

# RICKWOOD TALES

## Rickwood Calendar: 9/3/21 to 12/3/21:

- **Perfect Game** baseball tournaments — the weekends of: September 4-5, 11-12, 18-19, 25-26; October 2-3, 9-10, 16-17, 23-24, and 30-31
- **Friends of Rickwood** board meetings: October 13 and November 17
- Follow us on [Facebook](#) to stay updated as other events are announced.

## Get Your Rickwood Gear!

- Caps, t-shirts, jackets, posters, books, coffee mugs, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase on our website. Please visit our [online shop](#) to order.



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



## WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MARKER DEDICATED AT RICKWOOD FIELD

On August 21, 2021, the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the League of Women Voters of Alabama, and the Friends of Rickwood held a dedication ceremony for a National Votes for Women Trail marker. Attorney Nicole King addressed visitors on behalf of the Mayor's

office. Then, Alex Colvin, the public programs curator at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, joined Dr. Valerie Burnes, a professor of history at the University of West Alabama, Alabama State Senator Linda Coleman Madison, and Gerald Watkins, the execu-

tive director of the Friends of Rickwood, for the marker's unveiling.

The marker, which is located on the third-base side of Rickwood's entrance, joins five

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## WHO ARE THE FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD? BACK TO THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

In our previous editions, we documented the origins of the Friends of Rickwood, the role of unsung heroes in our restoration efforts, and how Hollywood and the Rickwood Classic helped to sustain the ballpark. Our final installment considers Rickwood from the perspective of our board members as we discuss some of the challenges we now face as we pass the preservation baton to the next generation.

The City of Birmingham has owned Rickwood Field since purchasing the ballpark from Albert Belcher in the late 1960s. Since the early 1990s, the City has entrusted the care of the park to the Friends of Rickwood, which is comprised of a board of directors along with two employees (an executive director and a groundskeeper). The Friends are responsible for the upkeep of Rickwood's grandstand, the arcade entrance, offices, the conference room, clubhouses, the batting building, and the playing field.

The ballpark itself is concrete and steel, but the Friends are the lifeblood of Rickwood Field. Our members pay annual dues

to belong to the board. Members attend monthly meetings at the ballpark, raise money towards the restoration of Rickwood, oversee numerous repair and maintenance projects, organize the baseball schedule, update our social media pages, volunteer for countless events, and publish the quarterly newsletter you are reading.

We also attend regular cleaning days on weekends in the spring. We paint handrails and fences, sweep all areas of the concourse, clean the ticket booths, eliminate weeds in the grandstand's lower bowl, clean seats, pick up trash, and scrub the toilets in the restrooms. Sometimes it gets tiresome, but we love every minute of it because we are all Friends who love Rickwood Field.

We recently surveyed our board members with questions regarding the present and future of Rickwood.

Rick Woodward, III, grandson of the Barons' owner who built the ballpark, became a board member in the 1990s. He learned about the Friends through a

mutual friend of Coke Matthews. He cited throwing out the first pitch with Piper Davis at the first Rickwood Classic in 1996 as being one of the best experiences in his involvement with the Friends. However, Rick and his brother Bob Woodward cited the general public's lack of awareness of the ballpark as being a nagging problem for years. Rick explained, "that is a conundrum with which the Friends have been dealing with since its founding."

Scott Davis and Wayne Trammell are two of our newest board members, having joined in 2019. Both expressed love for history and the ballpark as reasons for getting involved with the Friends. Davis loves giving tours to visitors and added, "I enjoy seeing people in awe of what Rickwood stands for." Trammell is a regular presence at the park on weekends and was instrumental in helping to submit a funding grant. He noted, "it's pretty cool to the behind-the-scenes workings of what it takes to maintain America's Oldest Ball-

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## WHO ARE THE FRIENDS?

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*"The Classic is great for the Barons, Rickwood Field, the fans, and the game of baseball. The game is truly an event, which brings a lot of tourism dollars into Birmingham."*

park." Rick Woodward and Davis both agree on some of the main concerns going forward for the ballpark. Woodward would like to see structural repairs take place, citing "the two remaining items on the City of Birmingham Engineering Department's recommendation list along with repairing the wooden wall along the walkway at the top of the seating area and the concrete walkway itself." He added, "a paint job for the whole ballpark would be nice."

