

# RICKWOOD TALES

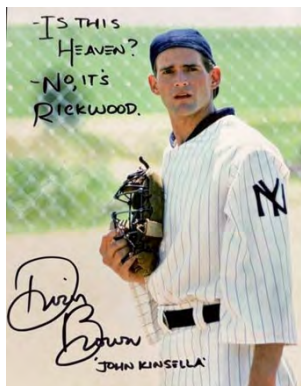
## Rickwood Calendar 12/24/25 to 3/24/26

- **Jan. 30-31:** Willie Mays Classic (Hosted by Miles College)
- **Feb. 3, 10, 14, 15, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28:** Miles College home games
- **Mar. 1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 27, 29:** High School Travel Ball

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[www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood.com](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood.com)

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## THE SWAC TOURNAMENT, BARONS, AND MLB'S EAST-WEST CLASSIC RETURN FOR 2026

After a thrilling slate of events in 2025, America's Oldest Ballpark is ready to welcome fans back for another remarkable lineup in 2026. From the sound of college bats to the roar of professional crowds and the pageantry of a Major League celebration, Rickwood Field continues to shine as one of baseball's most historic stages and a gathering place for generations of fans. Each new season adds another chapter to a story that began more than a century ago and still captures the city's imagination.

The action begins with the **Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) Baseball Tournament**, returning to Rickwood **May 20-24, 2026**. Last spring, fans were treated to one of the most exciting finishes in recent memory as Bethune-Cookman captured the championship with an 11-9 walk-off win over Florida A&M. The five-day event

showcased the heart and history of HBCU baseball, with thousands of supporters filling the stands to cheer on their schools. This year's tournament promises more unforgettable moments, outstanding talent, and the spirited competition that defines SWAC baseball.

Next, the **Birmingham Barons** make their annual return for the 26th time since 1996, taking on the Pensacola Blue Wahoos on **May 27, 2026**. The Barons' 2025 visit was a tense, old-fashioned pitcher's duel that ended in a 1-0 loss to the Rocket City Trash Pandas. Fans can expect another memorable afternoon of Double-A baseball as both clubs don throwback uniforms in tribute to the Negro Leagues—a tradition that honors the generations of stars who once graced the same diamond and continues to inspire new fans every year.

Finally, **Major League Baseball's East-West Classic: A Tribute to the Negro Leagues** returns to Rickwood on Juneteenth, June 19, 2026. Last year's contest saw the West prevail 3-0, with legends such as CC Sabathia, Jose Contreras, Prince Fielder, and Andruw Jones taking the field in a stirring celebration of the game's Black pioneers.

The 2026 contest will once again unite baseball greats, families, and fans from across the country in a joyful, reverent salute to history and community. As another summer approaches, Rickwood Field stands ready to blend past and present, hosting champions, prospects, and legends alike, and proving once again that the spirit of baseball remains timeless on Birmingham's most hallowed ground.

## BANANABALL RETURNS TO RICKWOOD!

The Friends of Rickwood are thrilled to announce that the **Savannah Bananas' 2026 Banana Ball World Tour** will bring two days of baseball fun to America's Oldest Ballpark, **September 19-20, 2026**. The games will feature two of the Bananas' newer and most colorful clubs—the **Indianapolis Clowns** and the **Loco Beach Coconuts**—in what promises to be another unforgettable Rickwood experience.

Rickwood Field has already hosted two sold-out Banana Ball events, each drawing more than 10,000 fans and introducing new generations to the magic of the

old park. The Bananas' 2022 visit set a team attendance record and marked Rickwood's first complete sellout since the inaugural Rickwood Classic in 1996. Their return in 2023 was equally electric, with fans lining up for several hours in the heat before game time and filling every seat for another day of joyful chaos. From choreographed dances to trick plays, sing-alongs, and baby races, the Bananas have turned the game into a two-hour celebration of fun and imagination.

The Clowns, a nod to one of the most famous teams in Negro

Leagues history, bring their own flair and humor to the diamond, while the Coconuts add island-style energy and a roster full of entertainers who blur the line between player and performer. Together, they capture the spirit of Banana Ball: fast-paced, fan-first, and always unpredictable.

Tickets for both games are expected to sell fast, and fans are encouraged to follow the Savannah Bananas online for on-sale information. Once again, Rickwood Field will prove that baseball's future and its past can share the same stage—and that fun never goes out of style.

## THE 2025 WORLD POLICE AND FIRE GAMES

For ten days in late June and early July, Birmingham hosted the World Police and Fire Games, an Olympic-style event with first responders from around the world competing in various sports. An estimated 7,000 first responders competed in the competition, filling local venues and hotels with energy and camaraderie. The Games also provided a welcome boost to the local economy, bringing visitors, tourism revenue, and national attention to the city.

The baseball component of the Games was held at Rickwood Field and Hoover Metropolitan Stadium from June 28 to July 2, 2025. All of the participating teams were from the United States, with entries from New York, Philadelphia, Houston, Dallas, Huntsville, and Birmingham. The competition drew enthusiastic fans and rekindled old baseball rivalries among departments that have fielded teams for decades.

