

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 7/10/26 to 10/25/2026

- **July 11, 9 AM-4 PM:** Sports Card Show
- **July 29:** Hank Aaron 44 Invitational
- **July 11, 12, 18, 19, 24, 25, and 26:** Perfect Game
- **Sept. 19-20:** *Bananaball* featuring the Indianapolis Clowns and Loco Beach Coconuts
- **Oct. 25:** Rickwood Home Run Derby

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

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

We have plenty of copies of the new book celebrating the life of Willie Mays. Caps, t-shirts, jackets, posters, books, coffee mugs, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase at <https://rickwood.com/shop/>



EAST-WEST CLASSIC RETURNS TO RICKWOOD FOR JUNETEENTH

Rickwood Field again served as the centerpiece of Major League Baseball's Juneteenth celebration as the third annual East-West Classic returned to Birmingham on June 19. Created to honor the legendary Negro League East-West All-Star Game, the event combined baseball, history, and community while bringing former major league stars back onto one of the sport's most historic stages.

CC Sabathia managed the West team, while Chris Young led the East in an exhibition featuring former All-Stars and World Series veterans. Before the game, fans were treated to a Home Run Derby featuring several familiar names, and youngsters participated in MLB's PLAY BALL program. According to Major League Baseball, the day's activities were designed to celebrate the Negro Leagues while en-

couraging the next generation to embrace the game.

The East-West Classic has become much more than an exhibition. Former players spent the day reconnecting with teammates, interacting with fans, and sharing memories that stretched across generations of professional baseball. The atmosphere reflected the event's purpose of celebrating the people whose contributions helped shape the sport while introducing those stories to new audiences.

Several participants emphasized the importance of Rickwood Field itself. Speaking with WVTM, Birmingham native Roy Wood Jr. described the ballpark as "a museum that you can still play inside of." Sabathia, also interviewed by the station, said preserving the stories of Negro

League greats such as Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, and John Donaldson remains an important responsibility for today's players and ambassadors of the game.

Now in its second year at Rickwood Field, the East-West Classic continues to reinforce the ballpark's place as a living monument to baseball history. After debuting at Doubleday Field in Cooperstown in 2024, the event found a fitting home in Birmingham following the 2024 renovation of Rickwood Field. By blending former stars, youth baseball, and Negro League history in one setting, the Classic ensures that the legacy of those pioneering players continues to inspire future generations.

— Photos from the East-West game appear on pages 6-7.

PENSACOLA'S BATS SPOIL THE BARONS' 26TH RETURN TO RICKWOOD

The Birmingham Barons' 26th annual game at historic Rickwood Field turned into a difficult afternoon as the Pensacola Blue Wahoos pounded out 24 hits in a 23-4 victory before a midday crowd. Pensacola wasted little time, scoring three runs in the opening inning and never relinquishing control as Birmingham struggled to slow the visitors' relentless offense.

The Barons briefly battled back after Alec Briley's first-inning solo home run and tied the game in the second on RBI hits from Jordan Sprinkle and Colby Shelton. Any momentum, however, quickly disappeared when Pensacola erupted for five runs in the third

inning before putting the game out of reach with an eight-run fifth inning.

Pensacola's offense featured four home runs, including a grand slam by Jay Beshears, while Ian Lewis Jr. and Juan Matheus each drove in multiple runs. Briley led Birmingham with a home run and two hits, while Shelton doubled and drove in a run as the Barons managed to score in four different innings despite the one-sided final score.

Although the result was disappointing for the hometown club, the annual Rickwood game

remains one of the highlights of the Barons' season. The tradition gives today's players an opportunity to compete on the same diamond that hosted generations of baseball greats while allowing fans to celebrate the rich legacy of America's oldest professional baseball park. Many fans arrive early simply to soak in the atmosphere, tour the historic ballpark, and relive Birmingham's remarkable baseball heritage before first pitch. It continues to be one of the most anticipated dates on Birmingham's baseball calendar.

— Photos from the Barons' game appear on pages 4-5.