Davis cited a relatively new problem for the ballpark as the latest pressing issue, "getting the lights back in working order. [There are also] big projects that will need to be done: like replacing the roof and the wooden slats on the exterior of the stadium. The bathrooms are also in need of renovation." While the infield ground has been substantially improved

and smoothed out within the last year, Davis, a veteran umpire of local amateur games, would like to see continued improvements.

Rickwood hosts around 100 baseball games per year, although some people only know about the Rickwood Classic. However, we constantly reach out to the baseball community to let them know we can host games and other activities. Davis recommends the ballpark hold a wooden bat high school tournament.

Rick Woodward suggests Rickwood put together an Alabama community college playoff and a possible state championship series. Trammell agreed, adding that an annual college baseball tournament would be a great event. He would also like to see a cook-off for a charitable foundation.

Everyone on our board is frustrated by the loss of the Rickwood Classic the last two seasons. We hope the game will return next year. The Classic is great for the Barons, Rickwood Field, the fans, and the game of baseball. The game is truly an event, which brings a lot of tourism dollars into Birmingham.

Bob Woodward has a loftier goal in mind. He believes that if we find more creative ways to promote the ballpark, Rickwood might one day get its own Major League "Field of Dreams" game. After all, Rickwood has hosted lots of major league teams, including more than 140 members of the Baseball Hall of Fame during its 111 years. When the big leagues come calling, Rickwood will be ready.

- Joe DeLeonard & Jeb Stewart

## SUFFRAGE MARKER DEDICATED

Continued from page 1

*"When you look at a moment like this at Rickwood Field [and] this marker ... it's a chance for us all to remember that nothing that happened was inevitable."*

other markers in Alabama, which remember the fight for Women's Suffrage.

The marker commemorates Birmingham's Suffrage Day event, which was held on August 18, 1915, and coincided with the fifth anniversary of Rickwood's opening. The Alabama Equal Suffrage Association joined with the Birmingham Barons in putting on the game.

According to Alex Colvin, the game was a fun way for the Suffragists to rally support for the cause of Women's right to vote in Alabama. Colvin noted that fans entered the park and saw "huge gold banners with words like 'votes for women,' 'equality,' and 'justice.' All the Barons were playing with yellow

sashes because yellow was the color for suffrage. And the coaches wore 'votes for women' sashes. And people were celebrating this moment."

The scheduled game was between the Barons and the Chattanooga Lookouts. Before they took the field, two all-female teams from Birmingham and Bessemer played a one-inning exhibition. Colvin noted, "they played to show that women can play the game as the men do." Bessemer won the exhibition contest, but the game between the Barons and Lookouts ended in a scoreless tie. Even so, the event was successful because the fans had a great time and even sang pro-Suffrage songs.

Colvin added, "so, it really was a success for the Suffragists. Unfortunately, two weeks later the

legislature did not pass the amendment. The Suffragists had to work once again to try and get the Nineteenth Amendment passed in Congress and ratified. It would take another five years before women would get the right to vote. Of course, the story doesn't end in 1915 or 1920, it continues ... [the] suffrage fight went on into the 1950s and 1960s as African American women took up that fight."

Colvin concluded, "When you look at a moment like this at Rickwood Field [and] this marker ... it's a chance for us all to remember that nothing that happened was inevitable. It took hard work. It took a lot of unique tactics. And it took a group of women across Alabama in order to bring greater equality to all Alabamians."

