park was rededicated as Willie Mays Park.

During the summer of 2016, community organizations rallied together to give Willie Mays Park much-needed repairs. Unfortunately, in the summer of 2017, a small tornado hit the city of Fairfield, causing severe damage to the park. Although repairs were made, the park no longer reflected the luster it once exuded.

Willie Mays Park has served as a playground and a meeting place for the community, the home field of our little league, middle, and high school baseball teams, and home for Birmingham's metro area's only HBCU, Miles College Golden Bears baseball team.

Restoring this park isn't just about Fairfield. It's about preserving the spirit of baseball itself. It's about creating a space where the next generation of players and fans can feel inspired by the greatness of Willie Mays and the values he stood for, hard work and perseverance. We need your support to breathe new life into this park, to build fields where kids can play, and to honor the legacy of the man who showed the world what greatness looks like.

Willie Mays was a strong supporter of his hometown. Whether serving as chairman of a fund-raiser to benefit Miles College athletics, or coming back home to provide baseball equipment to the youth, Willie did whatever he could to support the future of Fairfield.

Baseball has always been about community, and this is our chance to prove it. Together we can restore Willie Mays Park and make it a place worthy of its name, a place where the next Willie Mays might pick up a glove for the first time.

Let's honor the game we love by investing in the

communities that love it. Thank you again to Major League Baseball, its clubs, specifically the San Francisco Giants, and community partners, Mr. Michael Mays, and the Say Hey Foundation. We look forward to growing this partnership for the betterment of our community, our kids, and the game of baseball.

We thank you for your support in advance. Thank you.

(Applause.)

APRIL BROWN: Thank you, Councilman.

Our next speaker was with us at Rickwood Field when he received the news of his father's passing. He quickly traveled from Birmingham directly to California to say good-bye to his father and then returned right back at Rickwood with us to help celebrate his legacy.

Please welcome to the podium son of Willie, Mr. Michael Mays.

(Applause.)

MICHAEL MAYS: Thank you. I love this game of baseball. Granted I grew up in a household where a single at-bat could be brought as a metaphor for your entire life, but I think I would have loved it anyway.

Any Major League Baseball player, any ballplayer you talk to will tell you that playing at Rickwood is about fun. This field that we're talking about now, I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in Fairfield, Birmingham over the last couple of years, reconnecting, organizing, trying to start some new sports programs. All the coaches I've talked to, they're telling you that what we're calling Willie Mays Field now, when they were boys was their badge of honor, and when you go there, you absolutely feel it.

I had the opportunity to go down a few months before the big game at Rickwood -- which by the way, for my money, would be played every year as the Willie Mays Classic -- I'm just saying. But I've had the opportunity to go down with Jake and Carol with productions, and when we got out to the field, we started talking about feeling it, like you could feel their presence, you could feel the energy.

We made a pact at that time that we'd make that happen. So now standing here, being the subject of the charity auction and MLB has stepped up to the plate -- see what I did there -- and having the council involved, the foundation involved, I couldn't think of a better way or a better place to jump start these initiatives than with MLB and Rickwood.

My father left me with a simple task, to bring as much



camaraderie and support to struggling youth as we can. I'm more excited than I could tell you that it's begun. I promise to make sure this momentum stays with this project. I'm going to stay focused on Birmingham, on Fairfield.

So donate, donate hard, make it happen. If dad was here, he'd take off his jacket and auction it to you. I don't know if you want mine. Anyway, thanks for this. Don't be surprised if you see me back here because we've got a lot more coming.

(Applause.)

APRIL BROWN: Thank you, Michael. We might take your jacket. We'll see. We might put it up there.

Our next speaker is a longtime friend of Willie, a trusted confidant, and a board member of the Say Hey Foundation. Please welcome Jeff Bleich.

(Applause.)

JEFF BLEICH: Thank you very much, April. Thank you to Major League Baseball for this wonderful tribute to Willie. I'm just honored to be here with his son Michael, with our good friends from the Giants, and with Councilman Norman from Fairfield.