**2026
SOUTHWESTERN ATHLETIC CONFERENCE
BASEBALL TOURNAMENT**

FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY
Game 1 • 9 a.m.
Wednesday, May 20

TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
Game 2 • 12 p.m.
Wednesday, May 20

SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
Game 3 • 3 p.m.
Thursday, May 21

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
Game 4 • 6 p.m.
Thursday, May 21

FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY
Game 5 • 9 a.m.
Friday, May 22

TEXAS SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
Game 6 • 12 p.m.
Friday, May 22

SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
Game 7 • 3 p.m.
Friday, May 22

JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY
Game 8 • 6 p.m.
Friday, May 22

FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY
Game 9 • 9 a.m.
Saturday, May 23 (if necessary)

ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY
Game 10 • 12 p.m.
Saturday, May 23 (if necessary)

CHAMPIONSHIP
Game 11 • 3 p.m.
Sunday, May 24

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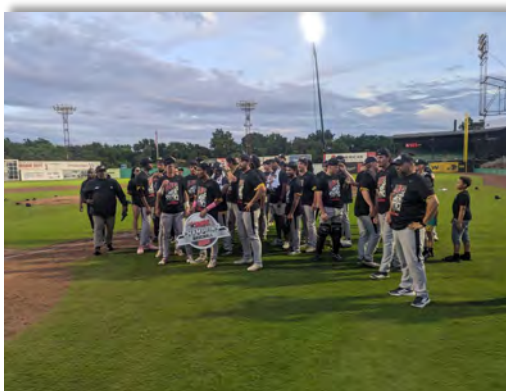
BUILDING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

With an 8-6 win over Bethune-Cookman in the championship game, the Alabama State Hornets earned an automatic bid to the NCAA baseball tournament and a trip to the NCAA Regional in Tuscaloosa.

PHOTOS FROM THE 2026 SWAC TOURNAMENT

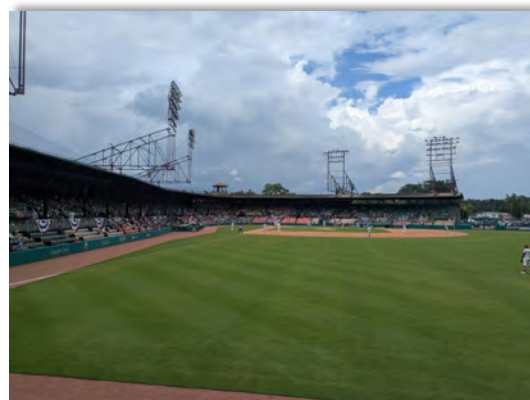


“Miguel Oropéza earned tournament MVP honors after leading Alabama State offensively, batting .571 with two home runs and 13 RBIs during the Hornets’ march to the championship.”



The SWAC tournament was an exciting event at that ballpark. Miguel Oropéza earned tournament MVP honors after leading Alabama State offensively, batting .571 with two home runs and 13 RBIs during the Hornets’ march to the championship. Former Black Baron Piper Davis, who played at Alabama State in 1934 and appeared in many games at Rickwood, would have been proud.

PHOTOS FROM THE BARONS AT RICKWOOD

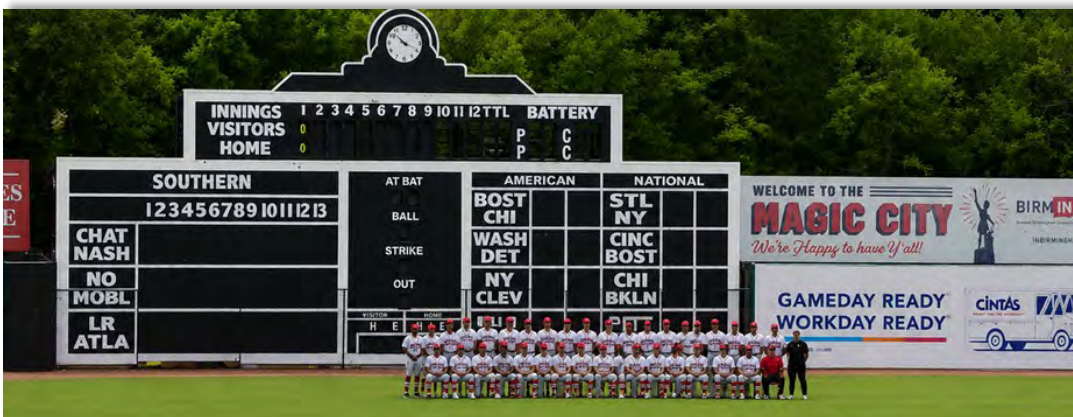


"Pensacola hit seven home runs en route to a 23-4 victory before a crowd of 4,248."



