



Charles W. Follis

The First African American Professional Football Player

Charles Follis was born in 1879 to Cathryn and J. Henry Follis in Cloverdale, Virginia. In 1890 they moved to Wooster, Ohio. Charles excelled in baseball and Track and Field and in 1898 became the captain of the first Wooster High School (WHS) football team. Undefeated, he earned his nickname “The Black Cyclone.” He went on to play baseball for Wooster University and football for the Wooster Athletic Club. Charles soon faced the tough Shelby Athletic Club (later, the Blues) and owner Frank Schiffer.

Schiffer said “I never want to play against him again,” offering Charles a job and a place to live in Shelby, Ohio. Eventually, Charles was paid \$10.00 per game as the star player of the Shelby Blues until 1906, when he retired from football due to injuries. While in Shelby, Charles’ ability and character impressed his teammate Branch Rickey.

Charles Follis finished his pro sports career as a standout catcher and slugger for The Cuban Giants Negro League in New Jersey, and sadly passed in 1910 after contracting pneumonia at the age of 30. He is buried in the Wooster Cemetery with his family. His old teammate, Branch Rickey, never forgot Charles and in 1947 as Major League baseball (MLB) was waning, Rickey (considering Charles an exemplar) signed Jackie Robinson to the Brooklyn Dodgers. This signing broke the race barrier, bringing an end to segregation in professional sports.

Charles’ story was featured in a play entitled “The Black Cyclone”, written and produced by Jim and Amy K. Stoner. For more information and a full map of sites, visit:

www.blackcyclone.org



THE BLACK CYCLONE Trail

9 Stops on the Amazing Journey of Charles Follis

- 1** The neighborhood where Charles grew up, Spink Street, Wooster, Ohio
- 2** Original Wooster High School Football Field, now Cornerstone Elementary
- 3** Follis Field, Wooster High School
- 4** Original Wooster University Football Field, now College of Wooster
- 5** Shelby-Oakland Cemetery, Frank and Julia Schiffer headstone
- 6** Weber’s Bar, Shelby, Ohio, initially supported segregation, then rejected racism, and welcomed Charles
- 7** Original Shelby Blues Football Field
- 8** Wayne County Sports Hall of Fame at the Wayne County Historical Society. Charles was inducted in the Inaugural Class of 1976
- 9** Charles Follis Family memorial stone, Wooster Cemetery

Run Charles, Run for the AGES!

Follow the Trail of a Pioneering Sports Legend