

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 10/25/24 to 12/22/24

- **Oct. 27 (Morning):** MLB Players Alumni Association—Legends for Youth Clinic from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM
- **Oct. 27 (Afternoon):** 3rd Annual Home Run Derby at 1:00 PM
- **Nov. 9:** Alternative Baseball event at 12:00 PM
- **Nov. 9:** Sports Memorabilia and Card show from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Please like our Facebook Page for updates about events at the park: www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood

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BRIAN JORDAN HEADLINES RICKWOOD'S THIRD HOME RUN DERBY SET FOR OCTOBER 27, 2024

On **Sunday, October 27, 2024**, Rickwood Field will host the third annual "Home Run Derby". Once again, 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 **Brian Jordan** who played three seasons as a defensive back with the Atlanta Falcons from 1989-91 before making the switch to baseball. Jordan played for 15 years as an outfielder in the big leagues from 1992-2006 with the Cardinals, Braves, Dodgers, and Rangers, and hit 184 homers, including two seasons with 25 while posting a career 105 OPS+ and stealing 119 bases.

Another outfielder, **Jacque Jones**, won a bronze medal in the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta on the U.S. Olympic baseball team. Three years later

he arrived in the big leagues. Jones was a 10-year MLB veteran with the Twins, Cubs, Tigers, and Marlins. He hit 164 home runs during his career, with a single-season high of 27 for Chicago in 2006.

Corky Miller was a catcher who played for the Reds, Twins, Red Sox, Braves, and White Sox during his 17 seasons in the minors and majors from 1998-2014. While Miller did not hit a lot of homers in the majors, he did record 131 professional home runs, including his minor league numbers. He is also one of the few catchers to steal home in his only career stolen base attempt.

Brady Clark played 9 years as an outfielder and pinch hitter from 2000-2009 with the Reds, Mets, Brewers, Dodgers, and Padres. He hit 36 homers and recorded a .358 lifetime on-base average.

Matt Adams played 10 seasons in the majors as a first baseman and outfielder with the Cardinals, Braves, Nationals, and Rockies from 2012-2021. He hit 118 homers in the big leagues and hit 15 or more eight times.

Mike Jacobs played for the Mets, Marlins, Royals, and Diamondbacks during his seven years as a first baseman in the big leagues from 2005-2012. He hit 100 career home runs with a high of 32 in 2008.

We will miss **Ian Hancock**, the slugger for Birmingham-Southern who led the Panthers to the College World Series and won Rickwood's first and second Home Run Derbies in 2022 and 2023. He will not be defending his title because he will be getting married that weekend. We wish him and his bride the best.

RICKWOOD HOSTED REVEREND BILL GREASON'S 100TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Reverend Bill Greason has lived an amazing life. He was born on September 3, 1924, in Atlanta, Georgia and grew up on Auburn Avenue across the street from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School, Greason joined the Marines in 1943 and attended basic training in Montfort Point, North Carolina. In 1945, his platoon landed on Iwo Jima in the Pacific theater, where some of the fiercest fighting in World War Two took place. Greason made a

solemn promise to serve the Lord in any capacity if he survived the conflict. In 2012, he was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal, which is the highest and oldest civilian award, to honor his service as a Montford Marine.

After the war, Greason played semipro football for two seasons before joining the Nashville Black Vols as a pitcher in 1947. The following season, while playing for the Asheville Blues, he was discovered in spring training by Piper Davis, who was the

player-manager of the Birmingham Black Barons. Davis acquired him for Birmingham before the 1948 campaign.

The Black Barons won the first half of the Negro American League. By the time the playoffs rolled around, Greason had become the club's ace. He won two games in the NAL playoffs against the Kansas City Monarchs helping the Black Barons win the Negro American League pennant, four games to three, with one tie. In Game Two,

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CELEBRATING REVEREND GREASON'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

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Greason's pinch-hit single in the bottom of the ninth tied the game at four. His teenage teammate, Willie Mays, then drove in the winning run in the eleventh in the Black Barons' exciting 6-5 win at Rickwood Field.

In the deciding game, Greason threw a complete game scattering three hits and striking out five, as the Black Barons captured the NAL pennant, defeating the Monarchs, 5-1.

In the last Negro League World Series ever played, Greason was the winning pitcher against the Homestead Grays in Game Three at Rickwood Field, as the Black Barons won, 4-3. Once again, his bat also figured prominently in the win. In the bottom of the ninth of a tied game, he singled and later moved to second. Mays scorched a single to center scoring Greason and securing the victory. It was the only game of the 1948 Negro League World Series Birmingham would win.