Thank you, Michael, for what you said and for being such a great representative of how your dad spoke. He'd speak off the cuff -- sometimes way off the cuff -- but always from the heart. He was always wanting to, as I said, take the coat off his back to please a kid or to do something good for society.

This is exactly the kind of tribute that Willie had hoped for, in his hometown on the field that he grew up, and that's how he thought about ball fields. He didn't think of them as just a place where you played a game or you learn some skills. They're a place where you grew up.

With all the talent that Willie had, with all the talent and the charisma that he had, he started out in very tough circumstances, grew up dirt poor. His mom left him shortly after he was born. He was basically raised by the people of Fairfield. He had a couple of aunties who looked after him. His dad and the guys in the industrial leagues, they taught him the game of baseball, took him under their wing.

The Birmingham Black Barons gave him the opportunity to play on a professional field, and they looked after a 17-year-old kid. He had teachers like Mrs. Rice, who recognized how intelligent he was and allowed him to see that in himself. He started out in Fairfield High School,

back then a segregated school. He couldn't get a regular education. He was trained to be a dry cleaner. Willie always said, if he hadn't become the greatest baseball player in the world, he would have been the greatest dry cleaner in the world.

But he was able to become Willie Mays and achieve his full potential because of all these people who looked after him.

Then Major League Baseball, Leo Durocher, and Horace Stoneham, all the folks -- whether it was Peter McGowan and Larry Baer, with the Mets, Mrs. Joan Payson. He always talked about them as being the people who made it possible for him to grow up and to live the life that he was capable of having.

When he set up his Say Hey Foundation, that was the vision for the foundation, to give kids who grew up the way he had the same opportunity to be the fullest expression of themselves. And to give them not just a field to play on, but a field to grow up on, a field with coaches and mentors and friends and colleagues and all the things that go into becoming a full person.

Now once it's funded, Willie's foundation is planning not only to contribute heavily to this effort where he grew up, but to use it as a model with MLB, with the Giants, with clubs around the country, to build similar ballparks and give similar kids the same chance that he had. The next Willie Mays is out there, and this is an opportunity for them to live their fullest life.

This is what Willie wanted with his legacy, to pay it forward. I'm just so grateful to all of you, to Major League Baseball, to the Giants and the city of Fairfield for making it all possible. Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

APRIL BROWN: Thank you. Our next speaker is a key member of Willie's beloved San Francisco Giants and someone who's helped us make today possible with the efforts of herself and her team. It's my pleasure to introduce Senior Vice President of Communications and Community Relations for the Giants, Shana Daum.

(Applause.)

SHANA DAUM: Thank you so much. Thanks to everyone who's here today and so many of you out there -- everyone out there who's supporting this effort.

Willie was so loyal to his roots, and we know we obviously started those roots in Fairfield, in Alabama. He went to New York, and then we were the really lucky ones that got

him in San Francisco for, what, 70-plus years. He always cared about the -- as Jeff just said, he cared about people, he cared about the people who provided him the opportunities.

It's so important we have this opportunity to carry on his legacy, not just for the generations of fans that got to know him in San Francisco, those who watched him on the field, those who got to learn about him from their mothers and fathers and grandfathers and grandmothers, because they passed Willie in the hallway at the ballpark or they see him pulling in in his Cadillac in the union lot when he would park, or they were at Candlestick. We really got to know Willie, and we are so fortunate for that.

We get to honor him with this field in Fairfield, his statue -- we remember him through the beautiful statue. He welcomes us to our ballpark at 24 Willie Mays Plaza. We have our Willie Mays Scholars program where we send -- that we started on his 90th birthday, where we have sent for the last three years five black high school students to college. And Willie loved that, a way to pay it forward.

With the renovation of this field, we continue to do so and carry on his legacy.

So thank you to all of you and for giving us the opportunity as the Giants to be the caretakers of that legacy. Thank you so much, Michael and Jeff.

