

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 6/11/20 to 9/11/20:

- All Events have been cancelled until further notice.
- Please like our Facebook Page for updates about the ballpark, including the public reopening: <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood.com>

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

- The Friends of Rickwood are excited to announce that caps, t-shirts, posters, books, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase on our website. We have some great new items, which we are excited about. Please visit our shop to browse and order:

<https://rickwood.com/shop/>



COVID-19 POSTPONES THE 24TH ANNUAL RICKWOOD CLASSIC AND THE JERRY MALLOY CONFERENCE

All previously scheduled events at Rickwood Field have been cancelled or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Birmingham Barons have postponed the 24th Annual Rickwood Classic, which had been scheduled for June 8, 2020.

Please check Rickwood.com and [Rickwood's Facebook page](#) for developments. If the Barons are able to have a partial season, and decide to go forward with the Classic at a later date, we will make the announcement immediately. Meanwhile,

SABR's Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference, which was announced for June 11-13, 2020 has officially been rescheduled for June 10-13, 2021 at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Birmingham.

THE 17TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION BASEBALL CONFERENCE WAS A BIG SUCCESS

The 17th Annual Southern Association Baseball Conference was held on March 7, 2020 at Rickwood Field. The event, which was put on by the Friends of Rickwood and the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter, was a tremendous success attracting nearly 40 attendees; this was *probably* the last public baseball event at Rickwood Field for 2020 given the current pandemic.

After morning coffee and snacks, **Clarence Watkins**, a native of Memphis, Tennessee, and the Executive Director of the Friends of Rickwood, opened the conference with introductory remarks. While wearing a Memphis Chicks jersey, he introduced each speaker throughout the day and kept attendees on their toes with trivia questions.

Clarence then presented on Charles Glock, who played in the minor leagues from 1937-52 posting a .285 lifetime batting average with 1,622 hits. Glock spent a decade as a middle infielder in the Southern Association, primarily as a member of the Atlanta Crackers. However, he also played for

other league members, including the Knoxville Smokies, Birmingham Barons, and New Orleans Pelicans. Several years ago, Glock's memorabilia came up for sale. Among the more interesting items was Glock's annual season budget, in which he allocated funds for his equipment, transportation, tips, taxes, and insurance. The budget was a reminder that while baseball remains a pastime for most of us, it was also a job for players in the Southern Association.

Gregory Bennington, who traveled from Louisville, Kentucky for the conference, then presented on his uncle, Bobby Durnbaugh, who played professional baseball from 1951-61, hitting a respectable .272 as a middle infielder.

Durnbaugh appeared in two games for the Cincinnati Reds in 1957, but spent most of his career in the minors, including five seasons in the Southern Association. He played four years for the Nashville Vols (1955-56 and 1958-59). He then spent the summer of 1961 with the Mobile Bears and Shreveport Sports during the final act of the Southern Associ-

ation. However, it was in Nashville where he had his best memories. He was named Most Valuable Vol in 1956 and his manager, Ernie White, called him "the hustlingest player' he ever saw."

Following a break, **John Guinozzo** closed out the morning session with a presentation on "Nicknames for Teams and Players of the Southern Association" while wearing a 1944 Memphis Chicks uniform. According to John, "the Memphis franchise listed more nicknames than any other Southern Association member. As the custom (in Memphis) in the early days, the team was called whatever color uniforms they wore. Hence, Memphis was called the Reds, Blues, Browns and Grays."

Memphis briefly used the Egyptians, and later the Turtles, before adopting the name Chicks in 1912. The nickname was short for Chickasaws and named after the Chickasaw Guard, which was a para-military drill team. In addition, the Chicks nickname

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SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

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was also short for the Chickasaw Tribe of native Americans, who live in the Memphis area. John's research also uncovered probably the most bizarre team nickname in Memphis baseball history: The "Fever Germs," which reporters began calling the club after a Yellow Fever epidemic in Memphis.

Following the morning session, attendees were treated to a delicious barbeque lunch, which was catered by Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q.

Terry Sloope, a SABR member with the Magnolia / Georgia Chapter, opened the afternoon session with an interesting presentation on William Virgil "Jumbo" Barrett. During his 9-year professional career, mostly during the 1920s, Jumbo batted .311 as a power-hitting catcher. In 1927, he hit .360 and set a South Atlantic League record with 39 home runs while playing for the Knoxville Smokies before finishing the season with the Memphis Chicks.

