

AFRICAN AMERICAN
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Honoring a Legacy.

HERBERT WILBERT & R.L. HUNTER PARK

ORANGE PARK, FLORIDA

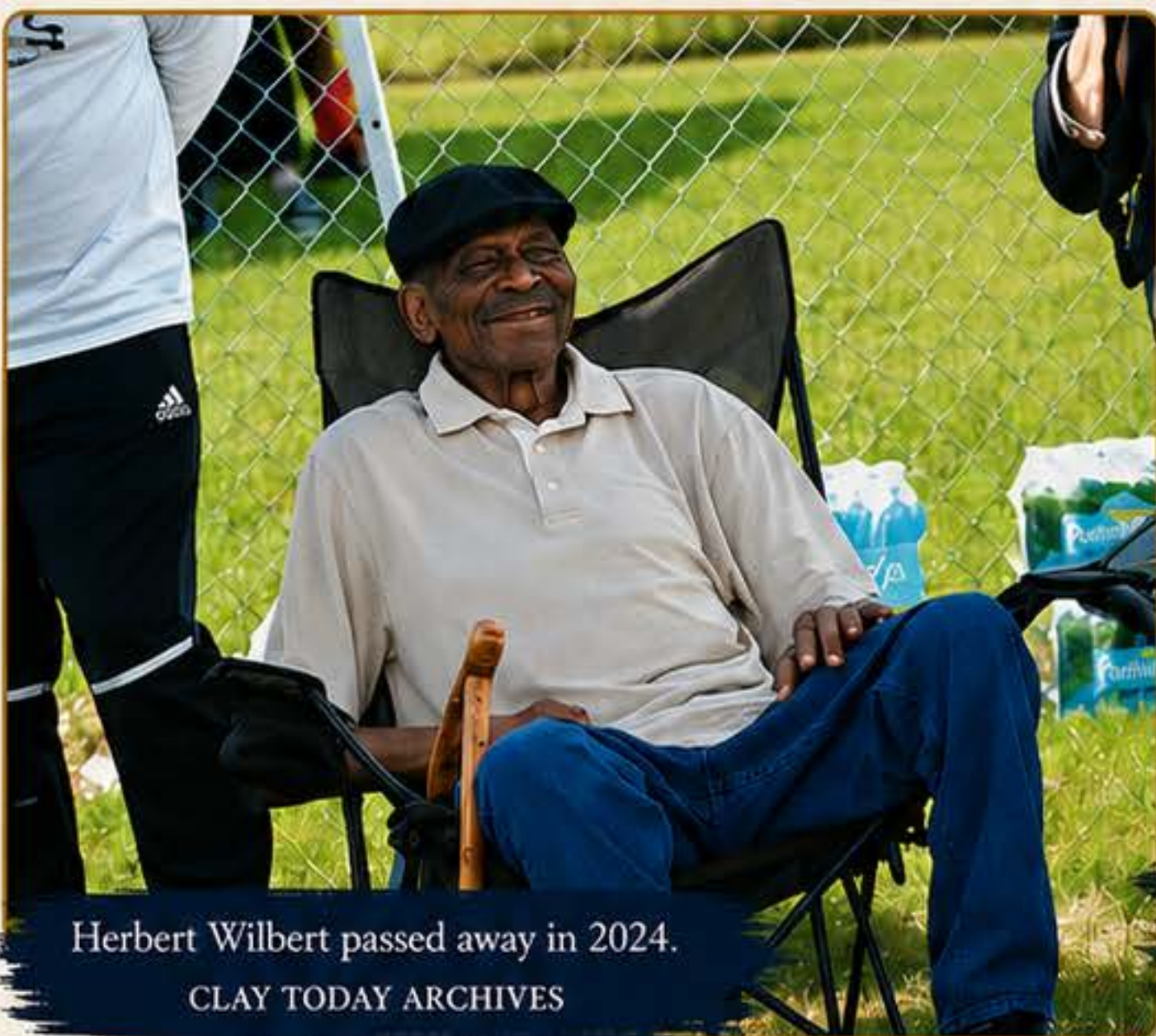
*Two Leaders. One Legacy.
A Community That Remembers.*

Herbert Wilbert and R.L. Hunter PARK

Town of Orange Park

The sign was located at what is now known
as the T.C. Miller Community Center and Park.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK



Herbert Wilbert passed away in 2024.

CLAY TODAY ARCHIVES



Herbert Wilbert's daughter, Jacqueline Dupree,
spoke on her father's legacy during Wednesday's
meeting.

STAFF PHOTO BY KYLA WOODARD

A COMMUNITY STANDS TOGETHER

In 2005, the Town of Orange Park honored two extraordinary men—Herbert Wilbert and R.L. Hunter—with a sign recognizing their lasting impact on the community.

