


4-2020

Michael Jordan In Orlando for Baseball

Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Other History Commons](#)
Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety>
University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Public History at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in On Sport and Society by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Michael Jordan In Orlando for Baseball" (2020). *On Sport and Society*. 847.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/847>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE - MICHAEL JORDAN IN ORLANDO FOR
BASEBALL
APRIL 29, 2020

ESPN has now aired the first four episodes of "The Last Dance." There will be ten in all. This documentary is being marketed as a new and candid look at Michael Jordan and the 1997-1998 Chicago Bulls. It is receiving rave reviews and, so far as I have seen, this is a good piece of documentary film making. As many of you know Jordan left basketball in mid-career to pursue baseball in the Chicago White Sox organization. During the 1994 baseball season, Jordan played for the Birmingham Barons of the Southern League. In early May of that year he came to Central Florida to play the Orlando Cubs. I was able to procure press credentials for the first game of that three game series. This edition of "Sport and Society" came out of that evening. This seems to be a good time to take a look back on my impressions of that night with Michael in the Minors. 4/29/2020

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE

MAY 11, 1994

Michael was in town this week, not to lead the Bulls in a playoff game against the Magic, but in pursuit of his new career. "Batting second and playing right field for the Birmingham Barons, wearing number 45, Michael Jordan."

The pregame scene on Monday can only be described as carnival-like. By 5:30 several thousand fans were already in the stands for the 7 o'clock game. The vendors were doing a brisk business, selling all sorts of Baron and Michael paraphernalia: Jordan shirts and jerseys, baseball and basketball cards promising

possible Jordan cards inside each pack, and Michael Jordan plaques.

Watching the crowd file in, it was striking how many people were wearing basketball gear. Several Chicago Bulls jerseys with Michael's famous 23 on them, large numbers of Bulls t-shirts and hats, and a scattering of baseball shirts with Jordan's picture on them rolled past. The merchandising of this career move is awesome, mercenary, and lucrative.

It is quickly apparent that this is an extremely important game, as defying both mathematics and logic, there are two first pitches thrown out. One by some guy from Steak 'N Shake, the other by Ranger Bob a local TV goof who hosts a kids show. Mini-cams are everywhere.

One of the beauties of baseball is that despite all the distractions, all the activity on the field, all the media, the basic rituals continue. Down the right-field line the Cubs players are doing wind sprints, on the left-field line Baron's players are stretching, and on both sidelines players are lazily throwing the ball back and forth gently loosening their arms. The starting pitchers are warming up, umpires appear and line-up cards are exchanged. The color guard makes it way to the first base line for the National Anthem. Michael is standing on the dugout steps wearing the black and grey of the Barons, holding a black bat, wearing sun glasses and a gold chain, his now familiar head shining in the early evening light. It's almost time to play ball.

Six-Thousand four hundred and twenty-two paid, four thousand over the season average, are ready for the action. Cubs pitcher Jose Guzman, a major leaguer on rehabilitation assignment takes the mound. After a walk, the crowd cheers before he is announced. Jordan walks into the batter's box setting up deep in the box, standing almost upright. He goes into a slight crouch as the pitch is delivered, bending his right leg. He takes strike one on the outside corner. The next pitch is a change-up that completely fools him for strike two. Then on the third

pitch Michael hits a line-drive to right center which is easily caught. As he returns to the dugout the crowd cheers again.

As the Barons take the field Jordan is greeted by some twenty people in the Citrus Bowl beyond the right-field fence who have lawn chairs and coolers set up on top of portables. When Michael arrives they hold up a banner for the World Cup. Everyone, it seems, is selling something.

In the third inning Jordan hits the first pitch, a two-hopper to the third baseman for the routine out. The game by now seems almost incidental. There is a constant buzz in the stands, and considerable movement, but thank God, no wave. People are mingling in the aisles. Later a Cubs staffer comes through the press box with a walkie-talkie into which I heard her say, "Bottom of the fifth," and wonder who needs to know this vital information. And why?

Jordan leads off the sixth for the Barons. New Cub pitcher Troy Bradford comes on. Ball one. Ball two. Ball three. Is he nervous facing Michael? Ball four. Probably. Jordan gets a good lead and Bradford throws over to first three times. Jordan runs on the first pitch to the plate, and it sails by the catcher. The crowd cheers, and the Twins manager comes out to calm his pitcher. A nice moment.

In the seventh with one out and runners on first and third Jordan again bats. He fouls out to the catcher in his last at bat of the evening. Jordan does not have a swing that will instill fear in the hearts of anyone. Many fans head for the exits. It looks like Dodger Stadium after the sixth inning.

The Barons win 3-2, in a good ball game, and Tinker Field proves a great little ball park worthy of both crowd and event.

Thirty minutes after the game Jordan appears for a press conference wearing a black cap, black t-shirt with a light brown sweater vest, khaki pants, black well-polished loafers and white socks. A diamond rests in the pierced left earlobe. He is soft-spoken, smiles frequently, and seems only slightly weary of the questions which he must have heard a thousand times by now.

His answers are well-studied. He says all the right things, and there seems little spontaneity, although some sincerity with his warm smile. The evening ends quietly.

Just another minor leaguer struggling to make it to the show.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

Copyright 1994 by Richard C. Crepeau