

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 9/16/22 to 12/9/22

- **October 1-2:** USAA Tournament
- **October 5-9:** Closed
- **October 15:** Deshazo Crane Anniversary Celebration - Park closed to the public
- **October 16:** Rickwood Field Home Run Derby, featuring Andruw Jones (**Gates open at 1:00 PM; Autographs at 1:15 PM; Derby starts at 3:00**)
- **October 23:** "Fetch Rewards" event - Park closed to the public
- **October 28:** Coke Matthews' Legends Reunion
- **October 29-30:** CABA Travel Ball Tournament
- No events are scheduled for November and December

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

Caps, t-shirts, jackets, posters, books, coffee mugs, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase at <https://rickwood.com/shop/>



THE 2022 JERRY MALLOY NEGRO LEAGUE CONFERENCE

Back in 2010, Birmingham hosted the thirteenth annual Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference, which was the first for the Magic City. The event is still regarded as a tremendous success for the City of Birmingham. Attendees were also reminded that America's oldest ballpark, which was celebrating its 100th anniversary, is also America's oldest *Negro League* ballpark.

Three years ago, Lamar Smith, an executive committee member of the Friends of Rickwood, decided it was time to bring the national conference back to Birmingham. He submitted a proposal to SABR's Negro League Committee for the 2020 conference to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro Leagues. The

committee selected Birmingham over other cities, and the announcement was reported in our first issue of Rickwood Tales in December 2019. Of course, the conference did not take place in 2020. Smith recalled, "It has been a long adventure because of the two postponements due to Covid."

However, Smith never lost faith and continued leading efforts to bring the conference back to our city once the pandemic subsided. Following a virtual conference in 2021, Malloy was ready to return for an in-person event in 2022.

From June 2-4, 2022, the conference was finally held at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel. This was the first in-person

Malloy Conference since Major League Baseball recognized seven Negro Leagues as being major leagues, which made this conference extra special.

Malloy '22 was very well-attended. According to Dr. Leslie Heaphy, an Associate Professor of History at Kent State University, the conference hosted 123 attendees.

Smith noted that the generosity of Birmingham area corporations and political entities made hosting the conference much easier. He added that the local funding may have even been the highest in the history of the conference.

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THE 18TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

On March 5, 2002, the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter, in conjunction with the Friends of Rickwood, held the **18th Annual Southern Association (SA) Baseball Conference** at the ballpark. The SA was a professional baseball league that existed from 1901-61. Rickwood (1910-61), Engel Stadium in Chattanooga, Tennessee (1930-61), and Luther Williams Stadium in Macon, Georgia (1961), are the three remaining ballparks, which regularly hosted league games. The conference is dedicated to preserving the history of the league and baseball in the South.

After morning coffee and snacks, Memphis native **Clarence Watkins**, the former exec-

utive director of the Friends of Rickwood, opened with introductory remarks. We remembered Chris Drago, Gary Higginbotham, Jay Gauthreaux, and David Jenkins, all of whom attended the conference over the years. They will all be missed.

Clarence introduced each speaker and kept attendees on their toes with trivia questions. He also presented "**Baseball Before Rickwood**" remembering a time when ballparks in the old Southern League had wooden grandstands. When the Barons were founded in 1885, the rules of the game were quite different from today's rules, which mostly began to take shape with the founding of the SA in 1901. The

Barons played games at the Fairgrounds and Lakeview Park before finally taking up residence at West End Park from the late 1880s until 1910. The park was nicknamed "The Slag Pile" because of the enormous mountain of slag stretching along the exterior of the outfield fence. Slag was a byproduct of Birmingham's burgeoning iron industry, and the mountaintop was poised neatly above the field. Budget-minded fans would climb to the top to watch games for free.

Clarence juxtaposed the events of 1908 against the rising popularity of baseball in Birmingham. That year Jack Norworth

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2022 JERRY MALLOY CONFERENCE

- Continued from page 1

In addition to the numerous Negro League presentations, attendees got a close-up look at the history of Birmingham. They boarded buses and visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the Negro Southern League Museum, Regions Field, and Rickwood Field.