In 1928, Jumbo spent spring training with the New York Giants in Augusta, Georgia competing to replace veteran Zach Taylor as the backup catcher to Shanty Hogan. However, he failed to make the squad and remained with the Chicks following an exhibition game in Memphis. According to Terry, "Jumbo hoped to use the '28 season as a springboard to a spot on the Giants' roster the following season. [However, a] badly broken leg [suffered] during a bitter, hard-fought four game series at Ponce De Leon Park against the Atlanta Crackers that August brought those dreams to an end."

During his career, the native Georgian also played for the Atlanta Crackers and Mobile Bears in the SA. Jumbo's career ended in 1931 following a season with

the Durham Bulls of the Piedmont League. He died in Savannah, Georgia in 1977.

Bill Plott, a former reporter, columnist, and editor with *The Anniston Star* and *The Birmingham News* presented next. Bill is a longtime SABR member, and has written two books about the Negro Leagues. His topic was on Ferguson "Fuzzy" Woodruff, the Southern Association's League Historian.

Fuzzy gained notoriety as a sportswriter in the early 1900s, and was a veteran of World War I. In 1919, while working for *The Birmingham News*, Fuzzy began writing a 19-part series of Sunday columns entitled "Story of the Southern League." The series began with league's formation in 1885 and continued through 1915. However, the columns ended abruptly with the 1915 season. According to Bill Plott, "Woodruff, who worked for 12 newspapers in 22 years, got itchy feet and moved to Atlanta, joining one of the papers there."

Woodruff's articles are filled with clichés, but also "include fascinating anecdotal information on cantankerous Charley Frank." Frank was a southern baseball legend, who played from 1899-1902 and managed in the Southern Association from 1901-1921, including stints with Memphis, New Orleans, and Atlanta.

Woodruff died in Atlanta at the age of 45. He was buried with full military honors.

Clarence Watkins was the final speaker and presented on "Dusty Rhodes, A Childhood Memory". When he was growing up in Memphis, Clarence recalled asking his grandfather who his favorite player was. He replied, "Willie Mays and Dusty Rhodes," who were two heroes

on the New York Giants 1954 World Series championship team. Everyone knows Willie Mays, but many people confuse Rhodes with a professional wrestler who used the same name.

Dusty Rhodes was born on May 13, 1927 in Mathews, Alabama, which is an unincorporated community in Montgomery County. He played professional baseball for 16 seasons, including 7 with the New York and San Francisco Giants from 1952-59. In the minors, he played for the Nashville Vols in the Southern Association in 1952.

Rhodes was a natural pull hitter, which made Sulphur Dell's short right field fence especially tempting. He batted .347 and socked 18 home runs in 90 games for the Vols. Of course, the Polo Grounds had a similar configuration down the right field line. With the Giants, Rhodes became one of the most dangerous pinch hitters in the game. In the '54 World Series, Rhodes batted .667, hit 2 homers, and drove in 7 RBIs while winning MVP honors. He was presented with a new car for his efforts but wrecked the vehicle several weeks later. Rhodes was out of baseball after the 1962 campaign.

Clarence almost met Rhodes in 2008 or 2009 at his mother's retirement home, but unfortunately Rhodes' health took a downward turn and he cancelled the visit. Dusty Rhodes died shortly thereafter.

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- Jeb Stewart

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Above: Fellow Memphians Clarence Watkins (L) and John Guinozzo (R) at the 17th Annual Southern Association Baseball Conference. Below: Attendees listening intently to one of the presentations.



“Members of the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter are currently voting to determine the best team in Rickwood’s proud history.”

THE RICKWOOD SABR CHAPTER IS VOTING ON THE BEST TEAM IN RICKWOOD’S HISTORY

In our last issue, we featured a story about the best players at each position in Birmingham’s Rickwood-era (1910-87) as voted on by the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter. Members are currently voting to determine the best team in Rickwood’s proud history. 16

teams were selected from the Barons, Black Barons, and A’s based on record, winning percentage, regular season pennants, post season performance, statistical evidence (Team ERA, Batting Average, and Run Differential), and anecdotal evidence based on

each team’s pitching staffs and player rosters. We expect to have the complete results of the voting in our next issue of *Rickwood Tales*. For more information, please like the [Rickwood Field SABR Chapter](#) on Facebook.