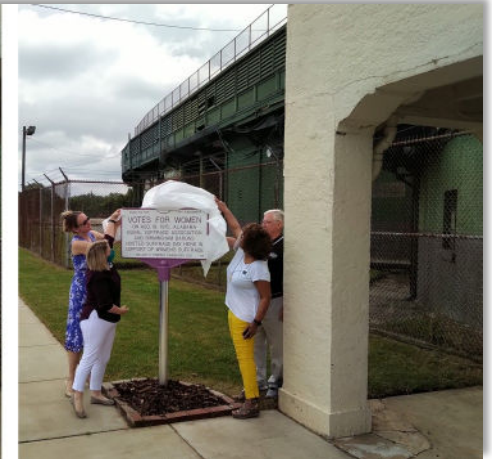
## SCENES FROM RICKWOOD'S OPEN HOUSE AND THE UNVEILING OF THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MARKER



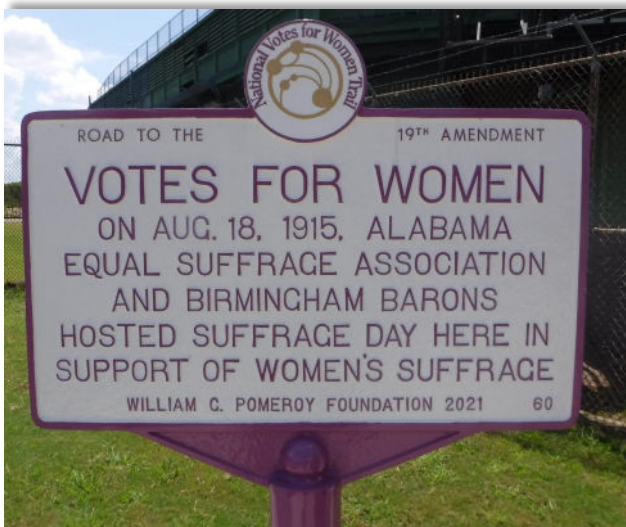
*A great crowd came out on August 21 to celebrate the dedication of the Women's Suffrage marker*



*Alex Colvin addresses visitors*



*Alex Colvin, Dr. Valerie Burns, Senator Linda Coleman Madison, and Gerald Watkins unveil the Women's Suffrage marker*



*Rickwood's newest historical marker*



*Executive Director Gerald Watkins poses with the UAB softball team*

## DUSTING 'EM OFF": FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

America's Oldest Ballpark has experienced an amazing three months. During the summer we had visitors from 16 states and 2 foreign countries. We were able to provide guided tours for most of our guests. Special thanks to Randy Ferguson and Ben Powell for serving as guides and sharing their stories with our guests.

Among the many visitors were current players and coaches from the Mississippi Braves, who took time out of a road trip to Birmingham to visit the ballpark. A film crew working on a documentary about the life of Willie Mays also shot several scenes at Rickwood.

This Summer we have had a tremendous increase in Board Member involvement, particu-

larly on weekends. This has greatly improved our presence on-site, and our ability to expand our operating hours, which makes for a much better experience for our guests.

On August 18, Rickwood celebrated its birthday as the park turned 111. On August 21 we held our first "Open House," which allowed fans to get on the field, toss the ball around, take photos, and take guided tours. The Open House was held in conjunction with the dedication of a historic marker celebrating Rickwood Field's role in supporting the Women's Suffrage movement in 1915. The event was a huge success with over 100 fans visiting and taking part in the activities, including the UAB softball team.

Our Fall schedule includes a record number of baseball games as the nationally known organization, Perfect Game, has booked every weekend in September and October for tournaments.

As events for 2021 begin to wind down we are working on our 2022 schedule. We hope to have big announcements before year-end. Stay tuned!

Thanks again to all of our visitors who have enjoyed and supported Rickwood Field, and our volunteers (the Friends of Rickwood) for your efforts to clean, repair, and work to keep America's Oldest Ballpark available to our fans.

- Gerald Watkins

*"We hope to have big announcements before year-end. Stay tuned!"*

## DID YOU KNOW?



After winning the Southern Association pennant in 1914, the Birmingham Barons took on the Milwaukee Brewers for the minor league championship. Southern newspapers derided the series because it was not sanctioned by the national commission and because the entire series was scheduled to be played in Milwaukee. The Brewers played in the American Association and were considered Double-A, while the Southern Association was Single-A. Despite those disadvantages, the Barons played hard, and the series was tied after four games. However, on October 11, the Brewers won a doubleheader (10-2 and 3-0) to claim the minor league championship. The final game was called after five innings on account of darkness. (See page 5 for the story of the Barons' season).

## RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1914 BIRMINGHAM BARONS

If you happen to 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 each of those seasons.