At Rickwood, they got to see Rickwood's updated championships mural on the third-base exterior of the grandstand. The mural updates were financed through a GoFundMe campaign and \$2,500 from SABR's Local Grants Program. A photo of the updated mural appears on the back page of this newsletter.

Malloy attendees also got to walk on Rickwood's field and have a catch, which several said was their highlight of the entire conference.

At the awards banquet on the final night of the event, former Black Barons Rev. Bill Greason and Tony Lloyd, and Clinton "Tiny" Forge of the Detroit Stars were honored for their years in Negro League Baseball.

Smith was also recognized as the recipient of the Malloy Conference's Commissioner Fay Vincent Most Valuable Partner (MVP) award.



Larry Lester Presenting the Fay Vincent MVP award to Lamar Smith

“Attendees also got to walk on Rickwood’s field and have a catch, which several said was their highlight of the entire conference.”

“Since its inception, the Friends accepted nearly every offer of baseball souvenirs, photos, relics, and more.”

CURATING THE RICKWOOD COLLECTION

Trying to get a grasp of all the baseball and related sports memorabilia donated to the Friends of Rickwood during the last 30 years is a daunting task. Since its inception, the Friends accepted nearly every offer of baseball souvenirs, photos, relics, and more.

Board member Coke Matthews, located an academic program that could provide someone with the knowledge and training to organize, catalog, and preserve historical items. In January of 2022, the Friends hired an intern, Elissa Lisle, a graduate student at the University of Alabama, pursuing an M.A. in History with a Certification in Museum Studies.

Lisle hails from Palm Harbor, Florida. Her father and brother played collegiate baseball. She has an undergraduate degree in Political Science and History from the University of Florida.

Lisle’s internship at Rickwood was a natural fit. She explained, “my master’s thesis examined the desegregation of the Blue-

Gray All-Star Football Classic in Montgomery, Alabama. When Coke Mathews reached out to Dr. Julia Brock, one of my committee members, about a potential internship opportunity with Rickwood Field, she asked if I would be interested because of my interest in sports history. I jumped at the opportunity! Dr. Brock is the Director of the Public History Concentration within UA’s History Department.”



Lisle’s work with the Friends occurred primarily from January through May of 2022. She de-

scribed the process of organizing and cataloging the items in the Friends’ collection. She began by “accessioning the items, which is a standard museum cataloging process.” She assigned “a three-part accession number to each item, and this number is attached to the item, either with a tag, light pencil marking, or B-72 resin. The details of the item, such as its accession number, physical description, and condition, are then uploaded to an Excel spreadsheet, which has photographs of each item. Through this process, members of Rickwood Field will be able to use the spreadsheet to inventory their collection and find exactly where an item is located.”

Lisle has cataloged 234 items but there are many more to be examined and classified. “My work is the first step in a long process to preserve the history of Rickwood Field. I have barely scratched the surface of items in the collection. The goal is to have the entire collection cataloged so the memorabilia and records can be easily found and accessed.”

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PHOTOS FROM THE MALLOY CONFERENCE



The Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference attracted 123 attendees, which had a positive economic impact on the community, including several hundred room nights in local hotels and patronage of local restaurants. Photos from left to right from the top: Larry Lester introduces a speaker to a capacity crowd; attendees visiting the Negro Southern League Museum; Larry Lester honoring Rev. Greason; the awards banquet; Larry Lester honoring Tiny Forge; attendees arriving at Rickwood; SABR's CEO Scott Bush playing catch on the field; and Tony Lloyd at the awards banquet.

THE RICKWOOD COLLECTION

She added, "I will not be able to complete the cataloging process due to the sheer number of items, but I hope that future interns will pick up where I left off."

When asked about the most unusual items in the collection Lisle cited several homemade scrapbooks. "I'm not sure I would call it the oddest, but most unique is a set of scrapbooks following the 1950s Birmingham Barons. A girlfriend, wife, or mother of one of the players created enormous scrapbooks with every newspaper clipping from those seasons. The beginning of the scrapbooks has handwritten color-coded rosters which include infor-

mation on if the player was single or not, their appearance, their hobbies, etc."