On Wednesday, May 27, 2026, the Barons returned to Rickwood Field for the 26th time since 1996. Birmingham wore throwback uniforms honoring the Black Barons, while the visiting Pensacola Blue Wahoos paid tribute to the historic Pensacola Sea Gulls. Pensacola hit seven home runs en route to a 23-4 victory before a crowd of 4,248.

THE BARONS RETURNED ON MAY 27



Pensacola's line score may have looked like a slightly incomplete Miami telephone number (305082005), but it's always a thrill when the Barons come home to Rickwood Field. We can't wait to see them again next year.

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EAST-WEST CLASSIC PHOTOS

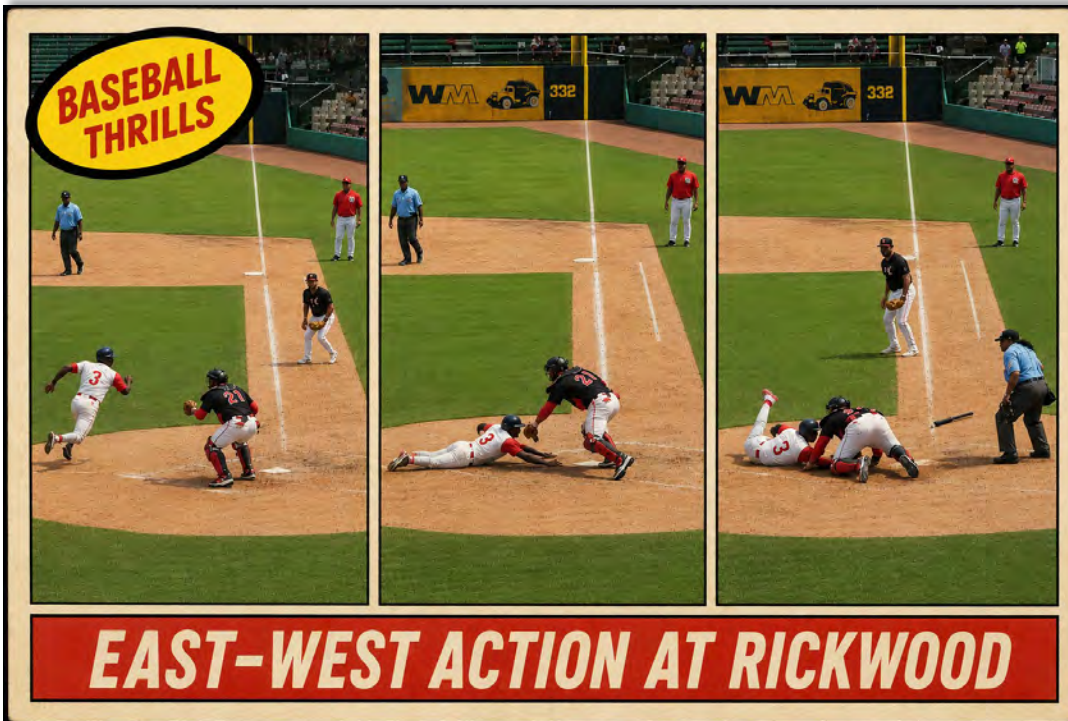


Juneteenth, 2026 was a great day to remember the East-West Classic as retired MLB players joined Hall of Famer CC Sabathia to pay tribute to the Negro Leagues. Sabathia's West squad won the 5-inning game, 7-2, and Prince Fielder won the home run derby before the exhibition contest.



“Juneteenth, 2026 was a great day to remember the East-West Classic as retired MLB players joined Hall of Famer CC Sabathia to pay tribute to the Negro Leagues.”

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION FEATURES THE EAST-WEST CLASSIC



"Sabathia, who won 251 games and struck out 3,093 batters over 19 seasons with the Indians, Brewers, and Yankees, wanted to pitch a half-inning and give the East an extra at-bat."