The New York Police Department team, with a 5-2 record, won the competition based on the tie-breaker system over squads from the Philadelphia Police and the New York Fire Department. The following is a complete list of scores of the games played at Rickwood:

### Saturday, June 28, 2025

Philadelphia PD 18, Birmingham PD 0  
FDNY Bravest 22, Birmingham PD 1

### Sunday, June 29, 2025

Huntsville Fire 18, Houston PD 6  
Philadelphia PD 5, New York PD 2

### Monday, June 30, 2025

FDNY Bravest 5, New York PD 4  
Houston PD 6, FDNY Bravest 3

### Tuesday, July 1, 2025

New York PD 25, Birmingham PD 0  
New York PD 8, Dallas Heat 1  
Houston PD 12, Birmingham PD 0

### Wednesday, July 2, 2025

Philadelphia PD 9, Houston PD 2  
Philadelphia PD 8, Dallas Heat 2  
New York PD 7, FDNY Bravest 5

- Joe DeLeonard

*"The baseball component of the Games was held at Rickwood Field and Hoover Metropolitan Stadium from June 28 to July 2, 2025."*

## IAN HANCOCK CLAIMS THIRD RICKWOOD HOME RUN DERBY CROWN

Cold winds and wet weather couldn't dampen the spirits—or the swings—at Rickwood Field on Sunday, October 26, 2025, as fans turned out for the annual **Home Run Derby** hosted by the Friends of Rickwood. Despite tough conditions that held the ball in the park, the afternoon offered plenty of smiles, memories, and baseball magic.

This year's event featured a special guest, actor **Dwier Brown**, who famously portrayed John Kinsella in *Field of Dreams*. Brown greeted fans, signed autographs, and even shared a game of catch with several attendees. His warmth and enthusiasm brought an added glow to an otherwise chilly day at America's Oldest Ballpark.

The 2025 field included a talented mix of newcomers and Rickwood regulars: **Sonny DiChiara, Ian Hancock, Mike McHenry, Homer Bush, Jack Wilson, Corky Miller, and Kaden Burch**. Conditions were far from hitter-friendly, with a damp field and a stiff wind blowing straight in from right. In the opening round, only DiChiara, Hancock, and McHenry managed to clear the fence once apiece.

The other competitors—Burch, Bush, Wilson, and Miller—took one more shot in a one-minute "swing-off," but none were able to reach the seats. That set up a semifinal round featuring Hancock versus DiChiara and McHenry versus Miller. Hancock, a Birmingham-Southern standout and two-time Derby champion, belted two long drives to

defeat DiChiara, while McHenry and Miller each managed one homer. After neither could connect in a one-minute tiebreaker, Miller graciously stepped aside.

The championship matchup came down to two seasoned sluggers. Hancock, still showing the smooth, quick swing that has made him a Rickwood favorite, launched two home runs through the cold air to blank McHenry, 2-0, and capture his third Rickwood Home Run Derby title.

Even on a gray day, the spirit of the game shone bright. Fans cheered, kids shagged fly balls, and once again, Rickwood Field proved that its magic endures—come rain, wind, or cold.

*"Hancock, still showing the smooth, quick swing that has made him a Rickwood favorite, launched two home runs through the cold air to blank McHenry, 2-0, and capture his third Rickwood Home Run Derby title."*







*“The victory gave Bethune-Cookman its first SWAC baseball title since joining the conference in 2021.”*

*“Daniel Figueroa of Bethune-Cookman, who batted .372 in the regular season and .556 for the tournament, was named the tournament’s Most Valuable Player.”*

## MORE FROM THE 2025 SWAC TOURNAMENT

The return of the Southwestern Athletic Conference Baseball Tournament to Birmingham and Rickwood Field provided memorable moments, with none more so than the championship game. The top-seeded Bethune-Cookman Wildcats dramatically won the tournament final with a come-from-behind 11-9 victory over the second-seeded Rattlers of Florida A&M, when Andrey Martinez slammed a two-out three-run home run to centerfield to end the game.

In the back-and-forth contest, Bethune-Cookman jumped to an early lead, scoring three runs in the second, which featured a steal of home by Wildcat Sergio Rivera. That lead stood up until the sixth frame, when FAMU, with the bases loaded, parlayed a bases-loaded single by Justen Crews for a run. A walk by Colton Ryals and a sacrifice fly by Matthew Perez plated two more

runs to knot the game at three apiece. The Rattlers scored four more runs in the top of the seventh to take a 7-3 lead, with William Brown and Crews both smashing two-run homers.

However, Bethune-Cookman struck for three runs in the seventh to cut the lead to 7-6 when Jeter Polle and Rivera drove in the runs on a pair of singles.

Florida A&M added a couple of insurance runs in the top of the eighth on the strength of a double by Jay Campbell. The lead stood at 9-6 in favor of the Rattlers, but the Wildcats retaliated with two runs of their own in the bottom half of the inning to cut the lead to one.

After a scoreless top half of the ninth, Bethune-Cookman put a couple of runners on base thanks to a single and an infield error.

With two outs, Martinez stepped to the plate and gave Rickwood Field another memorable moment as he belted a three-run home run to set off a wild celebration on the field and in the stands. The victory gave Bethune-Cookman its first SWAC baseball title since joining the conference in 2021. The Wildcats also earned an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

It was a fitting end for the SWAC Tournament at the nation’s oldest ballpark, as fans from across the conference traveled to Birmingham, filling hotels and restaurants and showing strong support for the Magic City. Excitement is already building for next year’s SWAC Tournament, returning to Rickwood Field from May 20-24, 2026.