Most items, particularly any valuable ones, are stored offsite in a safe, not at Rickwood Field. This is because there is no area at the ballpark which meets museum standards for curation. Lisle listed several upgrades and improvements needed to reach those standards at the ballpark including installing climate controls, fixing the roof, and purchasing museum-grade storage.

Lisle summed up her thoughts on the project with exuberance. "Rickwood Field

is truly a national treasure, and I hope that my work will help the Friends with its museum efforts and possibly pave the way for baseball enthusiasts and researchers to be able to access the extraordinary items held here."

The Friends of Rickwood appreciate Dr. Julia Brock, and the University of Alabama's History Department for paving the way for an intern to catalog the baseball items in our possession. We also look forward to working with Dr. Brock again in the future, and we are excited about continuing Lisle's work.

- Joe DeLeonard

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REGGIE, ROLLIE, AND RUDI RETURN TO RICKWOOD

The summer of 1967 in Birmingham was marked by many images that would leave their mark on a 12-year-old from the suburbs, but my best memories took root in West End, where my father would take me to Rickwood Field to see the Birmingham A's. Not just the team. They were all giants to me. But the one guy ... the guy that we got to the park early to watch take batting practice, was still known by his full name back then. Reggie Jackson.

The whole park would stop and watch in awe, and silently listen. With every mighty swing, the ball seemed to cry out in excitement (or pain) as it rocketed off Reggie's bat and cleared the right field fence, sometimes reaching the railroad tracks.

My father, not given to spontaneous outbursts of any sort (until he took up golf) would flip up his clip-on shades and exclaim "Isn't that something?" I remember the disappointing 'awes' from the crowd when

Reggie swung and missed (which was a lot). And this was just practice!

In games, Reggie had a monster season for the A's. He hit .293 and led the team with 17 home runs, 17 triples, 26 doubles, 17 stolen bases, 84 runs scored, and a .562 slugging average.

I can only imagine what his numbers might have been if he had not missed nearly 25 games after a June promotion to the big leagues. Even so, he hit for the cycle in one game and hit a bases-loaded grand slam home run with two outs in the bottom of the ninth to win another game.

Somehow 56 years have passed since Birmingham native Charlie O. Finley sent Reggie, Rollie Fingers, Tony La Russa, Joe Rudi, and friends to hone their championship chops in Birmingham. That team won the Southern League and the Dixie Series.

The photos below, taken this August by FOR Chairman Gerald Watkins, are poignant reminders that those guys remember that summer too, along with every inch of the storied ballpark, Rickwood Field.

They also serve to remind us that so much time has passed.

- Coke Matthews

"They were all giants to me. But the one guy ... the guy that we got to the park early to watch take batting practice, was still known by his full name back then. Reggie Jackson."



“DUSTING ’EM OFF”: FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We had an amazing summer at America’s Oldest Baseball Park. Rickwood hosted 40 games in the month of July, which was the most ever for a single month. The highlight was a Perfect Game tournament which featured the best high school-age players in the nation. Every team had “D1” prospects or commits, and the talent level was astounding.

College coaches and pro scouts were in the stands watching these young men play on a field where over 180 Hall of Famers had played in years past. Teams came from New York, Texas, and many other states. The Rickwood staff made every effort to share the history of our great

ballpark with the teams. The players, coaches, and their families took hundreds of photos and put Rickwood on display on social media for the rest of the country to see. The number of games played in August did not compare to July, but more excitement followed.

On August 22, Rickwood Field welcomed the return of “Mr. October”, Reggie Jackson! Reggie had not been to Rickwood since he played here as a member of the Birmingham A’s in 1967. He returned with his A’s teammates, Rollie Fingers, and Joe Rudi to film a documentary on Reggie’s life. All of these legends were gracious and generous with their time after the filming ended. Reggie was par-

ticularly excited when I told him that only Babe Ruth, Stan Musial, and Reggie Jackson had hit a ball over the right field roof.