Top: Although the East managed to cut down a runner at the plate in the exciting sequence above, the West still prevailed in the game. Bottom: West manager and Hall of Fame pitcher CC Sabathia answers a reporter's questions. Sabathia, who won 251 games and struck out 3,093 batters over 19 seasons with the Indians, Brewers, and Yankees, wanted to pitch a half-inning and give the East an extra at-bat. Alas, the game was already over.

ALABAMA STATE CAPTURES THE 2026 SWAC BASEBALL TOURNAMENT TITLE

*"It was the first
conference tournament
title for Alabama State
since 2002."*

Despite the delays and hitches from almost daily intense thunderstorms and lightning, the 2026 Southwestern Athletic Conference Tournament took place in fine fashion at Rickwood Field in late May, with the Alabama State Hornets crowned the 2026 tournament champions. It was the first conference tournament title for Alabama State since 2002.

The Hornets' first game proved to be fairly easy as they handed Grambling a 10-0 defeat. It proved to be the only breather for Alabama State on their trek to the tournament title.

In the Hornets' second game of the tourney, the Arkansas-Pine Bluff Golden Lions jumped to a 7

-2 lead before Alabama State scored four runs in the seventh and two more in the eighth to claim a hard-fought 8-7 victory. Devin Chandler's two-run home run in the eighth provided the difference.

The same two teams would meet again in the semi-finals, with Alabama State winning by a score of 8-5, largely due to a five-run uprising in the fourth inning. The win placed the Hornets in the final against the Florida A&M Rattlers.

In the final, Alabama State scored in the early and middle innings to take an 8-2 lead before holding off a furious late rally by the Rattlers to win 8-6 and claim the conference tour-

namment championship. Despite a rocky seventh and eighth innings, Hornets' James Peterson was the pitching star, going the last four-plus innings to record the win for Alabama State.

The batting star and tournament MVP was Miguel Oropesa. The Hornet slugger hit .571 for the tournament, including two home runs and 13 runs driven in. Oropesa also earned SWAC All-Tournament Team honors alongside teammates Fabian Santana, Jorhan LaBoy, and Peterson.

With the win, the Hornets qualified for the NCAA baseball Tournament Regional in Tuscaloosa.

- Joe DeLeonard

FROM THE ROOFTOP

It is the middle of summer and the first real heat of the season is here. The air is so heavy you could cut it into slices. It is definitely baseball season, and we all have learned to put up with the torrid conditions.

Many people, even in the Birmingham metropolitan area, do not realize that Rickwood hosts approximately 150 baseball games a year. You know of Miles, the Barons' annual return,

the Southwestern Athletic Conference Baseball Tournament, the East-West Classic, and others, but I bet you did not realize the bulk of these dates are filled with city and area high school games in the spring, with a heavy dose of travel ball in the summer. Rickwood is in full use all spring and summer long.

Please keep looking for those old photographs, scorecards,

and programs. We really would love to get a digital scan of your photos taken at Rickwood from the past. Please get in touch with us if you have something from the Rickwood past and we will share it here.

- Joe DeLeonard

Please send your Rickwood memory, or photo of the ballpark to jddballpark@gmail.com

*"Many people, even in the
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Despite all the rain, Rickwood's drainage system, which was completely overhauled in the run-up to the MLB game, and a sturdy tarp allowed the SWAC tournament games to be played.



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

The Birmingham baseball community is deeply saddened by the passing of Charlie Moore. Charlie had a fine big league career and had become a friend not only to me, but also to the Friends of Rickwood Field.

We have just finished an incredible run of events starting with our golf tournament, the Southwestern Athletic Conference Baseball Tournament, the Pensacola Blue Wahoos and Birmingham Barons' game, and Major League Baseball's fabulous East-West Classic. Each of these activities occurred over a

30-day period, which stretched our staff and volunteers to the maximum. All of these games were a success, and we could not have done it without great coordination and teamwork from the Southwestern Athletic Conference, the Birmingham Barons, and Major League Baseball.

We look forward to the Hank Aaron 44 Invitational on July 29. It will be the second consecutive year to host the game. In September, we host the Indianapolis Clowns and Loco Beach Cocomuts for two days of Banana Ball. In October, we will hold our fifth

annual Rickwood Home Run Derby.