It's now my opportunity to introduce Jake Peavy and bring Jake up. He's a forever Giant. He's a great friend, and I know he held Willie in such great reverence. During his playing days in San Francisco, you'd walk into the clubhouse. Willie would be sitting in Murph's office, our legendary clubhouse manager, and you'd usually find Jake in there talking ball with Willie.

So two sons of Alabama who connected, I bring up Jake Peavy.

(Applause.)

JAKE PEAVY: I appreciate the kind words, Shana. That's right, I was running from Boch, trying to hide from him. Thinking back to that, what tied me and Willie together, love for baseball, but the Alabama connection. For me just to be on and around this project -- when Michael mentioned we went there shortly before the Rickwood game, and you could just feel it all around town, but certainly there where Willie grew up in Fairfield and at the park there.

So myself knowing a little bit about Willie and spending time with him -- he did give my grandpa the jacket off his

back, right? And knowing how charitable he was and what this would have meant to him as an Alabama native who's now back in Alabama, the game at Rickwood was as special as anything I've ever been a part of in baseball.

To continue on with you, I think the game needs to be played every year, or some game needs to be played at Rickwood because it was just powerful.

This is just a small something that has spun off that when me and Michael and Harold, the production team were there that day, I believe this idea got started and started to become to where we're at today. So Major League Baseball, April, Jeff, Councilman, I'm honored to stand beside you to announce this, and it's just my honor to stand alongside Michael and the rest of the family to see that this becomes all it can be.

As an Alabama native who's living down the road, I'm in full support. I'm going to go gather the rest of the troops and make sure that we've got a lot of former players active in making this what Willie would want.

An honor to be with you this morning, and I appreciate you.

(Applause.)

APRIL BROWN: Thank you, Shana, and thank you, Jake. The Winter Meetings Charity Auction has quickly become a signature initiative under our MLB Together platform because it embodies exactly what MLB Together is. It's our club, PR teams, our community teams securing amazing, amazing, and generous experiences for the public to be able to bid on, for our fans to have first class experiences in our sport.

Over 40 Minor League teams have joined all 30 Major League teams to donate incredible experiences. Also, our partners in the Baseball Hall of Fame continue to support this each and every year and have an incredible experience right in Cooperstown. It's our players, it's our legends, and it's all of us together that will make this happen.

So it's now my pleasure to start the fun part, to tell you that the auction site is now open at mlb.com/wintermeetingsauction. You will find the most amazing baseball experiences. You want to meet Corbin Carroll? It's on there. Mike Trout, he your favorite? You can meet him along with a lot of other Major League stars. You want to throw out the first pitch at a game at your favorite ballpark? It's on there. Just check it out.

You want to get the full -- we've heard all about Willie and his beloved, beloved Giants. You want to get that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

experience of Willie Mays stadium experience first class, including a menu of all the things he would order, it's on there. You're going to get that full experience. Again, mlb.com/wintermeetingsauction.

Check it out. How about this? How about a round trip, expense paid trip to Las Vegas, food and drink included, in the owner's suite of the Aviators game. It's on there.

Now this one, I know many people might like to have, especially today, a special suite experience with Mr. Steve Cohen at Citi Field. You get to have a real, real conversation with Mr. Cohen. I know that one is going to go very, very high.

It's holiday season. Think of yourself, gift to yourself, gift to the ones that you love, and support our efforts in Fairfield County where our beloved, beloved Willie Mays played this game in Birmingham, grew the love of his sport, was taken care of as a 17-year-old, as we heard. We now have this opportunity to take care of the youth in the community as they step onto Willie Mays Park and have the biggest dreams and become the future great Willie Mays.

So thank you for being in this room. Thank you to all of our PR colleagues. You started this effort 11 years ago, and it has grown nothing but stronger and stronger and been so impactful. Over \$2 million given to the cause that's we truly care about.

Thank you to all of you watching online. Go now, go big, often, check on your bids. It will close at 10:00 p.m. Eastern time this Thursday, so you have an opportunity to start bidding now and giving back to the causes that mean the most to us.

Thank you again and happy charity auction.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