- Joe DeLeonard

## 2025 SWAC BASEBALL TOURNAMENT SCORES

### Wednesday, May 21, 2025

Bethune-Cookman 5, Texas Southern 3  
Florida A&M 9, Southern University 1  
Alabama State 7, Jackson State 6  
Grambling State 13, Arkansas- Pine Bluff 6

### Thursday, May 22, 2025

Jackson State 12, Texas Southern 6  
Southern U. 17, Arkansas-Pine Bluff 11  
Bethune-Cookman 9, Alabama State 8  
Florida A&M 14, Grambling State 4

### Friday, May 23, 2025

Alabama State 5, Jackson State 3  
Grambling State 16, Southern U. 2  
Bethune-Cookman 8, Alabama State 7, 10 innings  
Grambling State 13, Florida A&M 0, 7 innings

### Saturday, May 24, 2025

Florida A&M 9, Grambling State 1

### Sunday, May 25, 2025 (Championship)

Bethune-Cookman 11, Florida A&M 9

**SWAC Tournament MVP** — Daniel Figueroa of Bethune-Cookman, who batted .372 in the regular season and .556 for the tournament, was named the tournament’s Most Valuable Player.



**Andrey Martinez** after his dramatic walk-off homer  
[Photo Courtesy The Rampant Lion Photography]

## “DUSTING ‘EM OFF”: FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2025 was another tremendous year in the history of Rickwood Field, one that built confidently on the momentum created during the landmark renovations of 2024. Our goal was to keep this historic ballpark active, relevant, and welcoming, while continuing to honor the generations who made it special. The result was a full and rewarding year that blended competitive baseball, community pride, and thoughtful stewardship of America's Oldest Ballpark.

From early spring through late summer, Rickwood Field hosted a wide array of events that demonstrated its national reach and local importance. We welcomed another successful **SWAC Baseball Tournament**, along with the return of the **Birmingham Barons**, **MLB's East-West Classic**, the **World Police and Fire Games**, the **Hank Aaron 44 Invitational**, and numerous travel ball events that brought players and families from all over the country. On two occasions, we hosted nationally ranked **Troy University's** Division I baseball team; their presence added excitement and high-level competition while further cementing Rickwood's place on the collegiate baseball landscape.

While the schedule was packed, we also remained focused on improvements that enhance the visitor experience. We recently installed a new ceiling and floor in the gift shop and museum, changes that have made a noticeable difference for

guests. These upgrades help us better tell Rickwood's story, allowing visitors to more fully appreciate the people, teams, and moments that have shaped this ballpark over more than a century.

College baseball continues to be a cornerstone of Rickwood's identity, especially our ongoing partnership with **Miles College**. It is always an honor to have Miles play its home games at Rickwood. **Coach Milton Barney, Jr.**, and his program represent everything we value about the game — resilience, pride, and a deep respect for baseball's traditions. We are excited to continue that partnership and eagerly look ahead to the **2026 Willie Mays Open** beginning on January 30, a special event that connects today's players with one of the greatest names in the sport.

Community-centered traditions also thrived this year. The fourth annual **Rickwood Home Run Derby** was a success despite some unpleasant weather that tested everyone's patience and umbrellas. Fans stayed, the competition remained spirited, and congratulations go to **Ian Hancock** for capturing the title. Events like the derby remind us that Rickwood is as much about shared joy and memories as it is about wins and losses.

With all these great activities in 2025, it has set us up for a tremendous 2026 and beyond. Next year will feature the return of the **SWAC Baseball Tournament**, a May visit from the **Barons**, another **East-West Classic**, and two games in September with new teams from the **Savannah Bananas'** league. We are planning as far ahead as 2027, when the SEC's **University of Missouri** visits in February of that year.

None of this is possible without the generosity of our donors, supporters, volunteers, and board members. Because of them, Rickwood Field continues not just to endure, but to flourish. We are deeply grateful to the **City of Birmingham**, its elected leadership, and our community partners who continue to stand with us. Every event, tour, and visit helps ensure Rickwood remains a place where history is honored, the game is celebrated, and new memories are made every season.

Together, we are preserving more than a ballpark — we are safeguarding a living landmark that continues to inspire players, fans, and future generations who walk through Rickwood's historic gates.

- Gerald Watkins

*“We are deeply grateful to the City of Birmingham, its elected leadership, and our community partners who continue to stand with us.”*

## A MEMORY FROM LONG AGO

Many thanks to Charles and Margaret Farrell for approaching Mr. Matthew Thomason to share his experiences about Rickwood Field as a youth. Mr. Thomason is a World War II veteran and is 103 years old. The brief story he shares must go back to the Depression era and the 1930s. We are printing it below in its entirety.

*Good morning. I am a friend and ex-neighbor of Charles and Margaret Farrell. Would like to share a Rickwood story with you.*

*I grew up a few blocks from Rickwood and went to Woodrow Wilson Grammar School. Many afternoons after school, I would walk to Rick-*

*wood and stand outside the left field fence and hope to retrieve a fly ball. If successful, I could turn it in and get to watch the game.*

*After the 7th inning, they opened the gates and everyone could walk in.*

- Matthew (M.D.) Thomason

*“Many afternoons after school, I would walk to Rickwood and stand outside the left field fence and hope to retrieve a fly ball.”*

## 20TH ANNUAL BASEBALL, BEER, AND BEN-GAY GAME

### Twenty Years at Rickwood: Fellowship, Fastballs, and a Field Full of Friends

Thank you for helping me celebrate my 70th season at America's oldest ballpark. The 20th anniversary of our Rickwood gathering was the biggest by far — and I hope the fellowship matched the size of the crowd. For a few hours, the noise of the world faded, and all that mattered was the sound of baseballs popping into gloves and laughter echoing off those grand old stands. There were plenty of highlights and plenty of stories.

