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## **Mack and Jackie: Pasadena's Twin Heroes Worrill's World**

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Recently my father, Walter Worrill, sent me an article from the October 8, 2009 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*. The article focused on the debate around the naming of the \$24 million sports complex on Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena, California.

First, I have to acknowledge that I was born in Pasadena, California on August 15, 1941 in Huntington Hospital to Walter and Anna Bell Worrill. My mother made her transition two years ago. My father's family and the Robinson family were among the wave of Black families, who migrated from Georgia to California. Both families settled in Pasadena but neither knew the other. During his early teen years, my father met the Robinson brothers and their family. Because there were very few African American families in Pasadena at that time, it fostered intimate interactions between those few African American families who lived in Pasadena. My mother, who was close to Jackie's age, later became acquainted with the Robinson family.

I provide this background because my father, who is now 95 years old, moved back to Pasadena to be close to our family members who still reside in Pasadena and southern California. My father attended junior high, high school, and junior college with Mack Robinson and intimately observed the development of Mack's younger brother Jackie. His career in the Pasadena YMCA began as a part time staff member. After graduating

from Whittier College, he became a staff member of the 28th Street Branch YMCA in Los Angeles from 1942-44, during the War years, before returning to the Pasadena YMCA staff from 1944-50. Because of my father's work, I was deeply impacted by the history that he shared with me and what I observed as his son.

In 1950, our family moved to Chicago where my father took an assignment with the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. He spent twenty-one years with the Chicago YMCA in a variety of assignments. From 1971, until his retirement in 1980, he served as the Executive Director of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the National Council of the YMCA based in New Jersey. Throughout the years, my father maintained his ties to Pasadena and particularly with his childhood friends Mack Robinson and Mr. Ray Bartlet. My family always kept a deep connection to Pasadena by staying abreast of the many events and developments in the city, particularly as it related to the African American community.

As a young boy my father shared stories with us about the great athletic accomplishments of Mack and Jackie Robinson. I remember them well! His stories about being on the winning 1934 State Championship Track Team with Mack Robinson, Brainard Worrill, Joe Cunningham, and William Sangster were so exciting to me. I especially remember what he said about Mack making the United States Olympic Track Team in 1936 and winning a silver medal behind the great Jesse Owens in Berlin. I even have a copy of the telegram my father sent Mack congratulating him on his accomplishment. I also have a copy of Mack's response acknowledging receipt of my father's letter and how humbled he was to place second to the great Jesse Owens.

Personally, I have had some unique experiences with the Robinson Brothers. I remember when my father was the Executive Director of the famous Wabash YMCA in Chicago in the early 1950s. He invited Jackie to speak at a banquet at the Y. I was able to interact with Mr. Robinson in my father's office after he concluded his participation in the banquet. I was thrilled to no end. I remember his leaving tickets at Wrigley Field and my father and I attended our first major league baseball game. This man, we knew from Pasadena.

I can also remember when Mack drove from Pasadena to Chicago, stayed at my house, and we attended the funeral of the late Jesse Owens together. Mack Robinson was like a godfather to me. This man, we knew from Pasadena.

Many people may not know that Mack went on to the University of Oregon where he won the NCAA 220 and the AAU 200 meters in 1937. He was considered a world class 200 meter runner during this era. We must not forget that Mack's accomplishments occurred during the period of the Great Depression.

It is not often mentioned that Mack's younger brother, Jackie, was motivated to become the great athlete that he was because of the inspiration he received from the accomplishments of his big brother. Jackie became a great all around athlete at Pasadena Junior College and later at UCLA. When some in Pasadena argue that the park should be named only for Jackie, who emerged in a different era to break the color barrier in major league baseball and be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, it should not overshadow the historical reality of the twinning of the athletic accomplishments of the Robinson brothers to the city of Pasadena, California. Without Mack's achievements, there may not have been an opportunity for Jackie to be as

inspired as he was to accomplish his great athletic feats. Because of Mack, Jackie was exposed to the possibility of achieving greatness.

The City of Pasadena should be reminded of the words that provided the rationale of the twinness of the Robinson Brothers to be remembered in the busts of the sculptures for all to see. These words should also be the foundation of the rationale in naming the sports complex in their honor. You cannot separate Mack from Jackie nor Jackie from Mack. They were both uniquely gifted and outstanding athletes who contributed immensely in their chosen arenas. These athletic pursuits were made in different eras and under different circumstances in time and space.

As a Professor of Education and History and Director of the Jacob H. Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies of Northeastern Illinois University, as part of my work, I strive to preserve the contributions of African and African American people for the world. This work has led me to become a very passionate advocate of the truth concerning our people and I have written some of these truths in hundreds of articles that have appeared in numerous newspapers throughout the United States. It is in this spirit that I am humbled to write these words in this column to uplift the spirit of two brothers, Mack and Jackie, whom I feel should be honored forever and ever, in Pasadena most especially, for the "Twinness" of their accomplishments. We should not separate them from each other. In this regard, I reiterate my support, for whatever it means, of the naming of the sports complex on Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena, California in honor of Mack and Jackie, the Robinson Brothers.

In closing, I think that it is fitting to remember that in the dedication of the Pasadena Robinson Memorial it stated the following:

The Robinson brothers' abilities, self-confidence and determination set the stage for others to overcome barriers. Both men led complex lives, contributing in different ways to their communities, serving as role models and working tirelessly for civil justice. The bronze sculptures tell these stories and more with descriptive text and images inscribed on the backs and sides of their heads, highlighting the brothers' multifaceted lives.

So too should the naming of the sports complex reflect their story.

**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, Conrad W. Worrill, PhD, is the National Chairman of the National Black United Front ([NBUF](#)). Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Worrill.



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