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THE ULTIMATE DRAFT PICK: The Mariners made John "Mule" Miles their pick in the honorary draft of living Negro Leagues players last month. And on Wednesday, Miles dropped by to pay a visit.

Miles, who was an Air Force mechanic with the famed Tuskegee Airmen, left the service in 1946 to play for the Chicago Americans in the Negro Leagues, playing through 1949. He later played in the minor leagues and at one point was the first black player for the team in Laredo, Texas.

He was the first black player in the league, and he paid the price.

"The players were good to me," he said. "But there were some death threats. Fans used the N-word on me. But I played baseball because I loved it."

He recalled one time when, playing for Laredo, he tried to eat with his teammates in a restaurant. The restaurant manager wouldn't serve him, so the entire team got up and walked out. The manager quickly recanted and let him eat -- but in the kitchen away from his white teammates.

"I got \$300 a month and \$2 a day for meals," he said of his Negro League experience. "Look what A-Rod makes now (\$28 million this year). But I'm a living witness to blacks and whites playing together. I never thought it would happen."

Miles was a big hit on the field before the game. Toronto manager Cito Gaston, who also hails from San Antonio, asked to meet him. So did former Mariner Dave Henderson. And when Miles threw out the first pitch, Mariners reliever Arthur Rhodes was his catcher.

"I appreciate that the Seattle Mariners drafted me last month," Miles said, "and now I'm a major league ballplayer. It's 60 years too late, but I'm here."