Greason pitched for the Black Barons until 1950 when he signed with the Jalisco Charros in the Mexican League but returned to Birmingham in 1951. He eventually signed with the Oklahoma City Indians in the Texas League (AA). He led the Indians staff with a 2.14 ERA and posted a 9-1 record in ten starts.

Although the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox were trying to buy his contract, Oklahoma City's owner opted not to part with Greason and brought him back in 1952 hoping to increase the price. Unfortunately, he hurt his pitching arm during the season. Even so, he finished with a respectable 16-13 record and a 3.61 ERA over 249 innings. The St. Louis Cardinals then acquired him and assigned him to its Triple-A affiliate the Ohio-

based Columbus Red Birds. Greason had a 10-13 record with a 4.10 ERA. He was called up by the Cardinals for three weeks during the 1954 season and became the first Black pitcher for the club.

That winter, Greason joined the Santurce Cangrejeros in the Puerto Rican Winter League, which was a team he regards as "one of the greatest teams that I believe I played on. We had George Crowe, who played with Boston, at first base, Ron Samford with the Giants, Don Zimmer, Buzz Clarkson, Roberto Clemente, Bob Thurman, Willie Mays [fresh off a World Series title with the New York Giants], and our catcher was Valmy Thomas. Our pitching staff was Sam Jones, Ruben Gomez, and myself." An outfield that featured future Hall of Famers Mays and Clemente was also thrill for Puerto Rican fans.

Greason has fond memories of Roberto Clemente who "called me his brother, 'mi hermano', 'cause he started when he was young, and I was the one that encouraged him. I'd put my arms around him if he would strike out and I would encourage him and say, 'Just catch the ball.'"

SABR researcher, Frederick C. Bush, wrote Greason's biography for the book *Bittersweet Goodbye: The Black Barons, the Grays, and the 1948 Negro League World Series*. He noted that "the 1954-55 Cangrejeros were so powerful that the Puerto Rican media dubbed them the 'Panic Squad' for the fear they instilled in their opponents. They 'romped to the pennant, won the league finals, and captured the Caribbean Series.'"

Greason remained in the Cardinals' system for the next six

years as he pitched for the Houston Buffaloes (AA) and Rochester Red Wings (AAA) from 1954-59. In his eight seasons in the minor leagues, Greason posted a record of 78-62 with a 3.95 ERA in 1,260 innings pitched.

On January 1, 1959, the Cuban Revolution, which was led by Fidel Castro, overthrew the government of Fulgencio Batista. Greason was in Cuba with the Red Wings, who were playing in an exhibition game against the Havana Sugar Kings. He recalled:

"We were playing in Havana, Cuba on the night that Fidel [Castro] took over Havana. He came to the ballpark with some of his troops; and they were celebrating -- firing those weapons into the air. One of them [a bullet] clipped one of our player's ears. They had a big write-up about it when we got back home ... They were just celebrating the liberation."

According to Bush, after retiring from baseball, "Greason worked for 14 years in Pizitz Department Store. However, he felt called to the ministry and enrolled at Birmingham Easonian Baptist Bible College; after earning a degree in religion, he also completed post-graduate work there and at Birmingham's Samford University. ... He started the New Hope Baptist Church in Bessemer, Alabama and, in 1971 he was installed as the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church of Berney Points in Birmingham." He has now been a preacher for over 50 years.

On September 4, 2024, the Friends of Rickwood, in conjunction with the Heart and Armour Foundation, and the Bethel Baptist Church, Bernie Points, hosted the 100th birthday celebration for Rev. Greason at the ballpark. Portraits of his life, which were painted by U.S. Ma-

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REVEREND GREASON

rine Sgt. Jeremy Beliveau appeared throughout the con- course. The event opened with a presentation of colors by the Marines followed by the National Anthem, which was performed by Corporal Marquise Brown of the Parris Island Marching Band. Gerald Watkins, the Executive Director and President of the Friends of Rickwood, then drove Rev. Greason around the bases in a golf cart. At each stop, the guest of honor received well-deserved tributes from friends and dignitaries who gathered to celebrate his remarkable life.

At first base, Eamon Myatt and Major General J. Michael Myatt (ret) saluted him for his military service and bravery with the Marines during both World War Two and the Korean War.

At second base, veterans Samantha Erickson (U.S. Air Force), LeJon Butler (U.S. Navy), and

Aundray Rogers (U.S. Army) paid tribute to Rev. Greason's career in professional baseball. Rogers spoke on behalf of Mike Yastrzemski of the San Francisco Giants, who was unable to attend.