I told Reggie that another former teammate, Ron “Papa” Jackson lived in the area. Reggie asked me to invite Ron to visit. There is not enough space here to talk about all of the stories that surfaced during the visit as Reggie, Ron, Joe, and Rollie shared their stories. Gosh, I wish I had taped those conversations. I am told the documentary will be released in February. I cannot wait to see it!

- Gerald L. Watkins, Jr.

ANDRUW JONES HIGHLIGHTS RICKWOOD’S HOME RUN DERBY ON OCTOBER 16, 2022

On Sunday, October 16, 2022, Rickwood Field will host a “Home Run Derby”. The event will closely mimic MLB’s annual event but will feature retired MLB players. Gates open at 1:00 PM. The Derby begins at 3:00 PM. The schedule is subject to change.

Participants will include former Atlanta Braves great, Andruw Jones, who hit 434 home runs in a 17-year career and won 10 Gold Gloves; Desmond Jennings of Pinson Valley High School, who had 55 home runs in the show; Brandon Moss an 11-year veteran, who hit 160 homers in an 11-year career in the majors, with a high of 30 homers for the Oakland A in 2013; Seth Smith, who had 126 homers in his 11-year big league career; and we are inviting one local high school player and one local college player to compete. Our high school player is Trent Wright from Mountain Brook High School. The college player has not yet been named.

Other former MLB stars joining the festivities will be Wes Helms

and Ron “Papa Jack” Jackson. Wes had a fine 13-year career mostly with the Braves and Marlins but will be unable to compete due to a wrist injury. Wes will be on hand to offer advice to the hitters and meet with the fans.

Papa Jack had a 10-year playing career and coached for 20 years. He also served as the Boston Red Sox hitting coach during their 2004 World Series Championship season. He will be one of the pitchers in the Derby and will offer hitting

advice as well. Other former MLB stars have been invited.

There will be a one (1) hour public autograph session at 1:15 PM. Autograph tickets cost \$50 for one (1) autograph of each star. We encourage fans to visit our website at www.rickwood.com to order autograph tickets, as there will be a limited number.

The Home Run Derby will be a great event. Tickets will go on sale soon.

“Participants will include: former Atlanta Braves’ great, Andruw Jones. Andruw hit 434 home runs in a 17-year career and won 10 Gold Gloves ...”



RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1929 BIRMINGHAM BARONS

If you wander over by the third-base side of the grandstand, you will notice that the Friends of Rickwood have commemorated the championship clubs that have called America's Oldest Ballpark home from 1910-1987. This series remembers those seasons.

The 1929 Birmingham Barons finished 93-60 (.608), good for first in the Southern Association (Class A) for the second year in a row. The Barons finished three games ahead of the Nashville Vols. There were no playoffs in the SA in 1929.

Manager Johnny Dobbs' club batted .296. Once again, Rickwood's dimensions forced the Barons' offense to favor stolen bases (140) more than home

runs (72). Notable players included Stuff Stewart (.366), Butch Weis (.345, 7 homers), Yam Yaryan (.355, 3 homers), Ernie Moore (.309, 10 homers), Gus Sturdy (.297, 14 homers), Urbane Pickering (.278, 15 homers), Andrew Moore (.305, 7 homers), and Bill Black (.303, 8 homers).

The staff of the '29 Barons had a 3.75 team ERA. Will Ludolph (21-8, 3.62, 239 IP), Bob Hasty (22-11, 3.58, 236 IP), Ray Francis (15-10, 3.48, 212 IP), and Clay Van Alstyne (12-7, 4.76, 155 IP) led the pitching staff, which included Ray Caldwell who threw 65.1 innings, but who later gained immortality with the Barons in the 1931 Dixie Series.