### Hot Dogs and Heroes

**John Stone** earned MVP honors for delivering the hot dogs, though he might have noted where I was standing when he announced their arrival. By the time I sauntered in from left field, they were all gone. (Note to self: remind John and **Gus's Lee Pantazis** — we'll need more hot dogs next year). At least three brave souls wore Cubs uniforms, but only **Allen Yielding** bought a Barons uniform in the gift shop and changed into it on the spot.

### Roll Call

The **Crestline** alumni showed up in force: **Mason**, **Echols**, **Kent**, **Echols**, **Sherrod**, **Salem**, and **Simpson**. Missing in action this year were **Green**, **Nagrodski**, **Price**, **Kanter**, **Burr**, **Crittenden**, and **Kirkland**. **Robert Levin's** Birmingham Black Barons uniform was rivaled by his college friend **Randy Schaffer's** Cubs gear. **Glenn Fleisig**, **Ed Meyerson**, and **Jim Fuqua** may still be wondering what they'd gotten themselves into.

We were expecting six Dougs, but only **Jones** and **Friedman** made it. Get well soon, **Doug Neil**. **Scott Ellison** and **Brit Roshon** somehow convinced **Jemison Jr. High** to function without them for a day.

### Friends of Rickwood and the Field of Dreams

A hearty nod to **Sam Fisher**, **Jim Adair**, **Joe DeLeonard**, **Kevin Weidman**, **Rick Woodward**, **Tommy Cox**, **Scott Davis**, **Ben Powell**, **Mike**

**Newton**, and **Lamar Smith** — the **Friends of Rickwood Board** who gazed out at the field's joyful chaos and quietly wondered what they'd unleashed. **Bill Cather** didn't hit anyone this year — not that he didn't try — while son **Heath** and friend **Merrill Stewart** egged him on.

**Eamon Joyce**, down from New York because his Mets "Swoboda'ed" him again, delivered the best slide: a headfirst hook slide trying to stretch a hit into a double. Replay confirmed he was out, but it was a highlight all the same.

**Jason Peevey** earned the Sportsmanship Award, lining a single into right where there was no right fielder — then refusing to advance to second as **Eamon** retrieved the ball from the gap.

**Dr. Julian Maha** brought his son **Abram**, whose smile reminded everyone why we do this — the magic of baseball.

### On the Diamond and Behind the Lens

**Eric Napier** played a slick left-handed shortstop and arranged professional photographers for the day. More on those photos later.

**Tom Shufflebarger** dropped by for a few hours — proving that **Children's of Alabama** basically runs itself. **Robert Lewis**, the wild man from Arizona, played all-out as usual. Nobody had more fun.

**Paul Seitz** didn't pitch this year, graciously letting the younger guys get some swings while enjoying the sight of son, **Andy** and grandson carrying on the family tradition.

**Jeb Stewart**, editor of the **Friends of Rickwood's** newsletter, lawyer, and board member, brought his usual reliable defense — though fantasy players

noted he came up limping at second.

**Rick Woodward** regally represented the Woodward family, cheered on by **Sorrell Chew** and **Tommy Cox**. **Scott Myers**, Executive Director of the **Alabama Sports Hall of Fame**, left thinking hard about expanding ASHOF's baseball section.

### Legends and Laughs

**Dick Coffee** and **Greg Mayo** joined **Ted Fowler** and **Bob Baker** to represent **Woodlawn's glory days** — and **Bob** finally made the team photo this year, having refused to move from the designated spot. **Mike Jordan** was MIA.

Between throwing BP and bringing several pro players, **Ted Fowler** proudly shared videos of his son climbing the ranks in professional baseball. "I'm not saying our event was the turning point," **Coke** noted, "I'm just saying..."

**Charles Ball** and **Darren Sanders** returned for the first time in many years — tired, perhaps, of my persistent reminder emails. **Jimmy Collins' bionic knee** didn't slow him down. **Steve Demedice** arrived late with **Tom Cosby**, somehow thinking that would help. **Bob Carlton** trotted out another vintage Rickwood T-shirt — welcome to retirement, **Bob**.

**David Hamilton** spent most of the day researching his upcoming book about **Art Black**. **Cade** and **Robert Hornak** showed off for **Bentley**, who watched from the stands — though they'll surely keep the photos from **Davis**, who couldn't make it. Every year, **Jeremy Knowles** sprays hits all over the field. Maybe next year, **Cather** will finally pitch him inside. **Tom Walker** looked the part but didn't act it — and missed **Eamon Joyce's** heroics. **Ben Powell** played everywhere, as always — an MVP for the Friends of

*"For a few hours, the noise of the world faded, and all that mattered was the sound of baseballs popping into gloves and laughter echoing off those grand old stands."*

## 20TH BBB GAME MEMORIES

Rickwood and our resident historian, IT guru, and all-around utility man, **Wayne Trammell** runs the membership program for the FOR — sign up at Rickwood.com!

### Friends Old and New

I made a point to toss the ball with my childhood friend **Rusty Rushton**, drifting back to plays from 1968. (And remember to support the **Alabama Symphony Orchestra** while you're at it.)

**Mike Mays** thrilled us with stories about his father, **Willie Mays**, while **Gaines Johnson** and **Victor Hanson** reminded everyone that Birmingham is still a proud baseball town — home of the **World Baseball League**.