At third base, Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell, who represents Alabama's Seventh District in the U.S. House of Representatives, remembered Rev. Greason's life in Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement and his decision to enter the ministry.

Finally, at home plate, Mike Holt, a Deacon with the Bethel Baptist Church, welcomed him home. Holt expressed the Congregation's gratitude for his tireless service as a minister. When he got his turn to speak, he said "Hello to all of you. It's good to be here. God has blessed me to live one hundred

years ..." He wryly joked that he "can still count to ten," which caused an eruption of laughter from the crowd. Reflecting on his life, he added, "It's a blessing to be here. All that they said I just thank God for. I had a praying mother, and I made up my mind that I was going to follow her teaching, and because of that, I'm standing here today. God is a good God."

Everyone then sang a heartfelt version of "Happy Birthday" to Reverend Greason before having dinner and enjoying birthday cake. Jackie Robinson once said "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives." Rev. Greason's life has positively impacted countless other lives during his 100 years. He continues to be a blessing to us all.

- Jeb Stewart

"Rev. Greason's life has positively impacted countless other lives during his 100 years. He continues to be a blessing to us all."



RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1943 BIRMINGHAM BLACK 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 late 1930s marked a period of transition and instability for the Birmingham Black Barons. The franchise won a Negro Southern League title in 1936 and moved up to the Negro American League (a major league) the following season. However, the club soon fell on hard times as Birmingham finished in fifth place with a 17-24 (.415) record in the NAL. The next two seasons were even worse. In 1938 the Black Barons finished in the basement with a terrible NAL record of 13-

44 (.228). Birmingham did not even field a team in 1939.

That offseason, Memphis mortician Tom Hayes purchased the Black Barons and promised to bring a winner back to Rickwood. While the Black Barons improved over their most recent squad, their 18-31 (.367) NAL record was hardly the envy of the league, and they only managed a sixth-place finish in 1940 under manager Candy Jim Taylor.

The following season, Hayes hired Winfield Welch to manage the team and he guided Birmingham to a 31-20-1 (.608) NAL record, which was good for a second-place finish behind the Kansas City Monarchs. Although Birmingham fell to fourth place in 1942, the team still

managed to post a winning record of 31-30 (.508).

In 1943 the Black Barons broke through and won the first half NAL regular season crown. The team slipped to third in the second half en route to a 44-34-3 (.564) NAL record and a record of 62-49-3 (.559) against all teams.

The Black Barons were a hard-hitting team. Center fielder Felix McLaurin led the club in hitting with a .308 batting average and a 139 OPS+, while rookie shortstop Piper Davis batted .302, with a 160 OPS+. Clyde Spearman (.300) and Tommy Sampson (.300) also had good seasons at the plate. Paul Hardy, Herman Bell, and 40-year-

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Back row (left to right): Les Lockett, lf; Tommy Sampson, 2b; "Horse" Walker, 3b; Clyde Spearman, rf.
 Center row—Al Saylor, p; "Bubber" Gipson, p; Winfield Scott Welch, manager; John Markham, p; "Lefty" McKinnies, p; Jesse Holt, trainer.
 Front row—Felix McLaurin, cf; Jimmy Newberry, p; "Piper" Davis, ss; Paul Hardy, c; John Huber, c.

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

We’ve had a great summer at Rickwood Field. There are many exciting events scheduled for the fall. By the time the newsletter goes to print, the second annual Blues at the Ballpark will have occurred on October 5th. We thank Birmingham City Councilor Carol E. Clarke for hosting the event. We hope this will be a tradition that will continue for many years to come.

There are two separate events slated for Sunday, October 27th.

First up, in the morning, from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM is a free baseball clinic by the MLB Players Alumni Association. The names of the former big league players conducting the clinic have yet to be released. The clinic is free to the public.

In the afternoon, Rickwood’s third annual Home Run Derby will take place. The gates will open at 1:00 PM. Tentatively we have six former MLB players scheduled to participate in the event. They are Brian Jordan, Jacque Jones, Brady Clark, Corky Miller, Matt Adams and Mike Jacobs.

Additional autograph signers to appear include Ron Jackson and Joseph Marbury. Also, in attendance will be the Alabama A&M softball team and the Miles College baseball team. Tickets are \$20 and you can buy them from any board member.

The Alternative Baseball Organization event has been rescheduled for Saturday, November 9th. The Rickwood card

and memorabilia show will also take place at the ballpark that day, too. The card show will be from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The ABO event starts at 12:00 PM.

Some hits and bits I want to pass along: Congratulations to the Birmingham Barons on their 2024 Southern League Championship. This is the Barons’ seventh SL title since Art Clarkson brought the club back to Birmingham in 1981.

