

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 12/10/21 to 3/10/22

- **December 11, 2021:** Friends of Rickwood Christmas Party
- **March 5, 2022:** Southern Association Conference
- **January / February 2022:** Check the [Miles College website](#) for the schedule of games, which will begin in late January or early February
- Please like our Facebook Page for updates about events at the ballpark: <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood.com>

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.



THE SAVANNAH BANANAS ARE COMING TO RICKWOOD FIELD ON APRIL 16, 2022!

The Friends of Rickwood are delighted to report that the sensational Savannah Bananas have chosen Rickwood Field as one of the destinations for the [2022 Banana Ball World Tour](#). The game is scheduled for **Saturday, April 16, 2022**, at America's Oldest Ballpark.

The Bananas are easily the most popular team in baseball and tickets to their home games are nearly impossible to obtain. The club has a 2-year waitlist of 10,000 people seeking tickets and is currently selling seats for the [2023 season](#). The Bananas are so popular

that the team boasts a social media presence greater than any major league franchise.

To score tickets to the Bananas' first-ever appearance at Rickwood Field, please visit their [website](#) and join the

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FORMER CINCINNATI REDS VISIT RICKWOOD FIELD

Have you ever had a normal day turn unexpectedly into an awesome one? It just happened to me.

I'm the city clerk for Trussville, Alabama. Having already had Veterans Day off, I arrived at city hall early Friday morning, November 12th, ready to tackle my usual lengthy to-do list. Two hours later, I received a life-changing email from Friends of Rickwood Executive Director Gerald Watkins:

We have an unofficial Cincinnati Reds fantasy camp here today and tomorrow.

Guests are: Taubensee, Power, Oliver, Hatcher, Reese, Oester, Miller, and Young.

*Best,
Gerald*

My jaw dropped.

Like my fellow FOR board members, I have loved baseball all my life. However, I stand alone from my FOR peers when it comes to team loyalty. I am a die-hard Cincinnati Reds fan, through the great times (1970s [Big Red Machine](#), 1990 wire-to

wire) and the lean years (too many to count - sigh)

You can thank or blame my mother Louisa and her parents Reuben and Hermine Herzfeld for that. My grandparents settled in Cincinnati after their I-does in 1935. Reuben worked for his aunt and uncle in their women's clothing store downtown. Quickly they forged a close friendship with another downtown businessman, John Frank, and his wife Katherine "Kitty" The four of them shared Reds season tickets at [Crosley Field](#), starting in 1936, the year before my mom was born. They maintained their Reds seats through the 1998 season.

In 1957, my mom - by this point a college student - was visiting family in Montgomery, when her aunt set her up on a blind date with a nice Alabama boy, Mike Weinrib. Baseball was the first thing they had in common. My dad grew up a Yankees fan. DiMaggio, Mantle, Berra, Ford, among others, were his heroes.

They married in 1959. In October 1961, their teams met in the World Series. While dad was shaving one morning, prior to Game 1, my mom asked, "Reds

versus Yankees. Who are you rooting for?"

"Yankees," he answered.

It was a rhetorical question.

"Do you want to continue sleeping with me and maybe have children?" she responded. And that's how my two brothers and I became Reds fans, while growing up in Montgomery.

The Big Red Machine spoiled us Reds fans. When we three boys visited our grandparents every summer during the 1970s, we made nightly treks to [Riverfront Stadium](#), to see [Bench](#), [Rose](#), [Morgan](#), [Perez](#), and others play winning ball. Even if they lost a game, we fans knew the Reds would win the next day. In addition to those summer trips, we would return to Cincinnati in 1970, 1972, 1975, and 1976 for the World Series.

Can you blame me for believing at the tender age of 6 that my Reds always played in the Fall Classic?!

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RETIRED REDS RAVE ABOUT RICKWOOD

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My childhood bedroom became the unofficial Reds shrine, south of the Ohio River.

In addition to Riverfront, Grandpa also introduced me to Reds radio broadcasts, starring [Marty Brennaman](#) and [Joe Nuxhall](#), on WLW 700 AM. The pair worked together from 1974 through 2004. By the time I was 8 or 9, I had my own GE transistor radio. From April through September, I kept the dial on WLW for night games. Sometimes I fell asleep - *ugh those West Coast games* - and woke up with a speaker pattern on my cheek.