In the Dixie Series, the Barons faced the Texas League Champion Dallas Steers. Dallas had 8 players who batted over .300 including Randy Moore (.369), Jimmy Moore (.364), and Sy Rosenthal (.339). The Steers pitching staff was not on par with the '28 Houston Buffaloes, as Dallas had no 20-game winners. The series opened at Rickwood on September 26.

In Game 1, Will Rudolph won a two-hit shutout, 1-0. The game was tied in the seventh inning with runners on the corners and two outs. when the Barons executed a daring double steal. The Steers nearly picked off Herschel Bennett at first base as he broke for second. As they tried

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DID YOU KNOW?



BIRMINGHAM CLUB—CHAMPIONS SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION, 1929.

1, M. O'Brien, Trainer; 2, Ludolph; 3, Yaryan; 4, Morton; 5, Hasty; 6, Sturdy; 7, Francis; 8, Caldwell; 9, Mascot; 10, Weis; 11, A. Moore; 12, C. Moore; 13, Gibson; 14, Pickering; 15, Black; 16, Hearn; 17, Smith; 18, Van Alstyne; 19, Mascot; 20, Bennett; 21, Clabaugh; 22, John G. Dobbs, Mgr.; 23, Mascot.

The Barons won Southern Association titles in 1928 and 1929 for manager Johnny Dobbs posting a collective record of 192-114 (.627). After winning the Dixie Series in 1929, Dobbs accepted an offer to manage the Barons' rivals, the Atlanta Crackers. Dobbs was no stranger to changing jobs as he had already managed Nashville, Chattanooga, Montgomery, New Orleans, and Memphis in the league. In Atlanta, Dobbs managed the Crackers to disappointing fourth and sixth-place finishes in 1930 and 1931. Birmingham replaced him with Clyde Milan, who managed the Barons for five seasons and guided the club to Southern Association and Dixie Series titles in 1931.

1929 BARONS WIN BIRMINGHAM'S FIRST DIXIE SERIES AT RICKWOOD FIELD

to tag him out, Barons outfielder Moose Clabaugh suddenly ran for home. Dallas infielder Irv Jeffries then threw home, but the throw was high and Clabaugh scored.

The following day, Dallas led 4-2 in Game 2 after two innings. However, the Barons collected 16 hits in the contest and took a 7-5 lead in the fifth inning en route to a 7-6 victory behind the pitching of ancient starter Ray Caldwell.

Back home in Texas, the Steers won Games 3 and 4 from the Barons 4-2 and 6-5. The Series must have felt familiar to the Barons, who had blown a 2 to 0 Series advantage in losing to the Houston Buffaloes the previous year.

However, in the pivotal Game 5, the Barons' bats came alive as Birmingham won 8-4. The series returned to Birmingham for Game 6 on October 2. The Barons defeated the Steers, 7-5, for Birmingham's first-ever

Dixie Series crown (and the first for any SA team in the Series since 1922).

With their SA pennant and first Dixie Series title, the Barons completed one of the finest seasons in team history.

An incredible 16 players from the Barons' 22-man roster would spend time in the big leagues.



DIXIE SERIES GAME, BHAM. ALA. SEPT. 26, 1929.

“The Barons defeated the Steers, 7-5, for Birmingham’s first ever Dixie Series crown (and the first for any SA team in the Series since 1922).”

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 donating 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 donate, please visit <https://rickwood.com/donate-to-rickwood-field/> or write us at:

**The Friends of Rickwood
Rickwood Field
1137 2nd Ave West
Birmingham, AL 35204**

We need your help more than ever this year. Thanks!