The Friends of Rickwood are continuing to work with the Barons to revive the Rickwood Classic. Stay tuned. Please also check out Rickwood’s website for our updated merchandise.

- Gerald Watkins

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ALTERNATIVE BASEBALL ORGANIZATION GAME RESCHEDULED FOR NOVEMBER 9TH AT NOON

The Alternative Baseball Organization’s big event will be held at Rickwood Field on Saturday, November 9th at noon. Originally scheduled for a mid-September date, the event was postponed due to several days of heavy rain and generally poor weather.

The ABO was founded by Taylor Clark Duncan in 2016. Duncan was diagnosed with autism at a young age. He experienced many hardships due to his disability, but even more from society because of it. Growing up, one of his passions was baseball. He was not allowed to participate in the sport but kept his enthusiasm for the game.

From his challenges and experiences growing up, Duncan knew he could help others with intellectual disabilities and enrich their lives integrating the game of baseball with life skills to overcome obstacles in everyday life.

Duncan developed the Playing for Community Integration Tour, a pioneering event series showcasing the talents of players with autism and other intellectual disabilities. This one-of-a-kind tour combines baseball, social inclusion, and community engagement to create a memorable experience for all involved. Community leaders, local television personalities, and retired professional athletes (particularly baseball players) regularly appear at these events.

Duncan assures those attending the game will come away with an overwhelmingly positive feeling. He declared, “We will provide awe-inspiring action. There will be a fighting spirit brought to the game showing how we can make a positive impact on society, and community through raising awareness of what those with

disabilities can do when given the resources and the opportunities.”

Some of the personalities tentatively projected to appear are former major leaguers Tim Hudson (Braves and Auburn star), Kendal Graveman, (Astros), Roger McDowell (Mets), Johnny Estrada (Braves), Lance Cormier (Braves and Alabama), and Craig Brazell (Mets). Local TV personalities Mike Dubberly (WBRC Fox 6) and James Spann (ABC 33/40) are on the list to appear, as well as others from the local media. Representatives from the five Birmingham area professional sports franchises will also be in attendance, along with many local elected officials.

The event is free to attend, but we hope attendees will make donations to the ABO.

“This one-of-a-kind tour combines baseball, social inclusion, and community engagement to create a memorable experience for all involved.”

19TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE: MONTGOMERY EDITION

The Southern Association was a professional baseball league that existed from 1901 to 1961 and was preceded by the Southern League (1885-99). 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 Southern Association Conference (SAC) is an annual event presented by the Friends of Rickwood Field in conjunction with the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter. Recent conferences have been expanded to include presentations on the Negro Leagues as well as the South Atlantic League.

The 19th annual SAC was held in Montgomery, Alabama on May 18, 2024, at the Farley Auditorium at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. This year's event was unique as the SAC partnered with baseball historian Shane Earnest, better known to baseball fans as "Dr. Miraculous", who blogs about Montgomery baseball. Earnest did an incredible job as the host and moderator of the SAC, which was included as part of a joint venture with the inaugural Montgomery Baseball History and Legends Conference. The

SAC included collector's displays and presentations primarily focused on the Negro Leagues in Montgomery.

Clarence Watkins opened the conference with a presentation of his book, *Baseball in Montgomery*. He discussed Montgomery ballparks and players, such as Alec Piersall and Goat Walker.

Rickwood Field SABR Chapter president Jeb Stewart then presented on Paul Hardy who appeared in a chapter he authored in SABR's book *When the Monarchs Reign: Kansas City's 1942 Negro League Champions*. Hardy was a rookie with the Montgomery Grays in 1931 and spent 28 years as a catcher in the Negro Leagues.

Shane Earnest had two fascinating presentations, which wowed the attendees: "A Research Update on the Heritage of Black Baseball in Montgomery," and "The Rebels Who Fell to Earth: The Dubious Death of Hoke Vandigriff and the Failed Integration of the 1954 Montgomery Rebels".

Longtime SABR member Bill Plott and retired journalist pre-

sented his book, *Negro Southern League*, which is a definitive history. He discussed some of the players' greatest achievements in the league.

Sheldon Burnside, who played for the Montgomery Rebels in the 1970s and also appeared in games for the Detroit Tigers and Cincinnati Reds, gave an entertaining talk on his life in baseball. Burnside's most memorable moment with the Rebels was meeting his future wife who was attending a game.