At every opportunity, I would soak up like a sponge any Reds-related news stories, media guides, or biographies. From all that reading, I first learned that Nuxhall grew up in nearby Hamilton, Ohio, then as a 15-year-old, became the youngest player ever to make his MLB debut. On June 10, 1944, skipper [Bill McKechnie](#) summoned Nuxhall to pitch the 9th inning against the 1st place Cardinals, who led 13-0. "Nuxy" managed to get two outs but not the third. After bouts of wildness worthy of Nuke LaLoosh, the overexcited Nuxy got McKechnie's hook. The next day, the team demoted him to the minors. Eight years later, the Reds promoted him back to The Show.

How does Joe Nuxhall relate to Rickwood Field and this Reds fantasy camp? Shortly after joining the FOR board 17 years ago, I met local journalist and fellow Board member, Ben Cook

(1945-2015). He autographed my copy of his book [Good Wood](#), which chronicles the history of Rickwood Field. In *Good Wood*, Cook wrote that the Reds, under owner Powell Crosley Jr., bought the Barons before the 1940 season and maintained operating control through the 1943 campaign. Afterward, local restaurateur Gus Jeebles bought the Barons and maintained it as a Reds affiliate. So, the youngest person ever to make his MLB debut had to report to the Birmingham Barons, here at Rickwood Field, upon his demotion on June 11, 1944.

Back to the present ... Opportunities such as this knock only once. Thankfully, my boss Mayor Buddy Choat used to play & later umpire college baseball, so he understands my love for the game and the Reds. With his blessing, I left work before lunch.

By the time I arrived at Rickwood, I was already little-kid excited. The first game among Reds fantasy campers was almost over. Scattered throughout the 1B side stands, inside the dugouts, and on the field were middle-aged players from Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, decked out in various Reds uniforms. Gerald pointed to me where some of the ex-big leaguers were. Playing it cool, I first introduced myself to a few campers, welcoming them to Birmingham and Rickwood. I'd ask them where they were from and in the course of conversation, casually mention that I root for the Reds.

Eventually, I made my way over to ex-MLBers Ron Oester, Dmitri Young, and Ron Jackson. Ignoring the baseball and Sharpies in my pockets, I casually chatted with them, getting to know them more on a personal level. The former Reds raved about Rickwood, each saying MLB should bring a regular-season game here, just like in Iowa.

Later, I found myself in the old Barons clubhouse with 1980s era Reds reliever & former pitching coach Ted Power. I introduced myself to him as both a FOR board member and a Reds fan. After asking him questions about his tenures with our team, I then asked him about his memories of Nuxhall. He gladly obliged with a few tales. When I told him about Nuxhall's demotion to Birmingham, he was floored. He thanked me for sharing that tidbit with him. The same thing happened when I later chatted with Corky Miller, Joe Oliver, Dmitri Young, Billy Hatcher, and Ron Oester.

By the time I returned to work, all six and Eddie Taubensee had autographed that baseball, which is now my son Jack's prized possession. While I regret not getting any 1-on-1 time with gold glove Pokey Reese, all in all, I had a day for the ages. Experiences like this make me proud to be a Friend of Rickwood and happy to know the friends I've made on the board.

- Dan Weinrib

"The former Reds raved about Rickwood, each saying MLB should bring a regular-season game here, just like in Iowa."



Dan Weinrib with new friends: former Reds Billy Hatcher and Dmitri Young

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

America's Oldest Baseball park is going *bananas*! In the last issue of our newsletter, I hinted at some big news. Well, here it is. Next Spring the Savannah Bananas will bring their show to Rickwood Field as part of their 2022 World Tour. Rickwood was selected by a poll conducted by the Bananas as one of 5 cities to host one of their unique baseball games. The Bananas have become the hottest thing in baseball. They have sold out every home date since their inception and have a greater social media presence than the New York Yankees. “Banana Ball” is a fun version of the grand old game, which has fans captivated from beginning to end.

The Friends of Rickwood are excited to host this big event on **Saturday, April 16, 2022**. We are expecting a sellout so get your tickets early. Tickets are available only through the [Bananas' website](#) so go

online and join the Bananas' priority list, to get first access when tickets go on sale in February. Let's go Bananas!

The last three months at Rickwood have also seen an increase in travel ball games. We hosted the nationally known [Perfect Game](#) organization and the [Central Alabama Baseball Academy \(CABA\)](#) every weekend in September and October. Perfect Game and CABA brought players in from all over the South and Rickwood earned rave reviews. These organizations are already planning games for 2022.

