

HB 229 | To Designate February 3<sup>rd</sup> as “Charles Follis Day”  
House Committee on State Government  
Proponent Testimony by Jim Stoner  
June 7, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Anielski, Vice Chair Representative Hambley, for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 229. My name is Jim Stoner and I am the writer/director of the play on the life of Charles Follis called “The Black Cyclone.”

I have been an avid football historian my entire life, but had never encountered a story so inspiring to sports enthusiasts as we see in the life and trials of Charles Follis. When one examines Charles' life, one sees a life of extraordinary accomplishments that have been largely overlooked for more than a century. As a young black man in a post-civil war Ohio, literally nothing could be taken for granted by young, black men in 1898. Just a few of Charles' accomplishments include graduating from High School in Wooster, starting, organizing and serving as captain of the Wooster High Football team, enrolling at then Wooster University and playing on the university baseball team where his athletic talents immediately stood out, and soon after gained regional recognition as "The Black Cyclone" for his tenacity on the gridiron. It was here that he then garnered the attention of Frank Schiffer, who ran the Shelby Athletic Club Football team, and impressed him enough that he paid him to move to Shelby, and play for his team. Here he encountered and befriended a young Branch Rickey, who never forgot his friend Charles Follis, and carried his memory forth, even after Charles' untimely passing in 1910. Of course, most sports enthusiasts know Branch Rickey as the man who broke the race barrier in modern sports by signing Jackie Robinson in 1947. As a student of history, I have learned that there is always a reason amazing things happen, and heroes are born. Charles Follis from Wooster, Ohio sparked a transition in this country that fostered acceptance. I am blessed to have encountered this story and been blessed with the inspiration to write his story in the play "The Black Cyclone", and make it a part of Ohio's proud history. I am grateful that this body has seen fit to recognize one so extraordinary. As Archie Griffin, an advocate and supporter of this story stated, “If we hadn’t had Charles Follis, we likely would not have had Jackie Robonson!”. He is an example for all to follow for his character and I echo his great niece as she said at the WHS Football field dedication **"Run Charles, Run for the Ages!"**