After the presentations, attendees were treated to a barbeque lunch at Riverwalk Stadium, which has been the home of the Montgomery Biscuits since 2004. After lunch, the group took a private tour of nearby Paterson Field. The ballpark opened in 1950 and hosted the Montgomery Rebels of the Southern League from 1965-80 before Art Clarkson moved the team to Birmingham in 1981 and renamed them the Barons.

The Friends of Rickwood and the SAC thank Shane Earnest for putting together a wonderful conference. We are looking forward to hosting the 20th SAC in 2025.

"The 19th annual SAC was held in Montgomery, Alabama on May 18, 2024, at the Farley Auditorium at the Alabama Department of Archives and History."



ABOVE: Baseball historian Shane Earnest presents on the Heritage of Black Baseball in Montgomery; attendees tour historic Paterson Field. RIGHT: Numerous historical baseball memorabilia related to the Southern Association on display; Former Rebel and Major Leaguer Sheldon Burnside speaking about his years playing in Montgomery.

THE '43 BLACK BARONS WON THE NEGRO AMERICAN LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP

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old Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe shared the catching duties. The pitching staff posted a 3.49 team ERA and were led by Johnny Markham (5-1, 2.20 ERA), Alfred Saylor (3-2, 2.66 ERA), Gready McKinnis (4-6, 3.40 ERA), and John Huber (4-3, 3.58).

In the post-season, the Black Barons faced the NAL second-half champs, the Chicago American Giants, in the Championship Series. The clubs played the first three games in three cities across Ohio (Toledo, Columbus, and Dayton), as the American Giants took a 2-1 series lead. However, when the series shifted to Alabama, the Black Barons won Game Four in Montgomery, 4-1. Birmingham clinched the pennant the following day at Rickwood winning a pitcher's dual, 1-0.

In the Negro League World Series, the Black Barons faced the mighty Homestead Grays. The Grays were managed by former Black Barons' skipper Candy Jim Taylor and had an incredible Negro National League record of 50-13-1 (.794) and an overall record of 78-23-1 (.772). Because Homestead had won both halves of the NNL Sea-

son, they advanced directly to the World Series and were better rested than the Black Barons. Homestead had another distinct advantage. The Grays lineup was loaded and included five future Hall of Famers including catcher Josh Gibson, who batted .466 with 20 home runs and an astounding 277 OPS+, first baseman Buck Leonard (.329), third baseman Jud Wilson (.304), left fielder Cool Papa Bell (.350), and pitcher Ray Brown (6-1, 4.09 ERA). Homestead's pitching staff was led by Johnny Wright (18-3, 2.54), Spoon Carter (14-2, 3.77), and Edsall Walker (9-4, 3.64).

As with the NAL series, games in the series were played in multiple locations (Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Chicago, Columbus, Ohio, and Indianapolis) before shifting to Alabama. Once again, the Black Barons won the only game played at Rickwood, 1-0. However, the Grays won the World Series the following day, 8-4 in Montgomery.

Thirty Years later, Piper Davis recalled the year the Black Barons nearly defeated the

Grays in an interview with Theodore Rosengarten that was published in *Southern Exposure Magazine*:

"We carried 'em to seven games, but that was the year we had a car wreck. Our second baseman got tore up. We were riding in cars some, too, then. Our second baseman got broke all to pieces; and the third baseman - we were coming home to start the World Series - he got a hole knocked in his head; and the catcher, one of our catchers - we had two pretty good catchers - he got his arm hurt; and our utility infielder, which was a good pinch hitter and a powerful hitter, he got his leg hurt. So we were short-handed, but we carried 'em to the limit. We never did win a World Series."

Despite the World Series loss, the Black Barons will forever be remembered for their NAL championship in 1943 on Rickwood's grandstand.

NOTE: All player statistics and team records were taken from Seamheads.com

"Despite the World Series loss, the Black Barons will forever be remembered for their NAL championship in 1943."



“PIPELINE TO THE PROS” EXHIBIT AT REGIONS FIELD IN BIRMINGHAM

Dr. Layton Revel had a vision to tell the story of baseball in Birmingham. He gathered uniforms, memorabilia, artifacts, photos, and game programs and then worked with local exhibit designer Stewart Knox to bring the vision to life. Over a year in the making, the “Pipeline to the Pros” exhibit debuted in September at Regions Field before Game One of the 2024 Southern League Championship Series.

Almost a decade earlier the City of Birmingham had agreed to build the Negro Southern League Museum which was also a collaboration between Revel and Knox – with Revel’s vision and extensive authentic memorabilia collection – and Knox’s experience with other museum projects. The Regions Field exhibit is a comprehensive project promoting baseball in Birmingham, Alabama, and the Southeast.

