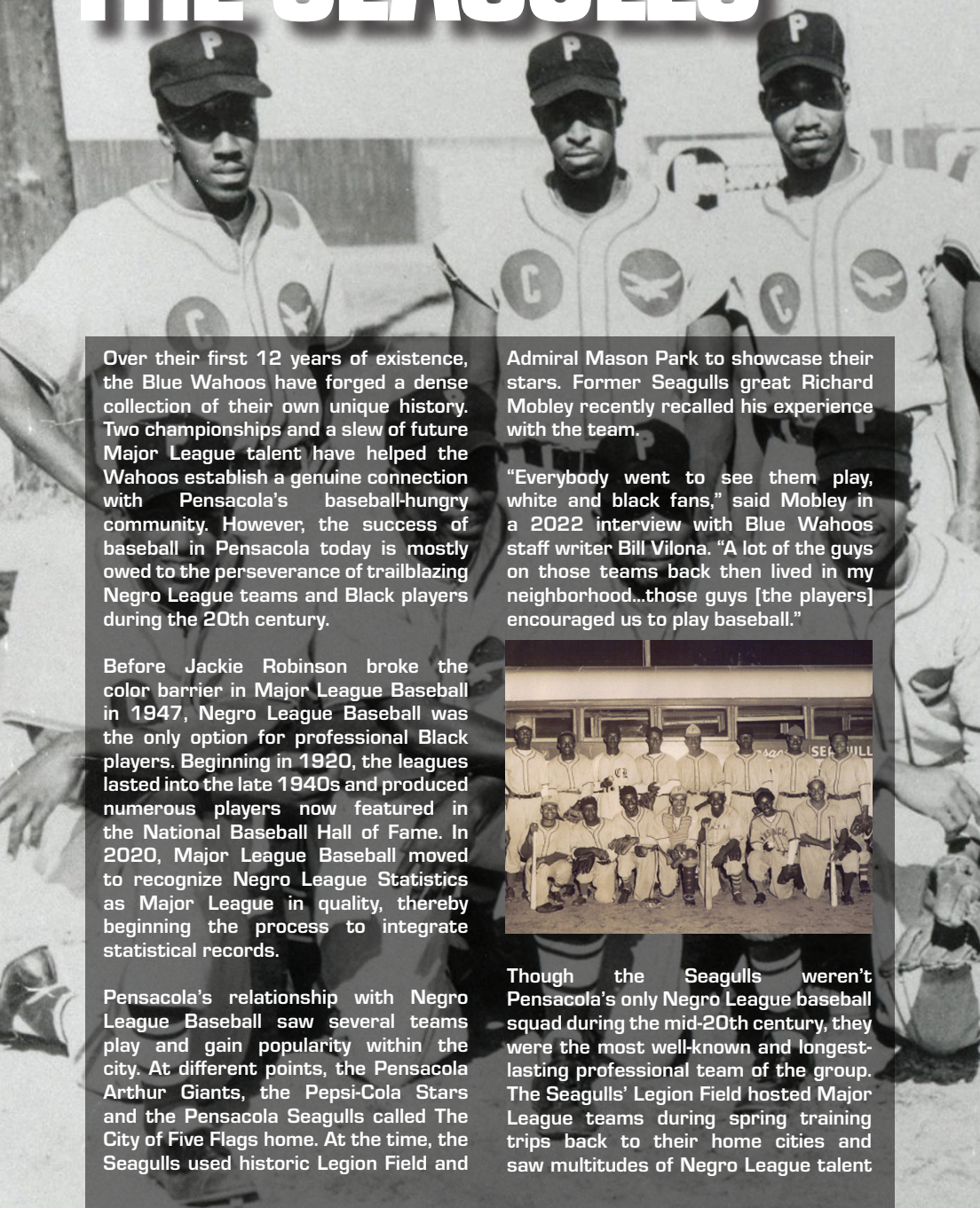


THE SEAGULLS



Over their first 12 years of existence, the Blue Wahoos have forged a dense collection of their own unique history. Two championships and a slew of future Major League talent have helped the Wahoos establish a genuine connection with Pensacola's baseball-hungry community. However, the success of baseball in Pensacola today is mostly owed to the perseverance of trailblazing Negro League teams and Black players during the 20th century.

Before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947, Negro League Baseball was the only option for professional Black players. Beginning in 1920, the leagues lasted into the late 1940s and produced numerous players now featured in the National Baseball Hall of Fame. In 2020, Major League Baseball moved to recognize Negro League Statistics as Major League in quality, thereby beginning the process to integrate statistical records.

Pensacola's relationship with Negro League Baseball saw several teams play and gain popularity within the city. At different points, the Pensacola Arthur Giants, the Pepsi-Cola Stars and the Pensacola Seagulls called The City of Five Flags home. At the time, the Seagulls used historic Legion Field and

Admiral Mason Park to showcase their stars. Former Seagulls great Richard Mobley recently recalled his experience with the team.

"Everybody went to see them play, white and black fans," said Mobley in a 2022 interview with Blue Wahoos staff writer Bill Viloni. "A lot of the guys on those teams back then lived in my neighborhood...those guys [the players] encouraged us to play baseball."



Though the Seagulls weren't Pensacola's only Negro League baseball squad during the mid-20th century, they were the most well-known and longest-lasting professional team of the group. The Seagulls' Legion Field hosted Major League teams during spring training trips back to their home cities and saw multitudes of Negro League talent

TAKE FLIGHT

pass through during exhibitions versus well-known entities like the Indianapolis Clowns and Kansas City Monarchs.



One former Kansas City Monarch star eventually came back to Pensacola nearly 60 full years after the end of the Negro League era. Hall of Famer Buck O'Neil visited for a Pensacola Pelicans game while the independent team was the only professional baseball tenant in the city. Current Blue Wahoos owner Quint Studer remembers O'Neil's visit as a highlight of his baseball experience.

"We were fortunate to bring him [O'Neil] here," said Studer. "He shared with the community what it was like as a Black person who played professional baseball before and after the color barrier was broken...it was an educational experience for many."

At present, the Blue Wahoos have

done their part to educate fans and celebrate Pensacola's baseball past. In seasons past, the Wahoos have donned replica Seagulls jerseys for special occasions and will do so again in 2024. During the Wahoos' June 18-23 series versus the Chattanooga Lookouts, Pensacola will don the Seagulls' jerseys on Wednesday, June 19 - otherwise known as Juneteenth, an annual holiday commemorating the end of slavery in the United States - and during the series finale on Sunday, June 23 in "The Nine" Night presented by Cox.

The celebration of the Seagulls holds special meaning for Studer, who observed the occasion back in 2022 during a similar celebration.

"A number of players from the Seagulls were honored at the game and the Wahoos wore Seagulls uniforms," Studer said. "This leads us to the 2024 season when the Seagulls will again grace the field."

The celebration of Pensacola baseball history at Blue Wahoos Stadium will provide a rare up-close glimpse into a city's past rich with baseball history and lore. The week is set to provide a unique and enjoyable look at the past - all while the current day Wahoos continue to make fresh history of their own.

By Carter Bainbridge