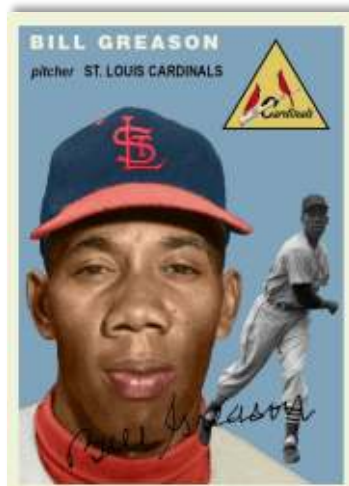


Photo Credit: Johnny Haynes

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

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and Albert Von Tilzer wrote the song, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Birmingham's population was just 75,000. The divorce rate was 1 in 1,000. Houses did not have electricity. Radio broadcasts did not yet exist, and filmmaking was in its infancy. People learned popular songs of the day from sheet music and got their news from Birmingham's five newspapers. Entertainment was live, from Birmingham's Vaudeville theaters to horseracing, boxing, wrestling, and baseball. The Barons kept fans abreast of the schedule and rain-outs by posting announcements during business hours downtown. Most patrons traveled to games using Birmingham's extensive network of streetcars.

By 1909, A.H. "Rick" Woodward purchased the Barons during their final season at the Slag Pile. He soon decided to build a showplace - a park with the first concrete and steel ballpark constructed in the Deep South.

Skip Nipper, who traveled to the conference from Mt. Juliet, Tennessee is an expert on another ballpark from the SA. He presented next on "**The Quirky Confines of Nashville's Famous Ballpark, Sulphur Dell.**" The park existed in various forms from 1870 until it was torn down in 1969. Skip's presentation included a nice slide show of photos taken from every angle of Sulphur Dell.

The ballpark was located at Sulphur Springs Bottom between Summer and Cherry Streets near the Tennessee State Capitol and the Cumberland River and was originally named "Athletic Park". Famed sportswriter Grantland Rice later dubbed it Sulphur Dell and the name stuck. The Nashville Vols began playing at Sulphur Dell in 1901.

In its early years, Sulphur Dell was unusual, as batters had difficulty seeing pitches during sunset. By 1927, the field was rotated 180

degrees, and a 7,500-capacity concrete and steel grandstand was added to complete the park.

Even with changes, Sulphur Dell remained one of the most idiosyncratic parks. When the Cumberland River flooded - so did the playing field - until the construction of the Hickory Dam. The park had intimate confines as only 26 feet separated the third-base line from the grandstand, while the first-base line was also close at 42 feet. The outfield dimensions were 334 feet to left, 421 feet to center, and just 262 feet to right. In 1954, Bob Lennon took advantage of the short porch to set a league record with 64 homers.



However, the outfield was primarily known for its steep inclines. The right-field fence was 22 and 1/2 feet above the playing surface. Because of the incline, Phil Weintraub once made three errors on one play. After seeing the field in 1927, Babe Ruth reportedly said, "I'm not going to play on anything a cow won't graze on." Ruth later homered during the game.

The SA collapsed after the 1961 season. The Vols returned to Sulphur Dell in 1963 as a member of the South Atlantic League, but the franchise dissolved forever after one season. In 2015, the Triple-A Nashville Sounds opened First Tennessee Park (now First Horizon). The ballpark was partially constructed on Sulphur Dell's footprint.

John "JayJay" Guinozzo, who traveled from Memphis, then presented on "**58 Years of Scor-**

ing Pro Baseball." He is an official scorer for the NBA, the Memphis Redbirds, the University of Memphis, and Ole Miss.

As a freshman in high school, John discovered his love for scoring. Other young men emulated their favorite players, such as Stan Musial's batting stance. JayJay emulated Henry Chadwick, who was most responsible for creating baseball's rules and scoring. When he was only 13, he cut class and took a trolley into downtown Memphis where he purchased a rule book and a scorebook. Despite missing class, he eventually became a professional scorer.

In the 1960s, JayJay had to fill out his scorecards and mail them to the league office. Now, he scores games with a computer, which revolutionized his job. But scoring decisions remain judgment calls. When a player or manager at AutoZone Park complains about one of his calls, he invites them to the press box to show replays of a particular play. He also gives Major League Baseball's Office Scorers Certification Test to would-be scorers, coaches, and any parents who complain about a scoring decision. Most people are only able to answer 30% of the questions correctly.