**Umpire Scott Davis** enjoyed the rare chance to drop his neutrality for one day. **Phillip Jordan** brought his son and in-laws — getting his boy some BP for next year's **BBB 21**. **Doug Friedman** and **Paul Colson** renewed their friendship on the diamond. **Jabriel Weir** and his **grounds crew** got to play on the field they maintain so beautifully.

**Art Black**, **Jimmy Barton**, and **Jimmy Wiygul** represented **Birmingham University School**. **Sammy Natta's** father, **Andre**, provided his usual left-handed power — and running commentary.

**Joseph Goodman** showed he's just as adept with a bat as he is with words. **Burgin Kent** and **Robert Smith** arrived early — early enough to avoid moving the turtle or fetching more ice. Timing, indeed, is everything. The early quiet always makes for the best conversations.

**Jonathan Nelson** remembered his real roots. **Marc Puccio** caught both sides, hit, threw BP — a one-man Ohtani Award winner.

### Looking Ahead

Thanks to **Jack Watkins** for designing the anniversary T-shirt, and to **FOR President and Executive Director Gerald Watkins** and board member **Mike Newton** for reminding everyone about upcoming Rickwood events and the annual golf tournament.

**JL Shaia** once again allowed **Chuck Ellis** to bask in his celebrity glow. The Shaias didn't have to give away a suit this year — no one cleared the fence. Get well, **Jeff Underwood**. **Dan Weinrib** worked the crowd in street clothes. **Randy Ferguson** sat this one out. **Don Lu-po** from the City dropped by and hopefully enjoyed watching a

hundred folks celebrate a Friday afternoon in Birmingham's West End.

**Gary Brandon**, author of *History Played Here* and a die-hard Cubs fan, admitted that Rickwood was better than his first stop at Buc-ee's.

**Drake Baldwin** of the Atlanta Braves, who just won the NL Rookie of the Year, was in attendance and enjoyed watching all the old-timers play. He does not have to face **Bill Cather** in the big leagues.

We remembered **Tom Surtees** and **David Osinski**.

And a heartfelt thanks to everyone who donated or bought merchandise — and to those who haven't yet: visit [rickwood.com](http://rickwood.com). The Friends of Rickwood allow us to "insult the field" each year with our nonsense, and for that, we owe them our gratitude.

That long-forgotten sound of the ball thumping into your glove — that's why we come back. And you thought I wasn't paying attention. (I'm sure I forgot someone.)

- Coke Matthews

*"The Friends of Rickwood allow us to 'insult the field' each year with our nonsense, and for that, we owe them our gratitude."*



Photo courtesy of the professional team that Eric Napier arranged.

## RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1958 BIRMINGHAM BARONS

If you wander over by the third-base side of the exterior grandstand, you'll see 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 teams.

The 1958 Birmingham Barons stand alone in the long tapestry of Rickwood Field history. Managed by Cal Ermer, the club finished 91-62 (.595), captured the Southern Association pennant by 6.5 games over the Mobile Bears, swept through the SA playoffs, and then defeated the Corpus Christi Giants to win the final Dixie Series between the Southern Association and the Texas League. No other Birmingham team ever claimed all three crowns—the SA pennant, the playoffs, and the Dixie Series—in a single season.

The Barons were a balanced and formidable ballclub. Birmingham hit .266 as a team with 138 home runs and 35 stolen bases. Bob Thorpe led the way with a .324 average and 23 homers, while Lou Limmer powered 30 home runs, Steve Demeter added a .309 mark with 18 homers, and Mel Clark contributed a steady .295.

Twenty-two players from the roster reached the big leagues, a testament to the depth of talent assembled at Rickwood that year.

The pitching staff produced a 3.83 ERA and worked heavy innings to power the club's postseason run. Joe Grzenda went 16-7 with a 3.19 ERA across 223 innings; Bill Harrington delivered a sterling 20-7 campaign with a 2.99 ERA; and Phil Regan, later a long-time major leaguer, posted a 15-8 record over 201 innings. With reliable arms and a punchy lineup, the Barons proved built for October.

Birmingham opened the 1958 Southern Association playoffs by taking four of five from the Chattanooga Lookouts, including an 11-inning thriller at Rickwood and three wins at Engel Stadium. In the second round, the Barons eliminated Mobile in another five-game series, highlighted by a 10-inning victory in Game 4. That set the stage for the Dixie Series, a postseason tradition dating back to 1920 that baseball fans across the Deep South

once circled on their calendars every year. But by 1958, the Dixie Series was nearing its end. Attendance had slipped badly—barely over 18,000 fans attended the entire six-game set—and growing tension between the two leagues threatened the event's future. The Texas League had integrated in 1952, while the Southern Association refused to do so. During the 1958 Texas League playoffs, Austin's owner announced that the Senators would boycott the Dixie Series if their Black players were barred from Birmingham. When Corpus Christi won instead, the Giants chose to leave their Black players in Texas to allow the Series to proceed. It was a quiet but defining fracture.

On the field, Birmingham prevailed in six games, winning four of the final five. Yet the triumph arrived as the tradition itself was collapsing. By the winter of 1959, the Dixie Series was abandoned, and only a few years later, the Southern Association itself vanished. The 1958 Barons, champions of a fading era, remain the only Birmingham club to win the SA pennant and playoffs and the Dixie Series in the same year.