After winning the Southern Association (A) pennant in 1912, the Barons sank to third place the next year. In 1914, Birmingham won the SA with a record of 88-63 (.583), which was good for a three-game lead over the Mobile Sea Gulls. The title was the third and final one for Manager Carlton Molesworth, who had also played for the Barons when the club captured the flag at Birmingham's Slag Pile in 1906.

The pennant was a hard-fought come-from-behind affair. On August 3, the Barons were just 59-49 and mired in third place behind Mobile (62-44) and the New Orleans Pelicans (60-46). However, the Barons finished 29-14 (.674) down the stretch to claim first place. On Sunday, September 13, the sports page of The Bir-

mingham News declared the news boldly: "Barons Have Clinched 1914 Race: Birmingham's Bustling Barons, Pennant Winners for 1914".

The Barons batted .249 as a team. Pete Knisley (.353, 9 homers), Clyde McBride (.284, 14 doubles, 27 steals), Ed McDonald (.282, 11 homers, 41 steals), Art Marcan (.264, 39 steals), Tuffy Stewart (.253, 4 homers, 48 steals), and Roy Ellam (.226, 10 homers, 13 steals) were the most notable hitters. Manager Carlton Molesworth played in 23 games and batted 74 times. He finished with a .338 batting average. Once again, the club used the stolen base as a primary weapon as the Barons' baserunners combined to steal 269 bases, 10 more than the club stole in 1912.

The pitching staff combined for a 3.79 ERA. Charles "Curly" Brown (21-7, 255 IP), Omar Hardgrove (20-9, 252 IP), and Richard Robertson (20-18, 306 IP) gave the Barons three 20-game winners, with Art Johnson (18-9, 288 IP), and David Roth (8-7, 130 IP) also contributing to the team's success. Future Hall of Famer Burleigh Grimes ap-

peared in 10 innings over 4 games.

Of the 20 players on the roster, 12 members of the 1914 Barons would reach the big leagues. There were no SA Playoffs or Dixie Series. However, Birmingham did play in a postseason series. The Single-A Barons took on the Double-A Milwaukee Brewers for the minor league championship. The Brewers had won the American Association pennant with a record of 98-68. All the games in the series were played in Milwaukee. Although the Barons played hard, they lost the series, 4 games to 2.



*"The Single-A Barons took on the Double-A Milwaukee Brewers for the minor league championship."*

## BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

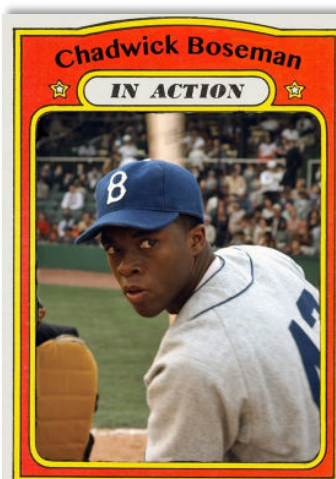
The Friends of Rickwood is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by donating to the Friends.

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!**



## RICKWOOD FIELD IS OLD... BUT NOT THAT OLD!

Back in May, Rickwood was set to host games between teams in the Tennessee Association of Vintage Base Ball. The league uses equipment and uniforms similar to what was available in 1864. In addition, the league follows [unique rules](#) from that era. Gloves, spitting, and swearing are expressly forbidden during play. Unfortunately, the May

games were rained out. We were finally able to reschedule the games for Saturday, August 14, 2021. We hosted about three dozen members of the Association, who played a double-header.

The weather, although hot, was fair. The field was better than

fair. And the games were fairly played as families, friends, and visitors took great joy in the festivities of the day. The teams play a regular season schedule in the Nashville, Tennessee area, and it was a delight to see them in Birmingham. We look forward to next year's games at Rickwood.