“The people with Diamond Baseball Holdings (the owner of the Birmingham Barons) as well as City and County Officials were impressed with what we did,” proclaimed Revel. “We took space in the ballpark not being used, commissioned custom display cases, and installed the artifacts. It ended up being a little bit of a bigger project than first planned. County Commissioner Sheila Tyson first embraced the project and the entire Jefferson County Commission made sure the project was funded.”

The exhibits showcase the Barons’ 130+ year history as well as highlighting some of the exceptional players who have played for Birmingham’s baseball teams. “The new stadium brought renewed interest in the Barons and it seems each stadium in Birmingham, when new, brought a championship for the team,” Knox stated.

The seven cases extend in and around Regions Field, chronicling the Barons’ history from the grassroots origins to the teams, stadiums, and great players. Traveling through the timeline of each case, visitors get to experience baseball history through the artifacts on display such as game-used uniforms, gloves, and bats from Barons legends.

Revel and Knox both beamed about their experience of meeting Hall of Famer Rollie Fingers the night of the unveiling of the exhibits. Fingers played four years in the minors, including stints at Rickwood Field with the Birmingham A’s in 1967 and 1968 before a 17-year career in major league baseball.

“Rollie Fingers renewed my faith in celebrities. He was so gracious. He was wonderful to have as a guest. I learned he doesn’t make many appearances. He should be looked up to as a role model for young ballplayers of today. He is down to earth, signs autographs, poses for photos,” Revel noted. He and Knox were also very impressed after meeting local Barons legend Paul Seitz who owned the iconic Little Professor Bookstore in Homewood for many years.

Before that, Seitz was the Opening Day pitcher at Rickwood Field for the 1964 Birmingham Barons, which was the first integrated baseball team that called Birmingham home. Seitz later pitched a no-hitter for the Barons at Engel Stadium in Chattanooga against the Lookouts in 1965.

Both of these former Birmingham players were a great addition to the unveiling of the special exhibit at Regions Field.

The Barons were later renamed the Birmingham A’s for the 1967 season under the ownership of Ensley native Charlie O. Finley who also owned the Kansas City Athletics.

Knox remarked that “the goal for the Regions Field displays was to show the Barons’ history as well as fan engagement. We covered ownership, the stadiums, and the players’ influence from Rickwood Field’s owner A.H. “Rick” Woodward to the Hall of Famers.” Dr. Revel recognizes the historical significance of the Regions Field displays: “My grandson told me, ‘What you are leaving is a legacy. It will be there for generations to come!’” [Editor’s note: No one knows and supports the former Negro League players as well as Dr. Revel and his Center for Negro League Baseball Research.]

In addition to the displays at Regions Field, six additional display cases have been installed at the Jefferson Courthouse in Birmingham.

“The Courthouse six displays tell the story of the Birmingham Industrial Leagues through the years. Included are numerous trophies and game-used uniforms. The players for ACIPCO, Stockham, Sloss, and others often filled the rosters of Negro League teams,” Knox stated.

We have collaborated with Dr. Revel and fellow Friends of Rickwood Field members for 25 years developing displays promoting baseball in Birmingham. These two exhibits are a tremendous asset to our community. It is the desire of all of us to update and expand on these exhibits, especially for viewing by our youth. Dr. Revel’s vision, energy, and resources are appreciated by all!

- Lamar Smith and Joe DeLeonard

“The exhibits showcase the Barons’ 130+ year history as well as highlighting some of the exceptional players who have played for Birmingham’s baseball teams.”



*“My grandson told me,
What you are leaving is a
legacy. It will be there for
generations to come!”*

Pictured above are some of the displays commemorating the history of baseball in Birmingham that have been installed at Regions Field. Below are (L-R) Jefferson County Commissioner Shelia Tyson, former player Reaf Blue (Black Barons and Black Crackers), Arlington House Director Toby Richards, and Dr. Layton Revel (Negro Southern League Museum founder), at the dedication of the Jefferson County Courthouse baseball displays, along with one of exhibits. [Photos by Lamar Smith and Stewart Knox].



FROM RICKWOOD'S ROOFTOP

This is a new column designed to discuss short topics, ask our readers for some help, make requests, or ensure certain events are known. Jeb and I hope you will enjoy it and find it useful.

Today, we are making a request to you, our kind and loyal readers, to bring us your old photos of Rickwood Field and the players and people who roamed the diamond. The photos should be ones you, a family member or a friend have taken in the past. At present, we are not looking for old newspaper clippings. At least not right now, maybe later, down the road.

Please search those old boxes or containers in your attic, basement, or dresser drawers where these photos might be stored and perhaps forgotten. We are hoping to find photos that will fill in pieces of the puzzle of Rickwood's past.