*"No other Birmingham team ever claimed all three crowns—the SA pennant, the playoffs, and the Dixie Series—in a single season."*



The 1958 Barons were managed by Cal Ermer. The team finished 91-62 (.595) and won the Southern Association (AA) pennant by 6.5 games over the Mobile Bears. This was the only Barons team to have won the trifecta of: (1) the SA pennant, (2) the SA playoffs; and (3) the Dixie Series during the same season in the history of the franchise.



## ZAC TATE DONATES HISTORIC UMPIRE GEAR

When I walk into a place like Rickwood, I reflect on all the history and memories that never need to be forgotten! Umpires go unnoticed until what? A) we have to make a call, or B) fans think we screwed up! Sometimes we do; it's part of it! But without umpires, the game of baseball is just practice!

I think of places like Cooperstown, established 89 years ago, and I bet you can't guess how many umpires are in the Hall of Fame: "10." That should tell you where umpires are viewed. Doug Harvey, one of the 10 in the Hall of Fame, once said, "the integrity of the game is the umpires. Nobody else. The entire integrity of the game is the umpires."

Until I got put into a position where I had to do what we call "Umpire," I

had to make a split decision, get with my crew, and make what we all thought was the right call! The coach came out of the dugout, and the words he chose to use were, I quote, "You are screwing the integrity of this game!" Well, let's just say I found out really quickly what that quote truly meant!

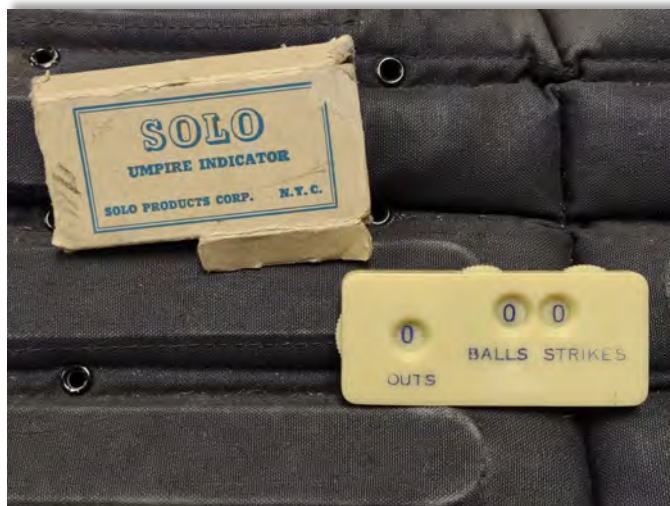
I found the equipment while traveling the country umpiring in a collegiate summer league called the Northwoods. It just so happened I had it bagged up because I just got done with an all-day career day at my daughter's school. I knew after walking into a historic place like Rickwood and hardly seeing any umpire history, I thought this place needs a piece of umpire history!

I have been umpiring for 10 years now. I had an amazing opportunity to go to Harry Wendelstedt Professional Umpiring School, where I saw a sign every day that read, "Not everyone can be a professional umpire, but everyone can be a Professional person!"

That's what I try to be on and off the field. But every time I put on the uniform, I umpire like it's my last time I get to be out there! So, for that, thank you for accepting my donation. And I hope it brings joy to many people to come!

- Zac Tate, the Blind Umpire

*"the integrity of the game is the umpires. Nobody else. The entire integrity of the game is the umpires."*





RICKWOOD COLLEGE CLASSIC: FALL BALL EDITION







On Sunday, November 9, 2025, Samford and Troy met at Rickwood Field for the fourth edition of the Rickwood College Classic, playing before an enthusiastic crowd on a sun-drenched autumn afternoon. Though no score was kept in the fall-ball doubleheader, the exhibitions were fiercely contested, providing a spirited and fitting close to another memorable year of baseball at America's Oldest Ballpark.



## RICKWOOD'S TEMPORARY WORKER

*"In early May, Rickwood had a new worker for most of the month. This volunteer walks on four legs, purrs, and asks for a little affection on occasion."*

In early May, Rickwood had a new worker for most of the month. This volunteer walks on four legs, purrs, and asks for a little affection on occasion. Mae, a shortened version of her full name, Willie Mae, showed up at the ballpark and immediately became a hit with the ground crew and board members. Mae mostly kept the rodent population down. It was her job and her payment. She usually slept in the seats. No one knew if she preferred the box seats or the cover of the grandstand roof for the bench seating.

Mae made herself useful by hanging around with the board members, trying to help with the chores like cleaning and vacuuming the conference room as well. She was not scared of anyone or anything. No task was too big for her.

On Friday, May 9th, Mae was accidentally locked in the conference room overnight. Fortunately, a workday was scheduled for Saturday, and she was not trapped in the room for the weekend.

That Saturday morning, board member Joe DeLeonard called his wife, Cathy, asking her to come out to the ballpark with some cat food. After some coaxing, she did, and Mae dove in, eating almost all of a large serving in a very short

time. She went home with Cathy.

"We have big hearts for people, stray animals, anything helpless," explained Joe D. "We just want to help out in any manner possible."

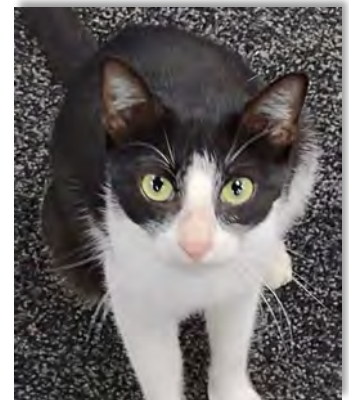
However, Mae had a surprise. Cathy took her to the vet a few days later and was told that Mae was expecting. Cathy clarified, "the vet explained Mae was 'very pregnant.'" She told me the term for a cat to carry a litter of kittens was 65 days. She said Mae was at least 50 days along. It was a surprise, certainly not something we were thinking about."

