

THE TABLET

Shuba's Historic Handshake Immortalized with Statue

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A statue (above) in Youngstown, Ohio, is set to be unveiled

on July 17 depicting the memorable handshake (inset) between Montreal Royals outfielder George Shuba and Jackie Robinson on April 18, 1946. (Photo: Courtesy Marc Mellon)

Brooklyn Dodgers fans of the 1950s can easily rattle off the names of the greats: Gil Hodges, Roy Campanella, Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, Pee Wee Reese, Carl Furillo, Don Newcombe, Carl Erskine, and Preacher Roe.

Only the true diehards might remember the name George Shuba, who served as the team's utility outfielder and left-handed pinch hitter for seven seasons from 1948 through 1955.

Known as "Shotgun" for his ability to

hit line drives, Shuba's on-field claim to fame was when he became the first player in National League history to hit a pinch-hit home run in the World Series. He accomplished the feat in the 1953 fall classic off New York Yankees pitcher Allie Reynolds.

Shuba, though, will be more so remembered for a gesture that occurred just off the field of play — a handshake with Robinson on April 18, 1946, at a time when baseball's color barrier was about to be broken.

To commemorate the moment, a statue of Shuba and Robinson is set to be unveiled on July 17 in Shuba's hometown of Youngstown, Ohio. The monument celebrating racial equality

will honor both Robinson and Shuba, who died in 2014 at the age of 89.

“We’re excited about unveiling and dedicating this memorial to the historic handshake of Jackie Robinson and George ‘Shotgun’ Shuba,” said Ernie Brown, co-chair of the committee that developed the statue. “This beautiful statue will remind generations of people from the Mahoning Valley and beyond that race should never divide us on the baseball field or anywhere else.”

During his days in Brooklyn, Shuba devoutly practiced his Catholic faith and was a parishioner at St. Charles Borromeo and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, both in Brooklyn



Photo courtesy: Mike Shuba (C)

Heights. This faith was cultivated in him as a youngster in Catholic elementary school and by his family, which included nine siblings. The family recited a Slovak prayer together

every day.

Shuba started the 1946 season with the Montreal Royals, one of the Dodgers' major farm teams. One of his teammates was Robinson, who would go on to break baseball's color barrier the following season.

As the Royals took on the Jersey City Giants at Roosevelt Stadium in Jersey City on April 18, Robinson — playing in his first professional game — launched a three-run homer in the top of the third inning. Just as Robinson touched the plate, Shuba, who had been in the on-deck circle, was waiting with his right hand extended, though the runners who previously scored went straight to the dugout. The baseball

world had just witnessed the first interracial handshake on a modern professional baseball field.

“The moment I shook Jackie Robinson’s hand, I knew that this would be a big part of my baseball career,” Shuba told *The Tablet* in 2012. “I played at Chaney High School (Youngstown) with Black kids and already accepted them as teammates and friends.

“When it came to shaking Jackie’s hand, there was no question. He was on our side; he was on our team. My Catholic faith taught me to treat all people equal ... bottom line.”

Later in his life, Shuba enjoyed

following baseball from the comfort of his living room, where a photo of the iconic handshake hung above his favorite chair. To him, it was just a handshake, yet this small gesture has led him to be considered a pioneer of racial equality in what has now become an international sport.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the handshake. Noted sculptor Marc Mellon of Connecticut has immortalized the moment with a nearly 7-foot-tall statue cast in bronze.

While the statue is bronze, it was Shuba's heart of gold that welcomed the great Robinson to professional baseball.



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