A breakdown of the categories follows, to give an idea of the photos we are looking for and hope to find:

- (1) The Rickwood Classic (1996-2019);
- (2) 1980s-era Birmingham Barons when Art Clarkson was GM and owner of the team;
- (3) Birmingham A's (1967-1975), the Charles O. Finley Era when Reggie Jackson, Rollie Fingers, Joe Rudi, Dave Duncan, Vida Blue, and Tony LaRussa roamed the grounds;
- (4) Birmingham Barons 1965 and older;
- (5) Birmingham Black Barons - Any photos of the Black Barons would be like hitting a grand slam. We would love to find photos of all the great stars of the Negro Leagues. There are few, if any, photos of game action at Rickwood Field of the Black Barons. To the best of our knowledge,

there is no known photo of Satchel Paige in a Birmingham Black Barons uniform;

- (6) Any major league exhibition game played at Rickwood. This category would also include when the Atlanta Braves played the Southern League All-Stars (1969, 1970, 1982) and the Houston Astros (1985);
- (7) Older college or high school baseball games before 2000;
- (8) Pre-2000 non-sporting events at Rickwood such as the circus, political gatherings, or concerts;
- (9) The filming of the *Cobb* and *Soul of the Game* movies;
- (10) Alabama, Auburn, and UAB baseball games at the park;
- (11) Football games at the park from 1910-1980. Both Alabama and Auburn used the park for football in the early years when they visited Birmingham (before 1928). Many high schools continued playing football at Rickwood for many years thereafter;
- (12) 1980s and older photos of the ads on the outfield

walls or of the front plaza where the photos currently are displayed; and

- (13) Employees and workers at Rickwood Field. They helped make the games happen.

You may scan the photos and send them to us. If possible, please identify the game, event, the date, as close as possible, and the person in the photo. If you would like to bring your original, the Friends of Rickwood will be glad to scan and return it to you. You keep your original photo. It's yours! Full credit will be given to you or a family member. Of course, donations of photos are accepted.

So, search your memory, think hard, then dust off an old box tucked away somewhere in your house and hopefully there is a place where your past photos of Rickwood Field are stored. Please share our request, tell your friends, anyone you think might have some old photos. We look forward to hearing from you!

If you have any inquiries, or submissions, please contact me at jddballpark@gmail.com.

Thank you!

- Joe DeLeonard



Photo: *The Birmingham News*, Alabama Media Group/AL.com.

"Today, we are making a request to you, our kind and loyal readers, to bring us your old photos of Rickwood Field and the players and people who roamed the diamond."

DID YOU KNOW?



In 1989 actor James Earl Jones delivered an unforgettable performance as a fictional author, Terrence Mann, in *Field of Dreams*. In the penultimate scene of the movie, he explains to Kevin Costner's character, Ray Kinsella, how the game on his field transports fans to a simpler time, much like a nostalgic elixir. His speech could just have easily been written about fans walking through the turnstiles for a game at Rickwood. "And they'll walk out to the bleachers and sit in shirtsleeves on a perfect afternoon. They'll find they have reserved seats somewhere along one of the baselines, where they sat when they were children and cheered their heroes. And they'll watch the game and it'll be as if they dipped themselves in magic waters. The memories will be so thick they'll have to brush them away from their faces. People will come, Ray."

James Earl Jones visited Birmingham from March 8th-10th in 1997 for a National Film Registry Tour event at the Alabama Theatre. While in Birmingham, Jones visited Rickwood where he met with our first executive director, Chris Fullerton. Sadly, Fullerton died in a car accident on April 27, 1997, before the second Rickwood Classic. Jones died on September 9, 2024.

"James Earl Jones visited Birmingham from March 8th-10th in 1997 for a National Film Registry Tour event at the Alabama Theatre. While in Birmingham, Jones visited Rickwood and met with our first executive director, Chris Fullerton."

BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

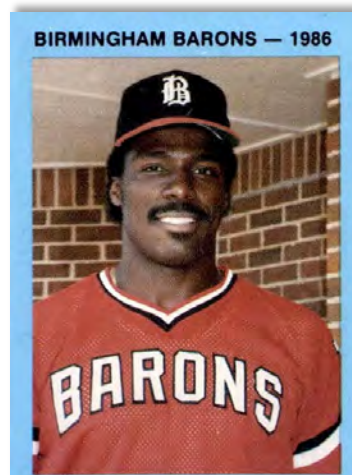
The Friends of Rickwood is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by donating to the Friends.