Cathy further described the situation, "We just weren't planning on it. We already had three cats established in the household. What were we going to do?"

On May 22nd, Mae delivered one female and three male cats. "Even though those kittens never saw the ballpark, I immediately dubbed them 'The Rickwood Rascals,' because they are a constant reminder of where I first saw Mae," said Joe. "We planned to foster the kittens and to ensure they have good homes."

However, another twist in the story occurred. "We got attached to all of them. We were considered 'foster fails' because we just couldn't let them go. It's more cats than I ever planned, and it has its moments, but they have been good for both of us," said Cathy.

The female cat is named Ebony, while the males are Oreo, Inky, and Baron. Cathy summed up her thoughts on the names, "We wanted to give them all baseball names, but just couldn't come up with four. We did name the one cat, Baron, for the hometown Birmingham Barons. He looks like he has a little moustache like the old-time baseball player used off and on for the team logo."



Willie Mae

*"The FOR is considering a petition to the State of Alabama for our own license plates."*

## INTERESTED IN A RICKWOOD LICENSE PLATE?



This featured license plate is just an idea. The FOR is considering a petition to the State of Alabama for our own license plates. Before we do, we want to hear from our fellow Rickwood-loving Alabama residents. Look for an email soon, with a link to a simple one-question survey. If you answer, "Yes, I'm interested," it's just an indication of interest – not a firm commitment. The best-case scenario – with enough Alabamians committing to a Rickwood car tag – the State could make them available sometime in 2027. Every plate sold would yield \$41.25 to help us preserve our favorite ballpark. Thanks in advance for your interest.

## FROM THE ROOFTOP

There are several events that all of us at Rickwood Field do not want to pass without comment in this newsletter. Leading off, congratulations to the **Birmingham Barons** on winning the 2025 Southern League championship. The Barons beat the Montgomery Biscuits in a hard-fought three-game series, winning the decisive game by a score of 6-3. Birmingham was the Southern League North Division second-half champion and had the circuit's overall best regular season record with an 81-57 mark. This marks the ninth time a Birmingham team has won the modern-day Southern League since its inception in 1964. The last time the Barons were back-to-back league champions was in 1928 and 1929 in the old Southern Association.

The **Black Barons** were the last Birmingham baseball team to win back-to-back pennants, winning the Negro American League in 1943 and 1944.

In July, scouts from around the country gathered at Rickwood for the **Hank Aaron 44 Invitational Showcase Game**, which featured the top 44 high school players in the country. We also note former **Birmingham-Southern** head baseball coach **Jan Weisberg** is now

the head man at Eastern Kentucky. Following the closing of Birmingham-Southern, Weisberg was head coach of the Valdosta State Blazers for the 2024 and 2025 seasons. It was on his recommendations that the Blazers stopped by Rickwood Field for a visit in April.

Taking over the reins at Valdosta State is **J.D. Hulse**, who was a four-year starter at Birmingham-Southern for Weisberg. Hulse became a star, owning many school and conference records in his four years. He would later rejoin his

mentor on the hilltop and follow him to Valdosta State, where he became the fourth head coach since 1967. Finally, thanks are owed to Samford's baseball coach and team for hosting Troy at Rickwood in November.

Gentlemen, congratulations and best wishes in the future. Please don't forget us at Rickwood. You are always welcome to bring your team to Rickwood or play a game on the field where 183 members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame have played their wares over 115 years.

- Joe DeLeonard



Scouts watching the 2025 Hank Aaron Invitational Showcase Game

## 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 and a window sticker. In addition: (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 cus-

tom 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](http://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!



*"This marks the ninth time a Birmingham team has won the modern-day Southern League since its inception in 1964."*

*"Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by donating to the Friends."*

## FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD 2025 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Rickwood Field depends on the generosity of our community every year to keep the park alive. We had another great year at the ballpark with the SWAC Tournament, the Barons game, and the MLB East-West Negro League Tribute! We again had solid park rental fees, memberships, and gift shop donations, and our board and friends really stepped up and contributed many volunteer hours and in-kind services. The following sponsors, grantors, and donors have contributed mightily to our 2025 success (this list is current through Dec. 12, 2025).

### Sponsors, Grantors, and Donors

#### \$275,000

City of Birmingham

#### \$50,000

Ed Reynolds

#### \$20,000

Cintas

#### \$6,000-\$7,000

Steve and Gwen Ritchie

#### \$5,000-\$5,999

Laura Lee Patillo

(Norquist Foundation)

#### \$2,000-\$4,999

Jeff Burris

Doug and Linda Friedman

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Jerry Pate Turf & Irrigation

Alabama Power

C.H. Zimmerman

#### \$1,000-\$1,999

Ed Bartel

Nick Bengé

Robert Canton

Bill Cather

Cheryl Cheadle

Clanton Lions Club

Chris Cox

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Matthew Harrison

Julie Huelskamp

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Bob Lake

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Kevin Stambaugh

Joe Steltenkamp

Landy Townsend

Adlai Trone

John Wayne

Mike Weckbach

Tom Whalen

Tim Woeste

Curt Zimmerman

#### \$500-\$999

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Allen Woodward

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#### \$250-\$499

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Joe DeLeonard

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Morningstar, Inc.