JayJay recalled one game in the early 1980s when Stump Merrill was the manager of the Nashville Sounds. The Sounds were playing the Memphis Chicks. JayJay called an error, which ended Willie McGee's hitting streak. Merrill was furious and berated JayJay. He responded, "*you may have the same guy manage and score in Nashville, but in Memphis it's separate.*" Merrill cussed him out. Later that year, Merrill argued with another Southern League scorer and told him, "*You're not the worst scorer in the league, but when that SOB in Memphis dies you will be!*"

"By 1909, A.H. "Rick" Woodward purchased the Barons during their final season at the Slag Pile. He soon decided to build a showplace - a park with the first concrete and steel ballpark constructed in the Deep South."

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Attendees were then treated to barbeque, which was catered by Full Moon. They were joined by special guest **Bobby Durnbaugh**, who played professional baseball from 1951-61, including stints in the SA with the Vols (1955-56 and 1958-59), Mobile Bears (1961), and the Shreveport Sports (1961).

Bobby entertained with stories about his playing days, including the time the Cincinnati Reds called him up in 1957. When asked about his favorite ballpark to hit in, he jokingly replied, "I would have liked to have been able to hit in *any* of them." Bobby recalled going 5-5 in a game; he then went hitless in his next 15 at-bats.

After lunch, members of the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter presented Clarence Watkins with a Memphis Red Sox cap in gratitude for his years of hosting the conference.



Jim Windisch opened the afternoon session with an interesting presentation on "**Memphis Baseball.**" Jim is originally from Chicago and is a White Sox fan. When he moved to Memphis, he saw the Chicks play during the team's final season at old Tim McCarver Stadium. He fell in love with Memphis baseball and recalled attending at least 60 of the club's 71 games at AutoZone Park the next season. Jim considers himself to be a sports memorabilia archaeologist. He regularly attends estate and yard sales, where he has made some incredible finds over the years. He once pur-

chased boxes from a storage unit, which had belonged to Tommy McMillan, who was a player with the Brooklyn Superbas from 1908 to 1910 and also briefly played for the Reds and Highlanders. McMillan had a 24-year career as a player in professional baseball and later became a manager. Jim obtained boxes of correspondence, which included letters signed by Ty Cobb and Wilbert Robinson.

Joe DeLeonard, Ben Powell, and Jeb Stewart then presented the findings of the Rickwood Hall of Fame Project. The goal of the project is to confirm every member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame who appeared in a game at Rickwood Field as an active player, manager, coach, or umpire. The committee has now identified **181 Hall of Famers**, who appeared in games at the ballpark with more research needed for 27 other Hall of Fame members, as well as executives.

Their slideshow included photographs of some of the Hall of Famers who appeared in games at Rickwood, such as Ruth, Ted Williams, Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle, Reggie Jackson, and others. The talk included an "inside baseball" discussion of how the project grew out of DeLeonard's years of research on the more than 230 major league games played at the park from

1911 to 1986. With Newspapers.com including *The Birmingham News* through the end of 1963, this made finding box scores of these games much easier.

Attendees then participated in a discussion on how to commemorate the Hall of Famers who appeared at Rickwood and whether executives in the Hall of Fame, who visited the park, and who are not yet included among the 181 Hall of Famers, should also count towards the total.

Clarence Watkins then gave his closing remarks, along with a discussion about possibly finding another Southern Association city to host the event in 2022.



Jim Windisch

"The committee has now identified 181 Hall of Famers, who appeared in games at the ballpark with more research needed for 27 other Hall of Fame members, as well as executives."



Clarence Watkins welcomes attendees to the conference

THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *At Bat*

The Friends of
Rickwood

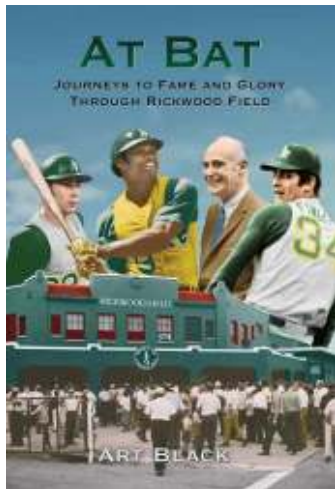
Rickwood Field
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<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood/>



Art Black has written three books about Rickwood Field, which are regarded as the best histories of the ballpark, the Barons, the Black Barons, and the A's. However, they are so much more than baseball books. He never leaves the reader in the vacuum of a dry summary of a particular season's events and records. Instead, he includes important details of events happening outside the gates of the park for historical context. His readers are also treated to richly painted stories of owners, managers, players, and the community, which make his books exceptionally readable and impossible to put down.