When that sign was unexpectedly removed, residents spoke up. On April 22, community members filled the Culture and Recreation Committee meeting to demand answers—and to ensure these legends are never forgotten.

The committee agreed to replace the sign and add a plaque that will share the powerful story of their lives and the difference they made for generations.

Their legacy. Our history. Our future.

A LEGACY THAT LIVES ON



Herbert Wilbert – Orange Park's first African American football coach, mentor, and leader who built unity and brotherhood on and off the field.



R.L. Hunter – Martial arts instructor who dedicated his life to teaching, mentoring, and empowering the youth of our community.



COMMUNITY. HISTORY. LEGACY.

Let's Keep Their Story Alive.

To learn more or share your memories
about Herbert Wilbert or R.L. Hunter,
contact the African American Historical Society
of Clay County, Florida.

★ HONORING THE PAST. INSPIRING THE FUTURE. ★
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA



'STAND UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT'

Orange Park residents rally for dismantled sign honoring legendary coach



Herbert Wilbert was a coach at Orange Park High and the Orange Park Athletic Association.
CLAY TODAY ARCHIVES

ORANGE PARK —When the Herbert Wilbert and R.L. Hunter Park sign was erected in the Town of Orange Park, many community members rejoiced.

Two Black trailblazers were being recognized for the outstanding impact they had made in the community. For the lives they had touched, both young and old. For the dedication and courage they'd spewed out unconditionally.

But that excitement waned and the glimmer in their eyes dimmed when they found out that same sign, that sat proudly in front of the park, had been removed unexpectedly.

Because of this, Orange Park residents joined the Culture and Recreation Committee meeting on Wednesday, April 22, to find out what exactly happened and demand a way forward.

"In this community, you've got to stand up for what's right, and that's all I'm doing," said Ron Flowers, a lifelong Orange Park resident. "We're hoping you do the right thing with this sign."

The sign was originally erected in 2005 when the town expanded the T.C. Miller Community Center and added an adjoining park.

Hunter ran a taekwondo and martial arts studio for children in the community.

Wilbert was a referee for the Orange Park Athletic Association. Beginning in softball and baseball, his success with OPAA led to a permanent coaching position at the high school. And he became the first African American football coach in the town.

In the 1970s, Wilbert, known for his passionate coaching and mentorship, built unity and brotherhood on a predominately White team during a time of heightened racism. He put Orange Park on the map, leading his team to a landmark victory at the Jacksonville Gator Bowl against one of the nation's top-ranked teams. He was also inducted into the African American Coaches Hall of Fame in 2019.

Wilbert passed away in 2024.

"These two people, they were God-fearing people. Not only did they help Black people, [but they also] helped everybody. Everyone. Color didn't matter to them. And the sign being taken down was wrong," said one passionate resident told the committee.

The seats were filled, and the room imbued with resolve during the meeting. Many came from near and far to express their outrage with the sign's removal, including friends, neighbors and athletes, like Flowers, who worked with Wilbert. Almost all said the sign was a way to honor the people who helped make them who they are today.

Wilbert's daughter Jacqueline Wilbert-Dupree was also in the audience. Wilbert-Dupree, who grew up in the town, said she was appalled to learn about the fate of the sign honoring her father.

"I'm not here to beg anyone to acknowledge what my dad has done, but I did come to let you know that he was a good man. A man of academia and education."

The matter was initially brought to the attention of Town Manager Joseph Taylor. Though no committee members were one hundred percent sure of where the sign went, Taylor confirmed that it was removed after the park was renamed to the T.C. Miller Community Center and Park in 2015.

The committee members agreed to replace the sign but also include a plaque further detailing the impact of the two men in the community.

"My suggestion on top that was not just the sign but was to put something there that gives us information about what they have done," Taylor said.

Although the board contemplated moving the sign somewhere else in the town like the OPAA, community members insisted it stay where it originally was.

The committee remained steadfast on abiding by the families wishes.

"There's obviously a deep connection to that location. There's a deep family ties in that neighborhood as well," Taylor said.

Taylor emphasized that the committee can't make the ultimate decision but can recommend it to be taken to council for further review and a final vote. Taylor said the resolution will be brought to council during a May meeting.

And, in the meantime, the committee recommended reinstalling the original sign for the time being. Flowers purchased it when it was originally placed in 2005. He saved it after it was removed from the park.

"The Town of Orange Park has tons of history, but I think some history has been left out," said Mayor Randy Anderson. "And the reason is, I don't know. But I think it's very important we recognize everyone that has input into the Town of Orange Park, our history."