MILES AND MONTEVALLO MET IN A MEMORABLE MOUND DUEL ON MARCH 11

The 24th Annual Rickwood Classic is unlikely to take place this season. With all events postponed or canceled there is little baseball news to report. However, on March 11, the Miles College Bears hosted the Montevallo Falcons at Rickwood Field in what was probably the final game at the ballpark for the 2020 season.

In the bottom of the second, Miles second baseman Cody Hamilton was hit by a pitch. William Johnson's base hit moved him to second. DH Preston Hope then singled him home to give Miles a 1-0 lead.

In the top of the sixth, Montevallo tied the score. Left Fielder Asa Awbrey opened the frame

with a double. DH Ben Teel's sacrifice bunt moved Awbrey to third. Mitch Fleming, the Falcons first basemen then reached on an error, which scored Awbrey. Miles pitcher Matthew McDonald was able to escape further damage.

The score remained tied at 1-1 as the teams entered the eighth inning. With one out in the top of the frame, Awbrey doubled again, but Bears pitcher Kolton Easterwood stuck out Montevallo's Riley Cain with two on and two out to end the threat and keep the score tied.

In the ninth, Evan Liddie drew a walk to open the top of the inning. Ryan Brooks then

moved pinch runner Matt Simon to second on a sacrifice bunt. Simon got to third on a wild pitch, and scored when Jake Smallwood hit into a fielder's choice to give the Falcons a slim 2-1 lead.

In the bottom of the ninth, pinch hitter Gage Humphries singled to center to open the inning, and lift the Bears' spirits. However, he advanced no further as Montevallo's reliever Chandler Ingram shut the door.

Chandler induced a fly out and struck out the next batter. With two out, Will Canty grounded out to short for the final out of the game, as Montevallo won, 2-1.

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DID YOU KNOW?



From 1948-52, the Birmingham Barons were an affiliate of the Boston Red Sox. The partnership was a successful one as Birmingham had an overall record of 409-354 (.535). The Barons also won Southern Association playoff titles and Dixie Series Championships in 1948 and 1951.

100 YEARS AGO AT RICKWOOD

On August 18, 2020, Rickwood Field will celebrate its 110th anniversary as America's oldest ballpark. As long as people care about keeping Rickwood alive, we believe the ballpark will last.

But this got us thinking about the 10th anniversary of the ballpark back in 1920. That anniversary went unnoticed by *The Birmingham News*, perhaps because the Barons were busy sweeping a doubleheader from the Crackers in Atlanta's Ponce de Leon Park.

The Barons were competitive in 1920 finishing with a record of 85-69 (.552). However, Birmingham finished in fourth place 6.5 games behind the Little Rock Travelers (88-59), New Orleans Pelicans (86-62) and Atlanta Crackers (85-62). In winning the Southern Association, the Travelers also won the right to represent the league in the first ever Dixie Series against the Fort Worth Panthers. Unfortunately for the SA, and the Travelers, Little

Rock fell in 6 games in the Series.

For the Barons and manager Carlton Molesworth, 1920 was a very good season. Attendance increased from 93,661 from the previous year to 172,475 and the club played well on the field. In fact, Birmingham was in the pennant race for nearly the entire summer. After a 4-7 start, which plunged them into seventh, the Barons went 10-1 and surged into first place by early May with a 14-8 record. Birmingham remained on top for the next 2 months. On July 3, the Barons led the league with a record of 38-29, but Little Rock was right behind them. On July 10, the Travelers overtook the Barons.

Still, Molesworth's men kept fighting. On the morning of August 21, the Barons were 67-50 and were tied with Little Rock for second place. Both teams trailed New Orleans by only two games. Birmingham fans didn't know it, but the pennant race was

about to end. The Travelers got hot finishing 21-9 to take the flag. Meanwhile, the Barons scuffled down the stretch with an 18-19 finish.

The Barons had some nice individual performances. Outfielder and Third Baseman Clyde Barnhart batted .322 with 25 doubles and 17 triples. First Baseman/Catcher Al Bernsen hit .320 and socked 8 home runs to tie Thomas Stevenson as the team leader in round trippers. Alfred Ellis and Bert Griffith batted .316 and .304 respectively. The Barons also added young Stuff Stewart, who would become an important cog in the Barons back-to-back SA championships in 1928-29.

The pitching staff had two starters who threw over 300 innings and two others with over 200 innings. Johnny Morrison led the Barons and tied for the league lead in wins (26-13). Whitey Glazner went 24-10. Thomas Gallagher and Joe Coffindaffer combined for 29 wins.

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BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

The Friends of Rickwood is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by making a donation to the Friends.

