

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 242

Recognizing the significant human rights activism and baseball stardom legacy of Roberto Clemente.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 22, 2023

Mr. ESPAILLAT (for himself, Mr. CARSON, Ms. BARRAGÁN, Mrs. GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, and Mr. DAVIS of Illinois) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Accountability

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the significant human rights activism and baseball stardom legacy of Roberto Clemente.

Whereas Roberto Clemente Walker was born on August 18, 1934, to Don Melchor Clemente and Luisa Walker in Barrio San Antón, Carolina, Puerto Rico, as the youngest of 7 children;

Whereas his mother, Luisa, was a laundress and his father, Don Melchor, was a sugarcane plantation worker;

Whereas Clemente's professional idol was Monte Irvin, a pioneering Black left fielder and first baseman who played winter ball in Puerto Rico, playing for the San Juan Senators;

Whereas Clemente excelled in athletics as a youngster, and at the age of 17 was playing for the Santurce

Cangrejeros “Crabbers” of the Puerto Rican Baseball League;

Whereas, in 1952, at the ripe age of 18, the Dodgers signed Clemente to their Triple-A minor league team, the Montreal Royals, in Montreal for a season;

Whereas, in 1954, the Pittsburgh Pirates selected Clemente in the first round of the Major League Baseball Rule 5 draft;

Whereas Pirates center fielder Earl Smith wore jersey number 21 until he parted ways with the team in April 1955, and Clemente wore number 13 until then;

Whereas, in 1955, Clemente made his Major League debut as he went on to play for the Pittsburgh Pirates starting as a right fielder;

Whereas when the team traveled to Richmond, Virginia, for games or Florida for spring training, Clemente encountered Jim Crow laws for the first time when the Black players had to stay at a separate inferior hotel and were refused the option to dine with their White counterparts;

Whereas it is known that during one of his first games, Clemente protested angrily when fans yelled racial insults at one of his teammates;

Whereas Clemente was treated like a foreigner, disparaged for his Spanish language, and discriminated against for his skin color;

Whereas it is reported that many people mocked Clemente’s heavy Latin accent, quoting him with phonetic spelling rather than merely reporting what he said;

Whereas Clemente insisted on being called “Roberto” in an effort to combat oppression and forced American assimi-

lation by reporters and other members of the public who repeatedly referred to him as “Bob”;

Whereas Clemente was known for being a proud Afro-Latino and protested the discrimination that Latin and Black ball players encountered;

Whereas Clemente was known for defending the rights of Black and Brown people, both on the field and in the streets;

Whereas, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, Clemente and his teammates refused to play until after the funerals and even wrote a public statement showing their respect for Dr. King;

Whereas Clemente became a union leader in the incipient Major League Baseball Players Association and defended players’ rights to demand better working conditions and benefits;

Whereas in every city where the Pirates played, Clemente visited sick children in hospitals;

Whereas Clemente put his heart and soul into training clinics, providing baseball lessons and fun for boys and girls in Pittsburgh, his home island of Puerto Rico, and throughout Latin America;

Whereas, while participating in one such clinic in Nicaragua, he developed a particularly close bond with the youth in that Central American country;

Whereas, in 1958, Clemente enlisted in the United States Marine Corps Reserve after the 1958 season and spent six months on active duty at Parris Island, South Carolina, and Camp LeJeune, North Carolina;

Whereas Clemente served until 1964 and was inducted into the Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame in 2003;

Whereas, in 1960, Clemente hit his stride, batting .314 with 16 home runs and 94 RBIs to earn his first All-Star berth and help the Pirates upset the Yankees in the World Series;

Whereas, the following year, Clemente led the National League with a .351 average, slugged 23 homers, and won his first of 12 consecutive Gold Glove Awards for defensive excellence;

Whereas Clemente was the first pan-Caribbean and first Latin-American superstar in Major League Baseball;

Whereas, in 1966, which many deem as his finest season, Clemente was voted the National League MVP with a career-best 29 homers and 119 RBIs;

Whereas, on September 1, 1971, Clemente batted third in a lineup of players that, for the first time in history, consisted entirely of Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC) players;

Whereas Clemente was selected to be the 1971 World Series MVP, and during this series he batted .414 with two home runs to help Pittsburgh defeat the favored Baltimore Orioles;

Whereas in giving an interview after winning the 1971 World Series, Clemente became the first person to speak Spanish on a nationally televised American broadcast;

Whereas, throughout the 1960s, Clemente wore his iconic “21” jersey number and dominated the game of baseball, forever inscribing the number 21 into baseball history;

Whereas for Carribeños, Pittsburgh residents, baseball fans, and athletes, especially those from BIPOC communities, the number “21” on the back of a T-shirt symbolizes the imprint Roberto Clemente left on and off the field;

Whereas Clemente was the 11th Major League player to record 3,000 hits;

Whereas, by the end of his career, Clemente had joined the exclusive 3,000-hit club, was selected to 15 All-Star teams, and won 12 Gold Gloves, 2 World Series, and a National League MVP award;

Whereas in Clemente’s 18 seasons with Pittsburgh he won 4 batting titles, hit 240 home runs, and posted a lifetime .317 batting average;

Whereas, in late 1972, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake ravaged Managua, Nicaragua, and killed 5,000 people;

Whereas, in his philanthropic spirit, Clemente sent shipments of humanitarian aid to the country;

Whereas after learning that 3 previous shipments had been diverted by corrupt Somoza Government officials, Clemente decided to accompany one of the aid shipments;

Whereas the four-engine DC-7 plane Clemente chartered for a flight on New Year’s Eve crashed in the Atlantic Ocean immediately after takeoff from the coast of Isla Verde, Puerto Rico;

Whereas, on December 31, 1972, Clemente died in the plane crash at the age of 38 years young;

Whereas, since 1973, Major League Baseball gives out the Roberto Clemente Award to one player in the league who “best exemplifies the game of baseball, sportsmanship,

community involvement and the individual’s contribution to his team”;

Whereas, in 2002, Major League Baseball declared the first annual Roberto Clemente Day;

Whereas, in 2021, Major League Baseball announced September 15 would be the permanent date of Roberto Clemente Day to coincide with the beginning of Hispanic Heritage month;

Whereas, on Roberto Clemente Day 2022, the Tampa Bay Rays put out a lineup of all Latin American players for the first time in history;

Whereas Clemente’s tragic death left behind his wife, Vera, and three young sons, Roberto, Jr., Luis Roberto, and Roberto Enrique; and

Whereas Clemente was a legend in life and death, a baseball star, a humanitarian activist, and a symbol of Latin American pride: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) recognizes that Roberto Clemente was the
3 first Latino player to accomplish many feats in
4 Major League Baseball;

5 (2) recognizes that Roberto Clemente was the
6 first Puerto Rican, and first person of Latino herit-
7 age, to win a World Series as a starter, be named
8 league MVP, be named World Series MVP, and be
9 elected to the Hall of Fame;

10 (3) recognizes that 2 weeks after his death,
11 Clemente was posthumously elected to the National

1 Baseball Hall of Fame in 1973, being the first Na-
2 tional League baseball player to receive the manda-
3 tory 5-year waiting period waiver;

4 (4) urges Major League Baseball to perma-
5 nently retire the number 21 in honor of the life and
6 legacy of Roberto Clemente; and

7 (5) urges Major League Baseball to expand Ro-
8 berto Clemente Day so that, in all ballparks on that
9 one day, all players, coaches, and managers on both
10 teams, and the umpires, wear Clemente's uniform
11 number, 21.

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