Lastly, in November our long-time client, Scott Green, brought his [Play at the Plate](#) organization back to Rickwood with a new twist. Scott brought about 50 adult baseball players from Cincinnati, Kentucky, Indiana, and the Northeast to play a tournament at Rickwood. But Scott added a twist; he and his friend, Ed Reynolds,

arranged for eight former Cincinnati Reds players to serve as coaches for the teams. We were able to introduce [Dmitri Young](#), [Ron Oester](#), [Joe Oliver](#), [Eddie Taubensee](#), [Pokey Reese](#), [Ted Power](#), [Billy Hatcher](#), and [Corky Miller](#) to Rickwood Field. The players and their coaches were blown away by the beauty of the ballpark and its history. Dmitri Young was thrilled to walk to the mound where over 142 baseball Hall of Famers had walked many years before. He said he felt the spirit of [Satchel Paige](#) coursing through his body!

All of these great experiences would not be possible without the great work of our volunteers. Rickwood is truly a special place but it would be just another ballpark without the work of our FOR board. **Thanks, everyone!**

- Gerald Watkins

“Next Spring the Savannah Bananas will bring their show to Rickwood Field as part of their 2022 World Tour.”

RICKWOOD IS GOING BANANAS!

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Bananas [priority list](#). Tickets will only be available from the Bananas in **February of 2022** and the game will likely sell out fast. How have the Bananas become such a phenomenon that tickets are so scarce? It's because the ownership's creative marketing approach is always evolving. In 2020, the Bananas announced their [“Banana Ball Rules”](#):

“(1) Win the Inning, Get the Point. The team scoring the most runs in an inning gets a point. An inning ends once the home team takes a lead or makes 3 outs. The first team to 5 points wins. If the score is tied – the first team to keep the other from scoring wins.

(2) Two Hour Time Limit. No inning will start after 2 hours. If

a team has not reached 5 points, the game will go to a Showdown Tiebreaker

(3) No Stepping Out. Batters who step out take a strike.

(4) No Bunting. Enough Said.

(5) Batters Can Steal First. If a passed ball or wild pitch happens, the batter may take run.

(6) No Walks. If a pitcher throws the fourth ball it becomes a Sprint. The hitter sprints to first while the catcher has to throw the ball to every defensive player on the field (except the pitcher) before it becomes live. The hitter may advance as far as he can before the ball becomes live.

(7) Showdown Tiebreaker. Each team picks one pitcher

and one hitter to face off. The defensive team only has the pitcher, one fielder, and a catcher on the field. All other fielders are off the field. If a hitter puts the ball in play, he has to score and make it home to get a point. If the ball is put in play, the pitcher and fielder are allowed to chase the ball and throw the ball to the catcher for a play at the plate. If a pitcher strikes him out or gets him out before scoring, he doesn't get a point. If the batter walks, he can take second base and the hitting team will bring another hitter up.

(8) No Mound Visits Allowed.

(9) If a Fan Catches a Foul Ball, It's an Out. Why not let the fans get in on some of the action?”

RICKWOOD WEDDING

On Saturday, May 2, 2009, the late morning sky was overcast, and the hosts were nervous about a rainout. Guests, however, began to enter historic Rickwood Field via the main gate. The orange-hued terracotta roof against the green façade struck many as they stepped into America's Oldest Ballpark. Through the turnstiles they came; unable to stop themselves from looking left and right, realizing that they were surrounded by history.

As they moved up the ramps, the lure of the field beckoning them forward, the blackboard gave many guests pause as they saw the lineups for the day's (second) main event. Some were surprised, but thrilled, to see their handwritten names in the starting 18. Others continued past and made their way through the concourse, then briefly through the darkness of the tunnels under the grandstands.

The lush green with its unmistakable smell of fresh-cut grass was too much to resist. As if stepping back in time, the wonder of the playing field and its surroundings, left all in awe. It's a feeling everyone remembers from their first visit to Rickwood, especially if they were lucky enough to see a baseball game. This day, however, the ballpark would be host-

ing a double-header of a different sort. Before baseball, there would be a wedding.