### MEMORIES OF RICKWOOD FIELD (1946-1949)

*The ongoing spirit to preserve and share the magic of Rickwood Field has always been inspired by the personal and collective memories of Birmingham's baseball-loving community. In this issue, we feature the childhood memories of Miller Gorrie, long-time leader of Brashfield & Gorrie.*

My first experiences at Rickwood Field were during the years just following World War II. Television did not yet exist and there were no major league clubs in the south so minor league baseball was a big deal. Birmingham belonged to the [Double-A Southern Association](#), an eight-team league consisting of the Birmingham Barons, Atlanta Crackers, New Orleans Pelicans, Little Rock Travelers, Memphis Chickasaws, Chattanooga Lookouts, Nashville Volunteers, and Mobile Bears. The stronger teams were generally Birmingham, Atlanta, and Nashville. Annually, the winner of the Southern Association would play the winner of the Texas League in the Dixie Series.

In the fall of 1946, I began to attend the sixth grade at Lakeview Grammar School on the Southside and met Naylor Stone, who became a lifelong friend. Naylor's father was the sports editor of the *Birmingham Post*, one of the two daily evening papers, which later became the *Post-Herald*. Mr. Stone was

responsible for covering all sporting events in and around Birmingham, including the University of Alabama and Auburn. Football, baseball, and wrestling accounted for most of his time. He attended almost all of the Birmingham Barons home games and Naylor and I would frequently join him, particularly on weekends.

I have vague memories of the 1946 season. From 1947-1949 we attended more regularly. In 1947, our best hitter, [Zeb Eaton](#) (.359) got knocked out of a game by a beanball. I also remember Mr. Stone would be seated in the press box on the roof just behind home plate. Naylor and I would join him while he typed away on his old Smith-Corona mechanical typewriter. I'm not sure he could write by hand. I also remember the sound of the ticker tape sending the progress of the game out over the wire. Foul balls would frequently land on the roof and we would watch the ball boy chase them down, I think his name was Zigarelli. There was a screen around the roof edge to keep the balls from falling on the fans below. The roof covered the back half of the stands and as I remember it extended a little past first and third bases.

The centerfield fence was 407 feet. Blach's Department store would give a new suit for each

home run hit. I'm sort of a nerd about statistics and would study the batting averages of all the players, sometimes calculating them before they were published in the papers.

I don't remember the pitchers as well and as I recall Birmingham was more noted for hitting than pitching.

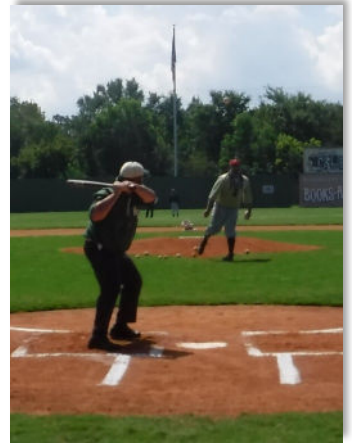
Some of the players I saw were [Tommy O'Brien](#), [George Wilson](#), [Mickey Rutner](#), [Joe DeMaestri](#), [Jimmy Piersall](#), [Gus Triandos](#), [Norm Zaichin](#), [Fred Hatfield](#), [Walt Dropo](#), [Karl Olson](#), [Eddie Lyons](#), and [Dick Adkins](#). [Fred Walters](#) was the manager and catcher in '48. If some of these names are incorrect charge it up to 75 years of memory. Eddie Glennon was the general manager and the owners were Gus Jeebles and later Albert Belcher, Al Dement, and Rufus Lackey.

Some of the biggest games had an attendance of nearly 20,000 and they put the overflow standing-room-only crowd behind a fence in the outfield and down the sidelines. Fair balls inside the fence were called ground-rule doubles. Birmingham set an attendance record in 1948 with 445,926 tickets sold, or nearly 6,000 per game. It was a great time to be a kid at Rickwood Field.