In closing, of course, I would be remiss if I did not thank Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin, his staff, and the city council members and their staffs for helping us pull off this series of games and events magnificently. I am very appreciative to work with such an outstanding group of leaders and am proud of our partnership with the city. Until next time, come see us and take a tour!

- Gerald Watkins

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REMEMBERING CHARLIE MOORE AND AL WORTHINGTON

The Birmingham baseball community lost two former major leaguers in less than 30 days during May and June. On May 23, Charlie "Butch" Moore, a veteran of 15 major league seasons as a catcher and outfielder, died at 72. Alan Worthington, a pitcher who spent all or part of 14 seasons in the majors, died on June 18 at age 97.

Moore played nearly his entire career with the Milwaukee Brewers, save for his final season in Toronto. Primarily a catcher, he also played outfield, spending most of the 1982 and '83 seasons in right field.

Moore hit a torrid .462 in the 1982 American League Championship Series against the California Angels and was a key force in the Brewers' run to the World Series, when he batted .346 as Milwaukee fell to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games. He finished with a .261 career average and 36 home runs.

A multi-sport star at Minor High School, Moore was set to play football at Auburn before signing with the Brewers after being

selected in the fifth round of the 1971 draft. He played at Rickwood in the 1971 East-West High School Baseball All-Star Classic and in the preliminary games the previous year.

Alan Worthington was another multi-sport standout at Phillips High School in the 1940s. He played baseball and football at the University of Alabama before launching a successful 14-season major league career with the New York/San Francisco Giants, Boston Red Sox, Chicago White Sox, Cincinnati Reds, and Minnesota Twins. Winning 75 games with a 3.39 career ERA, Worthington worked primarily out of the bullpen. He made two appearances in the 1965 World Series

for the Twins, pitching four innings and allowing one unearned run as the Los Angeles Dodgers prevailed in seven games.

Worthington appeared at Rickwood Field at least once, pitching for Alabama against the Birmingham Barons in an April 1950 exhibition game. He was one of the few bright spots as the Barons defeated the Crimson Tide, 23-5.

Both Moore and Worthington were members of the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame. The Friends of Rickwood Field extend our deepest sympathies to the families of both gentlemen.

— Joe DeLeonard

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RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1962 BIRMINGHAM BLACK 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 1962 Birmingham Black Barons occupy a singular place in Rickwood Field's history. Their championship was more than another pennant; it marked the final first-place finish by Birmingham's storied Negro League franchise. As historian Bill Plott concludes in *Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962*, the Black Barons were "the Last Team Standing in Negro league baseball." Plott's exhaustive research rescued the story of this overlooked club, ensuring that the final chapter of Birmingham's Negro League history would not disappear.

The season began with spring training at Birmingham's Westfield Park under Mack Curry, with long-