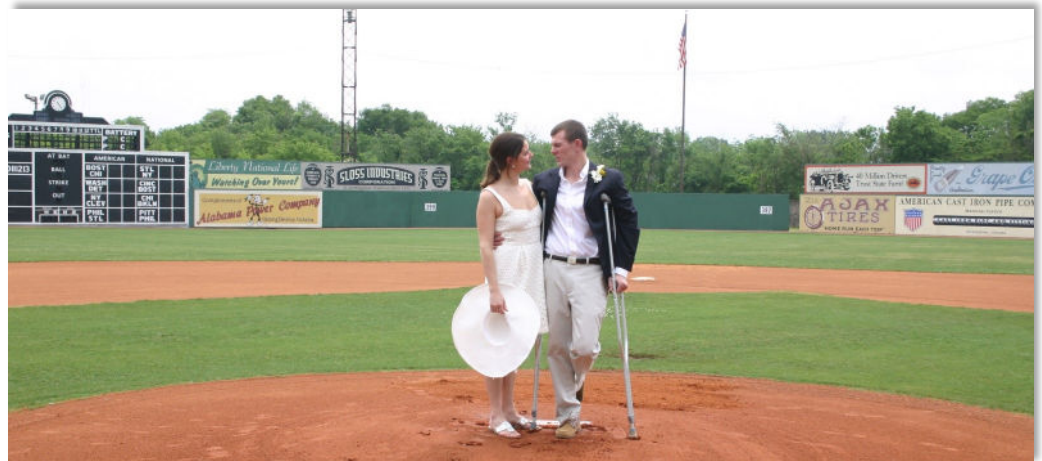
We were married just after noon at home plate. Facing the pitcher's mound, Judge Mike Graffeo, decked out in a vintage 1956 US Steel uniform, performed the ceremony. I, as a native Pennsylvanian and guest of the Woodward family, naturally entered the field from the visitors' dugout. Marie, of course, from the home team's. Our family and friends surrounded us in the infield. A string of balloons arched above us, and the skies were finally clear. Once the vows were complete Judge Graffeo motioned to the man leaning against the backstop behind home plate. Sam Fisher, donning his full umpire uniform, stepped forward and hollered, "play ball!" And so, we did.

The home team was comprised of the bride's family and friends, and the visitors' mine. Fans sat on the dugout roofs or in the bleachers eating popcorn and drinking beer—cheering and jeering as they saw fit. It was a competitive game and all who wanted to get the chance to play on the historic field did so. I have a vivid memory of one baserunner sliding headfirst

into home, suit and all. Our beloved Lab, Stella, even ran the bases. Both teams played hard, but the final score has been lost to history.

There's no question all in attendance that day were honored to be at the mother church of baseball, and even more so to have played on the same field as the countless Hall of Famers who stepped between the lines before them. It was a magical day, and one we can only hope compares to the feeling true ball players feel when playing America's game in America's oldest ballpark.

- Andrew Stevenson



Marie Woodward (the great-granddaughter of Rick Woodward) and Andrew Stevenson were married at Rickwood Field on May 2, 2009

*"It was a magical day,
and one we can only
hope compares to the
feeling true ball players
feel when playing
America's game in
America's oldest
ballpark."*

BRAVES' MINOR LEAGUE REPRESENTATIVES AWED AT RICKWOOD FIELD

"The most fun that I've ever had playing catch!" That's what Mississippi Braves centerfielder [Justin Dean](#) said as he tossed the ball with teammate and fellow outfielder, [Trey Harris](#). While in Birmingham to play the Barons, the talented professionals experienced the simple joy of "having a catch" with vintage mitts as they soaked up the historic environs during a visit to Rickwood Field.

Also touring America's Oldest Ballpark, that day, was [Devon Travis](#), a former major-leaguer who spent four years with the Toronto Blue Jays and is now

a coach for the M-Braves. Devon was wide-eyed at the Rickwood splendor carrying a huge smile as he walked the field and stadium.

Accompanying the guests was [Doug Mansolino](#) who has contributed to the success of several organizations at the major and minor league levels during his 35 plus season career. Most notably, after spending six seasons as the Philadelphia Phillies Minor League Field Coordinator, he now serves in the same role within the Atlanta Braves organization overseeing the development of all Braves

minor league talent. The skilled instructor/coach/leader is also a baseball history buff and was not only excited to visit Rickwood Field but also expressed a desire to support efforts to preserve Rickwood as a timeless baseball treasure.

While the Friends of Rickwood are partial to our own Birmingham Barons, we are grateful to these Mississippi Braves for their time and recognition that Rickwood Field holds a special place in baseballdom. Best of luck to Justin, Trey, Devon and Doug!

- Ben Powell

"While in Birmingham to play the Barons, the talented professionals experienced the simple joy of 'having a catch' with vintage mitts as they soaked up the historic environs during a visit to Rickwood Field."