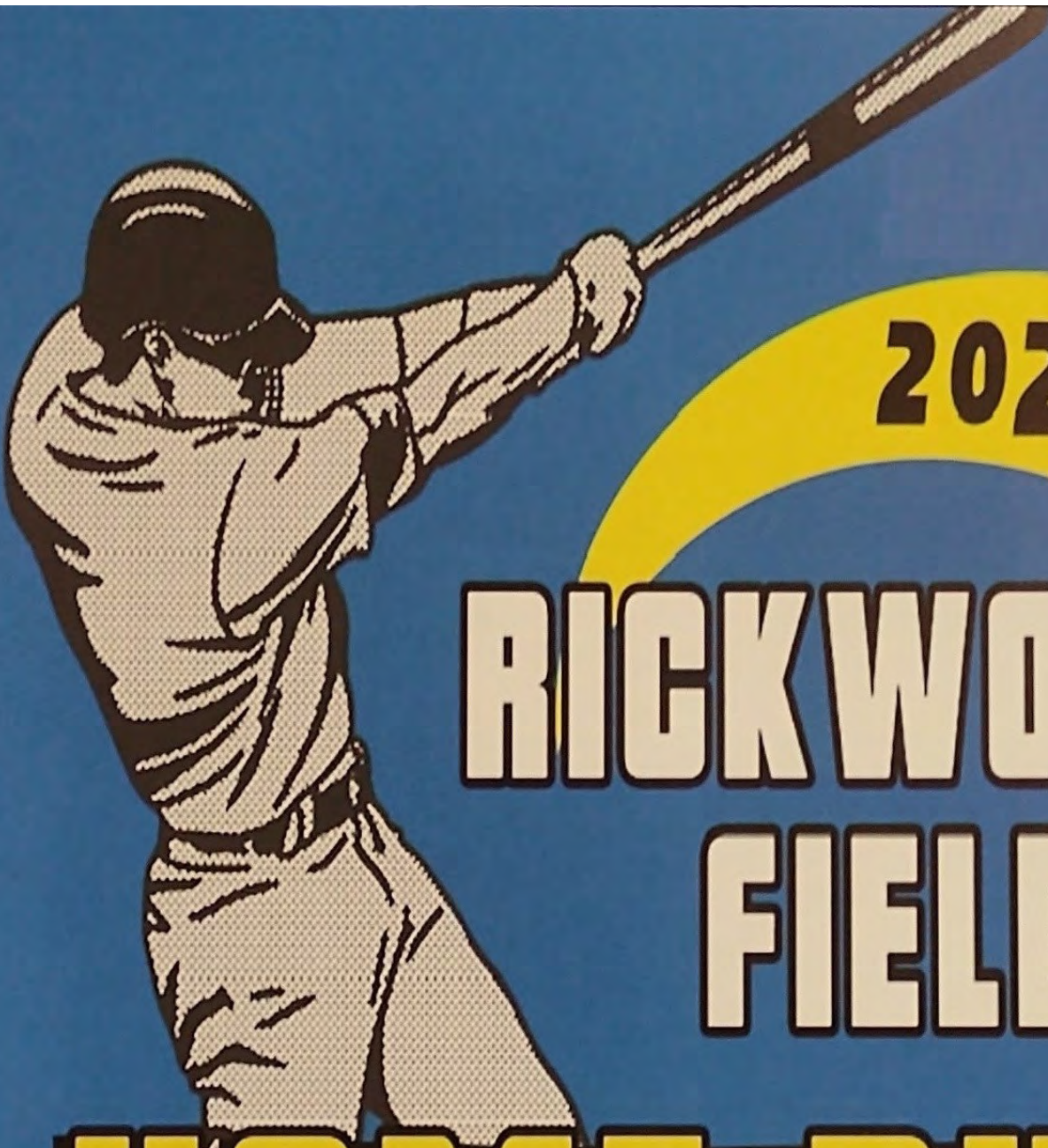
We have four levels of membership for individuals and each level will receive a certificate, a window sticker, and 10% off Rickwood merchandise: (1) Level 2 is a "Rookie" for a \$25 donation (and gets a certificate and a sticker); (2) Level 3 is a "Veteran" for a \$50 donation

(and also gets a custom patch); (3) Level 3 is a "Gold Glover" for a \$100 donation (and also gets a Rickwood T-shirt); and (4) Level 4 is an "All-Star" for a \$500 donation (and also gets a cage jacket) To join, please visit www.rickwood.com/membership or write us at:

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

Please come out to the ballpark and take a tour. Thanks!





2024

**RICKWOOD
FIELD**

HOME RUN

DERBY

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27