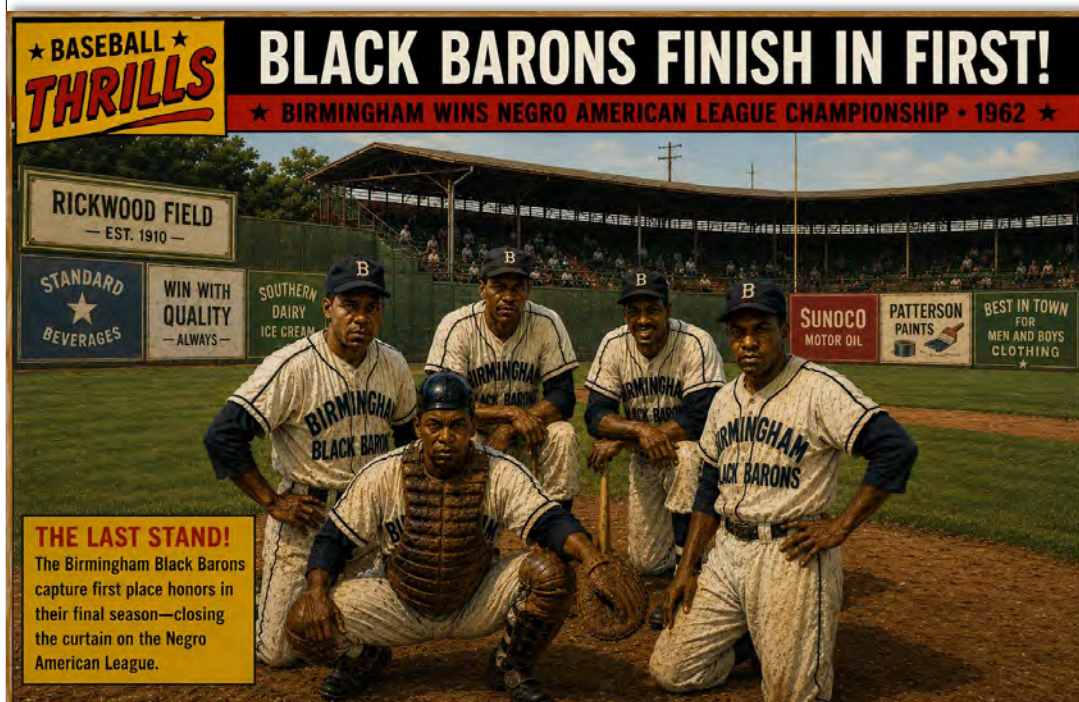
time Black Barons star Piper Davis assisting with player conditioning. Although famed manager Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe had been announced as the club's field leader, Frank Evans ultimately managed the team. The roster blended veterans such as Evans and catcher Otha Bailey with a collection of young talent. According to Plott, the *Birmingham News* described the squad as "the youngest in the history of the ball club," with teenagers Alonzo Perry, Jr., Robert Cardwell, and Edwards Stubbs joining the lineup.

The youthful Black Barons rewarded that confidence almost immediately. Birmingham swept its Opening Day doubleheader against longtime rival Kansas City and continued to build momentum during the summer despite the uncertainty surrounding the shrinking Negro American League. Plott notes that newspaper coverage became increasingly sporadic as the season progressed,

making the team's accomplishments even more difficult to reconstruct. Nevertheless, surviving accounts show Birmingham finishing atop the league before meeting Kansas City in the championship series. Although the complete results have been lost, contemporary reports indicated the Black Barons held a commanding lead and ultimately secured first place.

The championship quietly closed the book on one of baseball's greatest institutions. Plott remembers that following the season, owner Wardell Jackson loaded the team's uniforms and equipment onto the club's bus and carried them back to his home in Illinois. As Plott poignantly observed, "The only thing left of the Black Barons in Birmingham was memories." Fortunately, those memories endure at Rickwood, where the 1962 Black Barons remain forever recognized as the final champions of Birmingham's remarkable and enduring Negro League legacy.

"The championship quietly closed the book on one of baseball's greatest institutions."



The Birmingham Black Barons were the last team standing in the Negro American League, in 1962 according to Bill Plott's tireless research. Their season is remembered on Rickwood's championship wall.

DID YOU KNOW?



Long before becoming one of baseball's greatest players, Willie Mays honed his remarkable skills at Rickwood Field as the teenage center fielder for the Birmingham Black Barons from 1948-50. Discovered by Black Barons manager Piper Davis while playing for the Chattanooga Choo Chos, the 17-year-old Mays signed by Birmingham's co-owner Tom Hayes after receiving permission from his father, Cat Mays. Davis not only recognized Willie's extraordinary range in center field but also helped refine the hitting approach that carried him through a Hall of Fame, 24-year major league career. Willie quickly developed a reputation for delivering in the biggest moments. During the 1948 Negro American League playoffs against the Kansas City Monarchs, he drove home the winning run with an 11th-inning single in Game One; he then followed the next day with a dramatic two-out double in the ninth inning that tied another contest and helped propel Birmingham to victory. Later that postseason, Willie produced another clutch hit by driving in the winning run in Game Three of the Negro League World Series, accounting for the Black Barons' lone victory over the Homestead Grays. Rickwood Field was where a baseball legend first showed the world he could thrive under pressure.

"Long before becoming one of baseball's greatest players, Willie Mays honed his remarkable skills at Rickwood Field as the teenage center fielder for the Birmingham Black Barons from 1948-50."

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 1 is a "Rookie" for a \$25 donation (and gets a certificate and a sticker); (2) Level 2 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!