Ben Powell and Gerald Watkins giving a tour to members of the Mississippi Braves

REMEMBERING CHARLEY PRIDE (1934-2020)



Charley Pride singing the national anthem at Rickwood in 1998. Pride played for the Birmingham Black Barons in 1954. He died on December 12, 2020. (Photo courtesy of Coke Matthews)

“On February 26, 2006, Rickwood Field hosted a game between the Birmingham Black Barons and the Bristol Barnstormers, which was broadcast on ESPN Classic”

DID YOU KNOW?



On February 26, 2006, ESPN Classic broadcasted a [game](#) at Rickwood Field between the Birmingham Black Barons and the Bristol Barnstormers. The teams were made of former minor league and collegiate players wearing 1940s-era throwback uniforms. [Willie Mays](#) and country music legend [Charley Pride](#), both veterans of the Negro Leagues, served as Grand Marshalls. Pride also sang the national anthem. Former big leaguer [George Scott](#) managed the Black Barons and [Bob Veale](#) coached the pitchers. [Jim Bouton](#), who played for the Yankees, Pilots, Astros, and Braves during his career, managed Bristol. Bouton's book, [Ball Four](#), was the only sports book listed in the [New York Public Library's Books of the 20th Century](#). The year before the game, Bouton also published [Foul Ball](#) about his efforts to save Wahconah Park in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In this photo, Bouton seems to be channeling his old Pilots' manager, [Joe Schultz](#). The Black Barons won the game, 9-8.

RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1923 BIRMINGHAM BLACK 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.

However, one of the teams that is not yet listed on the grandstand is the 1923 Birmingham Black Barons. The club will eventually join the other championship squads honored at the ballpark. The Friends of Rickwood recently announced a ["Go Fund Me"](#) project to correct some of the years identified as Rickwood Championships on the grandstand, as well as to include some missing titles, which had been obscured in the history of the ballpark.

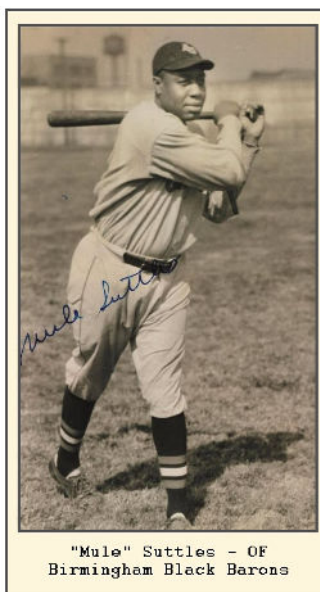
Information about the Black Barons 1923 season comes entirely from two books by Bill Plott, [Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962](#) and [The Negro Southern League: A Baseball History, 1920-1951](#). Thanks to Plott's tireless research the stories of the early years of the Black Barons have been preserved.

The '23 Black Barons included a future Hall of Famer, [George "Mule" Suttles](#), in left field, and the infield was anchored by Charles ["Two Sides" Wesley](#) at second and [Buford "Geechie" Meredith](#) at shortstop. Catcher [Poin-dexter Williams](#) also served as the team's manager. [Harry "Fish" Salmon](#) and outfielder/pitcher [Forest "Wing" Maddox](#), who was missing his left arm, anchored the pitching staff.

According to Plott, the Black Barons finished in first place in the first half of the Negro Southern League campaign with a record of 26-9 (.743). So good was Birmingham's performance, that the Black Barons moved up to the Negro National League for the second half of the season, while the Negro Southern League suspended operations.

In the Negro National League, the Black Barons never found their footing and struggled to a record of 21-24-3 (.467). For the season, the Black Barons finished with an overall record of 47-33-3 (.588).

Because of Bill Plott's hard work, the 1923 Black Barons will always be remembered as the Negro Southern League champions.



"Mule" Suttles - OF
Birmingham Black Barons

"Because of Bill Plott's hard work, the 1923 Black Barons will always be remembered as the Negro Southern League champions."

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!



Jim Bouton dancing the jitterbug

The Friends of
Rickwood

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friendsofrickwoodfield@gmail.com



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Friends of Rickwood 2021 Membership Program Contributors

THANK YOU to all of our supporters! We are counting more than ever on the support from our long-time donors. Please go to www.rickwood.com to make a gift, become a Member, and/or purchase our logo merchandise today. **Thanks to Coke Matthews and Wayne Trammell for compiling this list.**
Happy Holidays from the Friends of Rickwood!

Gold Glover Contribution Level (\$100.00)

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Little Leaguer Contribution Level (\$10.00)

Charlsey Trammell

Carter Hawkins



Eric Byrnes is Savannah's new manager for the Banana Ball World Tour