

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Junius "Rainey" Bibbs

Even as a Wiley High School student, Junius Alexander Bibbs did not like his unusual given name. A 1927 graduate at age 16, Junius was known to his friends as "Sonny."

By the time he became a Negro Baseball League All-Star in 1937, Bibbs had earned another nickname. According to legend, on a misty spring day a baffled sports writer asked Junius how to spell his first name. Bibbs responded with a chuckle, "You can call me 'Rainy'." The name stuck, spelled with a spare "e."

Under any name, Bibbs carved out an exceptional career as an athlete, educator and coach. He is among 10 Indiana State University alumni who will be inducted into the college's Athletics Hall of Fame during a ceremony tomorrow evening, Feb. 6, at Hulman Center.



Born in Henderson, Ky., on Oct. 31, 1910, Bibbs and his parents, Lloyd and Catherine "Kittie" (Carr) Bibbs, relocated to Terre Haute when Junius and his sister Eloise were young. The family lived on South Harding Avenue and the children attended Dunbar School.

Financially unable to enroll in college immediately after high school, Bibbs worked as a waiter — his father's occupation — at the "new" Terre Haute House. In the summer of 1933, he also played professional baseball for the Indianapolis ABCs in the Negro Baseball League. After the club relocated mid-season, he was an outfielder for the Detroit Stars.

A three-year starter in baseball at Indiana State, Bibbs was known for his strong arm and clutch hitting. He also was the top fullback on Coach Wally Marks' football squad, receiving All-Indiana College Conference recognition twice. After the 1936 college baseball season, he returned to the pros with the Cincinnati Tigers. In 1937, the year he earned an ISU degree, he was selected for the Negro League All-Star team as a second baseman, ripping a double during the All-Star game in his only official time at bat. His 1937 batting average was .404.

Over the next several seasons, Rainey played for the Chicago American Giants, Indianapolis Crawfords, Kansas City Monarchs and Cleveland Buckeyes. Bibbs' Monarchs won the league title in 1938, 1940 and 1941.

Junius wed ISTC senior Dorothy Hendricks, an Evansville native, Oct. 2, 1939. The couple had four children: Byron, Jeffrey, Jacquelyn and Stanley. Besides playing baseball, the energetic athlete held several off-season jobs before landing a position teaching in the Indianapolis public school system. At Crispus Attucks High School, he taught biology and coached baseball and wrestling, producing IHSAA wrestling champion John Sims. For two years before retirement he taught at Howe High School.

Bibbs died Sept. 11, 1980. Dorothy, their four children, nine grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren all reside in Indianapolis.

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