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LHSAA Celebrates Black History Month

Honoring Vida Blue, a Legend from DeSoto High School

By Ethan W. Anderson

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana High School Athletic Association (LHSAA) proudly continues its Black History Month celebration by honoring one of Louisiana’s most iconic athletes, Vida Blue. A graduate of DeSoto High School, Blue overcame racial barriers and small-town limitations to become one of Major League Baseball’s most electrifying pitchers, making an indelible impact on the game and paving the way for future Black athletes.

Born and raised in Mansfield, Louisiana, Vida Blue was a natural athlete at DeSoto High School, excelling in both baseball and football. His powerful arm made him a dominant pitcher, but the racial climate of the 1960s presented unique challenges for African American athletes in the segregated South. Opportunities were limited, and Blue often had to prove himself under unfair circumstances. Despite these challenges, he persevered, drawing attention from professional scouts for his incredible pitching ability.

In 1967, he was selected in the second round of the MLB Draft by the Kansas City Athletics (later the Oakland Athletics), a moment that changed his life forever. With little precedent for Black pitchers dominating in the major leagues at that time, Blue not only carried the pressure of being an up-and-coming star but also of breaking barriers in a sport that had not always been welcoming to African American athletes.

Blue quickly made his mark in the big leagues. At just 21 years old, he pitched a no-hitter against the Minnesota Twins in only his eighth Major League start, a performance that stunned the baseball world. That incredible display of talent was only a preview of what was to come.

In 1971, Blue delivered one of the most dominant seasons ever recorded by a pitcher. He finished the year with an astonishing 24-8 record, a razor-sharp 1.82 ERA, and 301 strikeouts across 312 innings pitched. He threw 24 complete games, including eight shutouts, proving to be a workhorse on the mound. His dominance earned him both the American League Cy Young Award and the Most Valuable Player (MVP) Award, making him the youngest MVP winner of the 20th century.

LHSAA... Beyond the Game

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Reflecting on that unforgettable season, Blue once said, "I knew it was close between Mickey Lolich and myself," he told MLB Network. "I was just a young kid from Mansfield, La., and didn't have a clue what the heck was going on, but I got the call and was very excited about it. Then of course I got the MVP, and it was just a dream come true to be the recipient of both awards."

Blue's success continued as he became a central figure in the Oakland Athletics' dynasty of the 1970s. Alongside stars like Reggie Jackson and Catfish Hunter, he helped lead the team to three consecutive World Series championships from 1972 to 1974, a feat that solidified his place in baseball history.

Throughout his 17-year Major League career, Blue played for the Athletics, San Francisco Giants, and Kansas City Royals, earning six All-Star selections and further establishing himself as one of the most dominant left-handed pitchers of his era. Despite his success, he often spoke about the challenges he faced as a Black pitcher in an era when racial tensions still loomed over professional sports.

"I had to be twice as good to prove I belonged," Blue once shared in interviews. "Being a Black pitcher, especially in that time, wasn't easy. But I wasn't going to let anything stop me."

His influence reached beyond the game itself. He became a role model for aspiring Black athletes, showing that success was possible despite the odds. He mentored younger players, spoke out about the challenges faced by Black athletes, and used his platform to inspire others. In recognition of his impact on sports and his home state, Vida Blue was inducted into the very first class of the LHSAA Hall of Fame in 1979. His legacy in Louisiana sports is unparalleled, as he remains one of the most successful athletes to emerge from the state.

As LHSAA continues its Black History Month celebration, we honor Vida Blue not only for his achievements on the field but also for the perseverance, strength, and leadership he displayed throughout his career. His story is a reminder of the challenges Black athletes have faced—and continue to overcome—while striving for greatness. Blue's journey from a small high school in Louisiana to Major League superstardom is proof that talent, determination, and resilience can break barriers. His impact lives on the countless young athletes he inspired, and his name will forever be remembered as one of the greatest to ever come out of Louisiana.

For more information on LHSAA's Black History Month features and other honorees, visit lhsaa.org and follow the LHSAA on social media @LHSAAsports.

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