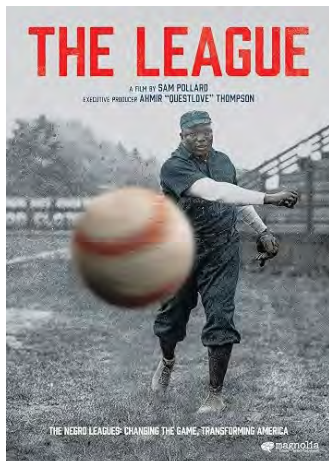
The Friends of Rickwood

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



THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *The League*

Released in 2023 by Magnolia Pictures, *The League* is an engrossing documentary directed by Sam Pollard and produced by Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson. Running 144 minutes and available on DVD and streaming services, the film chronicles the rise, success, and eventual decline of the Negro Leagues while celebrating the remarkable achievements of Black players, owners, and communities who built a thriving baseball culture despite being excluded from organized baseball. Featuring commentary from many of the nation's foremost Negro Leagues historians and scholars, including Larry Lester, Bob Kendrick, Andrea Williams, Lawrence Hogan, Gerald Early, Leslie Heaphy, and Dr. Layton Revel, the documentary combines interviews, archival footage, photographs, and dramatic recreations into a compelling account of one of baseball's most important stories.

The film traces baseball's color line to the late nineteenth century, when pioneers such as Moses "Fleetwood" Walker briefly competed alongside white players before segregation became entrenched through the influence of Cap Anson. After World War I, Black veterans returned home having fought for their country only to find discrimination unchanged. Unable to compete in organized baseball, Black entrepreneurs created their own leagues, teams, and business districts. At the center of that movement stood Rube Foster, the brilliant founder of the Negro National League in 1920. Foster revolutionized the game with an exciting style built on speed, bunting, double steals, and daring baserunning. As Larry Lester explains, Foster "exploited the rules to his maximum benefit," creating a brand of baseball that thrilled fans and distinguished the Negro Leagues from the home-run-oriented major leagues.

Although Foster's NNL collapsed following his death in 1925, Black baseball entered a golden age during the 1930s. The fierce rivalry between Pittsburgh's Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords featured legendary stars such as Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, and Oscar Charleston. The documentary also explores the formation of the Negro American League, whose membership included the Birmingham Black Barons, and highlights enduring traditions such as the East-West All-Star Game (which MLB just honored at Rickwood). Just as importantly, the film does not ignore the hardships players endured. Jim Crow laws made travel in the South difficult, forcing teams to search constantly for places to eat and sleep while maintaining grueling schedules. Many players found greater acceptance in Caribbean winter leagues, where stars such as Martín Dihigo and Cristóbal Torriente became household names.

One of the documentary's greatest strengths is its ability to place baseball within the larger story of American history. It examines the economic importance of the Negro Leagues within Black communities while highlighting the efforts of Wendell Smith, Effa Manley, and others pushing for integration and fair treatment. Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis was opposed to integrating organized baseball. After his death, Branch Rickey signed Jackie Robinson. Larry Lester's observation that Robinson became "an ink spot on the white canvas of injustice" is among the documentary's most memorable moments, capturing the enormous burden carried by the man who forever changed baseball.

For readers of the newsletter, however, the documentary offers another special attraction. Rickwood Field serves as the backdrop for many of the reenactment sequences and still photographs that appear throughout the film. The ballpark's century-old grandstand, large scoreboard, right field bleachers, colorful advertisements, and timeless atmosphere provide an authenticity that no modern stadium could duplicate. The ballpark quietly becomes a character in the story, helping transport viewers to the era of the Negro Leagues while reinforcing Birmingham's enduring place in baseball history.

As the film reaches the integration era, it acknowledges triumph and loss. Jackie Robinson opened the door for Larry Doby, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Ernie Banks, and countless others, but the Negro Leagues gradually disappeared as their greatest stars signed major league contracts. As Bob Kendrick observes, "progress came at a cost." *The League* tells that complicated story with honesty, emotion, and historical depth. By using Rickwood as the backdrop for its reenactments and still photography, the film also preserves the visual memory of the Negro Leagues at the oldest professional ballpark in America. It is a fine documentary and comes highly recommended to anyone who loves baseball history and the ballpark.

- Jeb Stewart