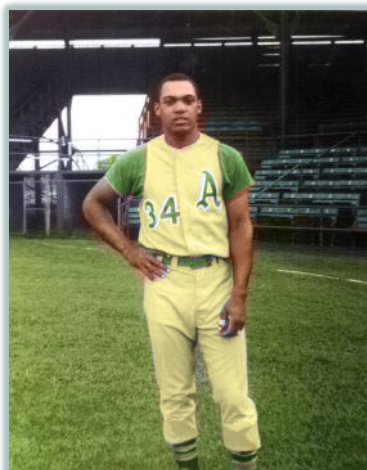
We have four levels of membership for individuals and each level will receive a certificate, a window sticker, and 10% off Rickwood merchandise: (1) Level 1 is a "Little Leaguer" for a \$10 donation; (2) Level 2 is a "Rookie" for a \$25 donation; (3) Level 3 is a

"Veteran" for a \$50 donation (and also gets a patch); and (4) Level 4 is a "Gold Glover" for a \$100 donation (and also gets a Rickwood shirt).

To join, please visit <https://rickwood.com/membership/>

or write us at:

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THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Bases Loaded With History*

You know a ballpark has reached a vintage age when even the books chronicling its long history are themselves old. Such is the case with Tim Whitt's 1995 book, *Bases Loaded With History: The Story of Rickwood Field, America's Oldest Ballpark*, which was published just a year before the first Rickwood Classic. Whitt, a resident of Montgomery, Alabama, was a member of the Ballparks Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) when he authored the book. He generously donated the net proceeds from its sales towards the restoration of the Rickwood.

Whitt's story of Rickwood's history moves quickly through the pages of *Bases Loaded With History*. He begins with the formation of the old Southern League in 1885, and the increasing popularity of baseball, as Birmingham grew to become the industrial center of the South. By 1909, the Slag Pile (also known as West End Park) and its dilapidated wooden grandstand, was outdated. The Barons new owner, A.H. "Rick" Woodward, made plans for a suitable replacement, which would not simply be an improvement, but would be the finest ballpark in the south, and the first minor league ballpark with a grandstand made of concrete and steel. Whitt tells the story of the ballpark's construction and the influence of Connie Mack, the owner and manager of the Philadelphia Athletics, who traveled to Birmingham to help design aspects of the grandstand and the playing field. Rickwood, which opened on August 18, 1910, was an unmitigated success for both Woodward and the Barons.

Carlton Molesworth, the Barons legendary manager from 1908-22, skippered the club's first Southern Association pennants won at Rickwood in 1912 and 1914. After a period of sagging attendance and competitiveness, the Barons enjoyed their most successful campaigns from 1928-31, when the team won three pennants and two Dixie Series titles over Texas League clubs.

Whitt also delves into the early history of the Birmingham Black Barons and its stars, Satchel Paige and Mule Suttles. The team was a member of the Negro Southern and later Negro National Leagues before joining the Negro American League in the late 1930s. The Black Barons rented Rickwood Field when the Barons were on the road. With Piper Davis, Artie Wilson, Double Duty Radcliff, Bill Powell, and teenage Willie Mays (1948-50), the Black Barons won three Negro American League pennants in the 1940s, but lost in the Negro League World Series each time to the powerful Homestead Grays.

After Rick Woodward died, the Barons came under new ownership. Whitt documents the Barons' most successful clubs in the 1940s and 50s, as well as the collapse of the Southern Association following the 1961 season. He briskly tells the story of the Barons rebirth in 1964, the formation of the new Southern League, the rebranding of the Barons as the A's, and Reggie Jackson's red-hot summer of 1967. However, declining attendance foretold the team leaving Birmingham after the 1975 season. Rickwood stood empty for the next five years until Art Clarkson brought the Barons back to Birmingham in 1981, which probably saved the ballpark from destruction. Whitt then recalls Rickwood's sunset seasons, which included Southern League titles for the Barons in 1983 and 1987.

Tim Whitt successfully managed to squeeze Rickwood's then 85-year history into just 108 concise, but well-written pages. The book is still regarded by most researchers as the starting point for any Rickwood-related research project. Unfortunately, the book is out of print and must be purchased used on Amazon or eBay. Whitt closes his book with the birth of the Friends of Rickwood and credits the Friends' progress in restoring the ballpark. As to Rickwood's legacy, he writes, "*You can hear the echoes of ten thousand games if you listen with the heart of a fan.*"

- Jeb Stewart