In *Showdown at Rickwood: Ray Caldwell, Dizzy Dean, and the Early Years of America's Oldest Ball Park*, Black told the story of the history of Birmingham and the Barons, as well as the construction of Rickwood Field in 1910. He expertly recounted Caldwell's and Dean's pitching duel in Game One of the 1931 Dixie Series, which many consider the greatest game ever played in Birmingham. Black's follow-up book, *Fame and Fortune in the Show: Baseball at Rickwood Field and Beyond in the middle 1900s*, explored the teams and players who played at Rickwood from the 1930s through 1964, as well as the historical events and rapidly changing times during this period.

Now, in *At Bat: Journeys to Fame and Glory through Rickwood Field*, Black completes his historical trilogy with a superbly written book, which covers the Birmingham A's era at Rickwood (1967-75), and the return of the Birmingham Barons (1981-87) for one last hurrah.

Black tells the story of Birmingham-native Charlie O. Finley, who nearly died from tuberculosis and spent more than 2 years suffering from its debilitating effects. He eventually recovered, made a fortune in the insurance business, and purchased a majority ownership stake in the last place Kansas City Athletics in 1960. The club's fortunes did not improve and stayed at or near the bottom of the American League standings from 1961-67. Ever the showman, Finley's early years in Kansas City are often remembered as much for his team's mascot, a mule named Charlie O, which often traveled with the club.

As an owner, Finley was both beloved for his quiet generosity and despised for his public parsimony. But he also had a knack for identifying talent and slowly began to build up the A's farm system with players like Bert "Campy" Campaneris, and John "Blue Moon" Odom. Campaneris and Odom were key players on the Birmingham Barons' club that narrowly missed winning the Southern League in 1964. With the beginning of the Major League Baseball Draft in 1965, Finley continued to stock his minor league system with talent over the next several years adding Rick Monday, Sal Bando, Gene Tenace, Reggie Jackson, and Vida Blue through the draft, and signing Rollie Fingers and Joe Rudi. In 1968, the A's moved to Oakland and by the mid-1970s they became a dynasty winning three World Series in a row. Except for Bando and Monday, most of these players honed their skills at Rickwood Field. Jackson, Fingers, Rudi, and Dave Duncan brought glory to the ballpark in 1967 by leading the Birmingham A's to Southern League and Dixie Series titles. Another player, Tony La Russa, became a student of the game under manager John McNamara.

By 1975, everything had changed. Free agency was in its infancy and Oakland began to lose players to teams with more money. Their affiliate in Birmingham moved to Chattanooga following the 1975 campaign. The cheers at Rickwood Field fell silent as the park was without minor league baseball for five long seasons. The ballpark might have been torn down if another showman did not save her.

In 1980, Art Clarkson was the GM in Memphis. He believed minor league baseball could still work in Birmingham. So, he led an ownership group that purchased the Montgomery Rebels and moved the franchise to Birmingham rebranding them as the Barons. Clarkson was a great promoter who brought crowds back to Rickwood and won SL titles in 1981 and 1987. Black tells the stories of those teams as well as players such as Kevin Comstock, George Fousianes, Don Henkel, and Rondal Rollin, who set the Barons' single-season home run record with 39 in their final season at Rickwood. He also recounts Clarkson's difficult decision to leave the ballpark and move the team to Hoover. *At Bat* is a fun ride and we are glad Art Black decided to take us along. *At Bat* is dedicated to "...those who love the game." Every fan of baseball and Rickwood Field will also love this book.

- Jeb Stewart