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Richard Neel

Ben Powell

Lamar Smith

James Thomas Somers

Jeb Stewart

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Paul Angel II

Julia Brock

Ben Burgess

Dana Bussey

Bob Carlton

Charles Clayton

Don Cline

Dick Coffee

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Amanda Fraijo

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Burgin Kent

Wilber Masters

Greg Mayo

Kim McDade

John Rall

Tim and Mary Horgan-Siegworth

Robert Smith

Alfrieda Tart

Susan Toland

Alfred Wolnski

### Rickwood Golf Classic Sponsors

Balch and Bingham \$5,000

BlueCross BlueShield  
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Brookwood Hematology &  
Oncology Associates \$5,000

Cintas \$5,000

David Mayo \$5,000

Kevin Weidman \$5,000

U.S. Pipe \$5,000

Stewart Lubricants \$3,700

Jacob Marsh \$3,600

World Baseball League \$3,200

ACIPCO \$2,500

Avadian Credit Union \$2,500

Eric Blackman & Friends \$2,400

Sam Davis \$1,200

Meacham Plumbing \$1,200

Zac White \$1,200

Mike Newton \$750

Gary Harding \$280

### Home Run Derby Sponsors

Mickey Newsome \$8,500

Dr. Allen Yielding \$5,000

Cintas \$5,000

Morris Shea Bridge \$5,000

Jerry Pate \$2,500

Alabama Power \$2,500

Art Black \$2,000

Birmingham Hide &  
Tallow \$2,000

Bhate Geo Services \$1,000

Buffalo Rock Pepsi \$1,000

Russell Ford \$500

### In Kind Sponsors

Buffalo Rock

Coca-Cola United

Perfect Game

Wes Helms & CamWood

*"Rickwood Field depends on the generosity of our community every year to keep the park alive. We had another great year at the ballpark with the SWAC Tournament, the Barons game, and the MLB East-West Negro League Tribute!"*

**\*\*\*If you made a donation and your name does not appear on this list, please send me an email and we will update the list in the next issue\*\*\***



## DID YOU KNOW?



*“Ed ‘Satchelfoot’ Wells was a member of the Birmingham Barons in 1927 and 1928 and compiled a record of 38-8 during those seasons with a 2.60 ERA over 405 innings.”*

Ed “Satchelfoot” Wells was a member of the Birmingham Barons in 1927 and 1928 and compiled a record of 38-8 during those seasons, finishing with a 2.60 ERA over 405 innings. He was the Barons’ ace in 1928 as he threw 291 innings and finished with a 25-7 record to help Birmingham to a 99-54 record (.647), and a first-place finish in the Southern Association (A). That club had the most wins of any team in Birmingham’s and Rickwood’s history. Although the Barons lost the Dixie Series in six games to the Houston Buffaloes, Wells was dominant in Game One at Rickwood, as he shut out Houston, 2-0. Wells pitched 11 seasons in the big Leagues from 1923 to 1934 with the Detroit Tigers, New York Yankees, and St. Louis Browns. He earned a World Series ring as a member of the Yankees in 1932. Wells’s uniform is part of the Friends of Rickwood’s collection of baseball memorabilia.

## FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD 2025 MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM CONTRIBUTORS

### All Star (\$500+)

Joe Hawley  
Mat Johnson  
Zac Knuppel  
Michael Shehi

### Veteran (\$50)

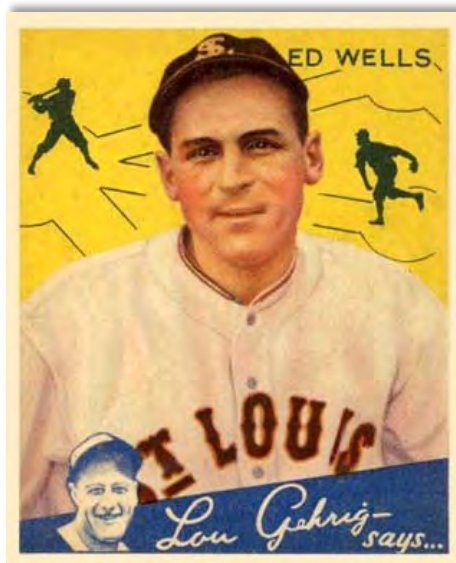
David Birch  
Henry Haskell  
Jim Cox  
Cline Thompson

### Gold Glove (\$100)

Wilbur Masters\*  
Melissa Bean  
Evan Brasher  
Tim Lyons  
Connor Knight  
Alan Morris  
Derek Webster  
Doug Brewer  
John Wilkens  
Valerie Burnes

### Rookie (\$25)

Jake Flynn  
John Gordon Coleman, Jr.  
George Wesley Strickland  
Gabe Harris  
Henry Walker  
\*Renewal Member



*“THANK YOU to all of our Sponsors, Grantors, Donors, and Members! You are truly FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD!”*

THANK YOU to all of our Sponsors, Grantors, Donors, and Members!  
You are truly FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD! Happy Holidays from the Friends of Rickwood!

**The Friends of  
Rickwood**

**Rickwood Field**  
1137 2nd Ave W  
Birmingham, AL 35204  
205-922-3725

**Email address:**

[glwatkinsjr@yahoo.com](mailto:glwatkinsjr@yahoo.com)



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



More photos from the Barons' 25th return to Rickwood since 1996.

