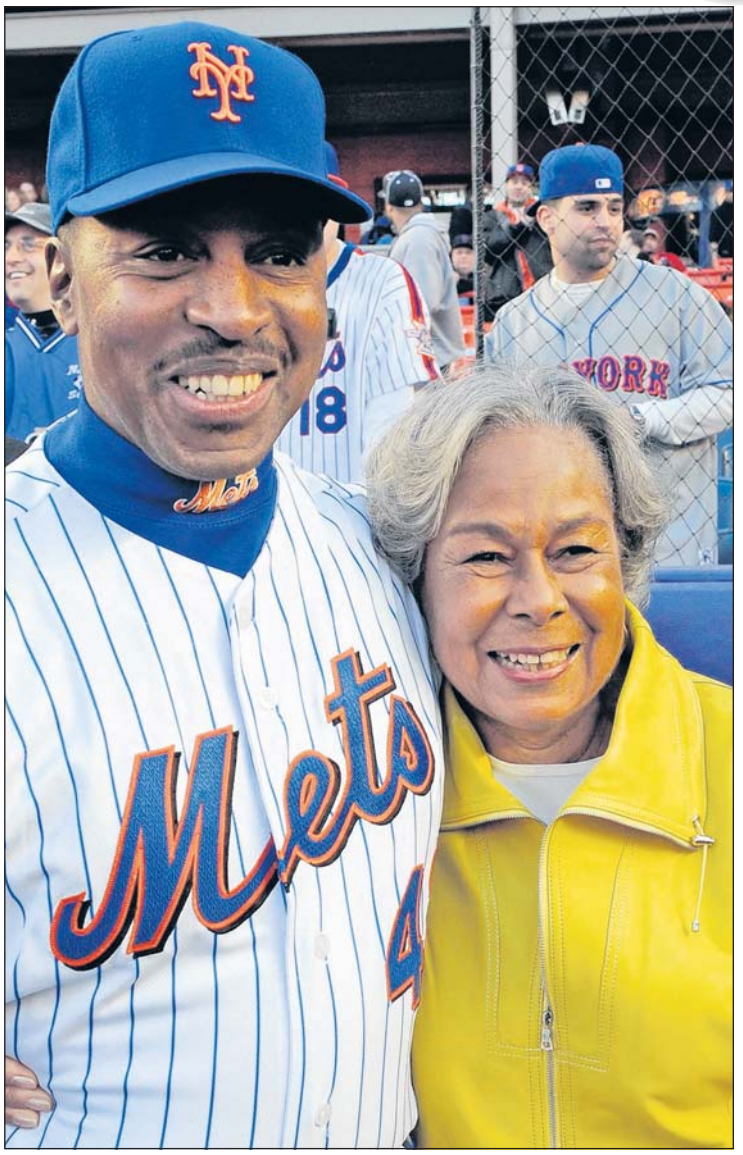


Rachel Robinson embraces Willie Randolph at yesterday's Robinson Day festivities, and David Wright (l.), Jose Reyes and the Mets pay tribute by wearing Jackie's number. Photo by Howard Simmons/Daily News

METS CEMENT JACKIE LEGACY

Building a tribute for No. 42

BY MARK LELINWALLA
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

JACKIE ROBINSON once said, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives."

Yesterday on Jackie Robinson Day, the very day that he broke Major League Baseball's color barrier 61 years ago, the entire Mets team honored him by wearing No. 42 and ensuring his legacy at Citi Field.

Jackie's wife Rachel Robinson and daughter Sharon Robinson, along with Fred Wilpon, Willie Randolph and Omar Minaya helped unveil designs for the Jackie Robinson Rotunda at Citi Field during a press conference and walk-through of the construction site yesterday.

Although construction on the rotunda is just underway, it is expected to not only be transformed into Citi Field's entrance, but will also serve a walkway through Robinson's life.

'When kids and families and children walk through that rotunda, I hope they're going to reflect on not just what they see Jackie Robinson accomplished, but also think about themselves and say, 'What am I doing? How am I living my life? Who am I affecting?' '

RACHEL ROBINSON

Etched into the 160-foot diameter floor and 70-foot high archways of the rotunda will be nine words — courage, excellence, persistence, justice, teamwork, commitment, citizenship, determination and integrity — that Robinson lived by and exemplified. There will also be an eight-foot No. 42.

"This rotunda is spectacular," Rachel Robinson said with a warm smile. "At my stage of life you're looking for permanence, you're looking for things that sure up the future. When kids and families and children walk through that rotunda, I hope they're going to reflect on not just what they see Jackie Robinson accomplished, but also think about themselves and say, 'What am I doing? How am I living my life? Who am I affecting?'"

In addition to the more than 330 players and coaches who wore No. 42 yesterday and the impending rotunda, Rachel Robinson also revealed plans for a museum on Varick St. in TriBeca. There's even an ESPN biopic with Robert Redford about Robinson on deck.

So, what would Jackie think of all the attention if he were still alive?

"It would fulfill a very intense feeling that he had, that until the game was integrated at all levels, it wasn't an all-American sport," his wife said.

Just yesterday, the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports gave the MLB an A-minus for race hiring, even though the percentage of African-American players in the big leagues dropped from 8.4 in 2006 to today's 8.2.

"We have to do something about that," Randolph said. "(African-American) kids need the opportunity to play."



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