- Miller Gorrie

*"I also remember Mr. Stone would be seated in the press box on the roof just behind home plate. Naylor and I would join him while he typed away on his old Smith-Corona mechanical typewriter. I'm not sure he could write by hand."*

## SCENES FROM THE TENNESSEE VINTAGE ASSOCIATION OF BASE BALL'S GAMES AT RICKWOOD FIELD (AUGUST 14)



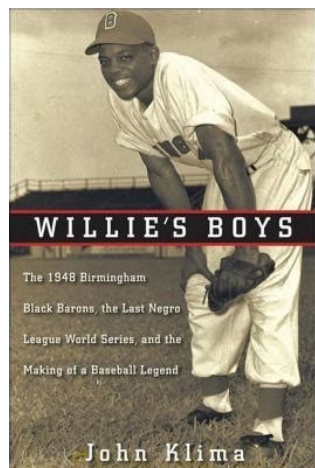
The Friends of  
Rickwood

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



## THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Willie's Boys*

In 1948, the Birmingham Black Barons were primed for a pennant run. They were led by player-manager, [Lorenzo "Piper Davis"](#), who played flawlessly at second base and hit .368. Davis' double-play partner at shortstop, [Artie Wilson](#), batted an incredible .428. With [Jim Zapp](#), [John Britton](#), [Ed Steele](#), [Herman Bell](#), and [Pepper Bassett](#), the Black Barons had a great offense. The pitching staff was also solid and was led by [Bill Greason](#), [Jimmie Newberry](#), [Bill Powell](#), [Alonzo Perry](#), and [Jehosie Heard](#). The addition of a young rookie turned the Black Barons from pennant contenders to winners.

Most baseball fans remember [Willie Mays](#) as the "Say Hey Kid" of the New York and later San Francisco Giants. They remember his remarkable catch and throw in Game 1 of the 1954 World Series, his 660 big league home runs, his youthful grin, and his enshrinement in the Hall of Fame.

In [Willie's Boys: The 1948 Birmingham Black Barons, the Last Negro League World Series, and the Making of a Baseball Legend](#), John Klima tells the story of the formative teenage years of the Fairfield, Alabama native long before he achieved immortality with the Giants. Early in the season, Piper Davis, discovered Mays playing for the semi-professional Chattanooga Choo Chos. Davis soon convinced Mays' father, Cat Mays, to allow his son to play for the Black Barons. When another player was injured, Mays became the starting centerfielder for the club, and later helped the club defeat the Kansas City Monarchs in the Negro American League playoffs.

Klima goes into detail explaining Piper Davis' positive influence on Mays' career and life. Davis helped Mays refine his natural talent on the field. He taught him patience at the plate, how to hit breaking pitches, and how to react to being hit by a pitch. Davis acted as Mays' surrogate father off the field teaching him to avoid alcohol and the importance of being on time. Once, when Mays was late reporting for a road trip, Davis told the bus driver to drive on as Mays chased the bus down the street. Satisfied that he had learned his lesson, the bus soon stopped, and an embarrassed Mays climbed aboard.

The book was meticulously well-researched; quotations from Black newspapers of the day – Kansas City's *The Call* and the *Birmingham World* – appear throughout the book. These newspapers give the book a contemporary feel as the 1948 season unfolds. Stories in the two newspapers are often contrasted with one another to show the very real rivalry between Birmingham and Kansas City, based on how the games were retold or even spun by the beat reporters. Klima also relies on Chris Fullerton's and Sam Fischer's interviews of Piper Davis, as well as Ted Rosengarten's lengthy interview of Davis, which appeared in *Southern Exposure* magazine in 1977, and which Klima calls "the gold standard" for anyone wanting to learn more about Davis' life.

So rich is John Klima's storytelling the reader is left with the impression that he must have zig-zagged across the United States visiting as many libraries as he spent interviewing former players. The book is well written with a pace that varies intentionally: the game descriptions move very quickly – as if to capture the frenetic speed game of the Negro Leagues – while the stories outside the ballpark slow to mirror the pace of life in the 1940s and the monotonous travel on buses.

Klima also tells the story of the Monarchs own player-manager [Buck O'Neil](#). In Ken Burns' Baseball series, O'Neil became a lovable hero to baseball fans everywhere. In *Willie's Boys*, Klima gives O'Neil three dimensions and shows off his competitive character. O'Neil is the perfect foil to Davis' Black Barons, and his Machiavellian style as a manager nearly won the pennant for the Monarchs.

Finally, Klima retells the story of the last Negro League World Series ever played as the Black Barons played the Homestead Grays. *Willie's Boys* is a must-read for any fan of Rickwood Field, and we are lucky that John Klima decided to take this journey for all of us.

- Jeb Stewart

