

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 3/4/22 to 6/4/22

- Southern Association Conference: **Saturday, March 5, 2022, (8:30 AM to 3:00 PM)**
- UAB v. Birmingham-Southern: **Wednesday, March 30, 2022, at 1:00 PM**
- Savannah Bananas' game: **Saturday, April 16, 2022, at 5:00 PM**
- The Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference: **June 2-4, 2022**
- Miles College Baseball games: **March 15, 18, 19, 26, and 27, and April 6, 8, 9, 15, 16, 23, and 24.**
- Please like our [Facebook Page](#) for updates

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

Caps, t-shirts, jackets, posters, books, coffee mugs, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase in our [online shop](#)



THE RICKWOOD CLASSIC MAY RETURN IN 2023

There will be no Rickwood Classic in 2022. In the fall of 2020, Major League Baseball assumed control of most aspects of the minor leagues. MLB has adopted additional guidelines, primarily focusing on player and fan safety, which impacts our ability to host the Rickwood Classic this year.

Representatives from MLB visited Rickwood and gave the Friends of Rickwood a reasonable list of improvements needed

to host the Classic. Follow-up conversations between MLB, the Birmingham Barons, officials from Birmingham, and the Friends to discuss the necessary improvements to the ballpark have been positive.

An agreement on all issues has tentatively been reached, including the City of Birmingham agreeing to finance the work needed to bring the Classic back.

While not definite, all parties remain optimistic that the Rickwood Classic may return for the 2023 season. We will provide more information when it becomes available.



THE 2022 JERRY MALLOY NEGRO LEAGUE CONFERENCE (JUNE 2-4)

We hope you will join us in Birmingham **June 2-4, 2022** for the 22nd Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference at the [Sheraton Birmingham Hotel](#). The event will include three full days of learning, sharing, and networking with others who share your love, passion, and enthusiasm for the history of Black baseball. The conference kicks off on Thursday morning, June 2nd, with an educational program. This is a learning opportunity for anyone but is designed primarily for teachers and volunteers who work with k-12 students. Participants will leave the forum with lesson plans and other ideas for use in their own work. Thursday evening will really kick things off with a meet and greet where you will be able to interact with scholars, authors, fans, former players, and family members of former players.

Friday and Saturday are filled with research presentations on a wide array of topics. Some will have a Birmingham and Negro Southern League focus while

there will be others on topics covering the wide range of Black baseball. There will be a couple of special panels focused on timely topics such as the Negro Leagues = Major Leagues and continuing efforts to get more Negro Leaguers elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

If you think you know a lot about the history of the Negro Leagues, or just want to listen and learn, then you can take part in our annual *significa* contest hosted by the knowledgeable Ted Knorr. And yes that means there is likely to be a question about Ted's favorite player, [Rap Dixon](#). There are great prizes for our top three finishers as well. The conference ends with our awards banquet on Saturday night. Here we get to honor the great work so many do throughout the year to keep the history alive.

We will also honor all players and family members present as well as have a few fun surprises Larry Lester, chair of the confer-

ence and SABR Negro Leagues Committee, always adds. You can also take part in our silent auction, taking home books, photos, bobbleheads, t-shirts, and more. All the proceeds help support our scholarships, library grants, and art contest. Winners of last year's art contest will have their work on display. We will also be visiting some wonderful local sites important to Black baseball and history in general. Attendees will get to play a little at historic Rickwood Field, to enjoy the history on display at the Negro Southern League Museum, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum.

You will not want to miss this great weekend so check out all the details on the [SABR website](#) and please register at: <https://sabr.org/malloy>

- Leslie Heaphy, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History, Kent State University

THE 18TH ANNUAL SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

The Southern Association was a professional baseball league that existed from 1901-61 and was preceded by the old Southern League (1885-99). Rickwood Field (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 is an annual event dedicated to preserving the history of the teams, players, managers, owners, seasons, and ballparks of the league.

Last year, the conference was 'rained out' by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are excited that the conference is returning to Rickwood Field's museum and conference room on **March 5, 2022, from 8:30 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.** Baseball historians from around the southeast will again come to Birmingham to attend the Southern Association Conference. If you are interested in attending, please contact Clarence Watkins at 205-999-5742 or cwatkins5@charter.net.

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Southern Association Conference Schedule (March 5, 2022)

- 8:30 A.M. – Morning coffee and snacks
- 9:00 A.M. – Welcome and introductory remarks
- 9:15 A.M. – Clarence Watkins:
Baseball Before Rickwood
- 10:00 A.M. – Skip Nipper:
Nashville
- 10:45 A.M. – Morning break – collector exhibits
- 11:00 A.M. – John Guinozzo:
58 Years of Scoring Pro Baseball
- 11:45 A.M. – Lunch with Special Guests [Bobby Durnbaugh](#)
of the Nashville Vols, Mobile Bears, and Shreveport
Sports and [Buddy Gilbert](#) of the Vols
- 1:00 P.M. – Jim Windisch:
Memphis Baseball
- 1:45 P.M. – Ben Powell, Joe DeLeonard, and Jeb Stewart:
Rickwood's Hall of Famers
- 2:30 P.M. – Clarence Watkins:
Future Conferences
- 3:00 P.M. – Closing Remarks



RICKWOOD SABR CHAPTER MEETING



On Saturday, February 12, Rickwood Field hosted the annual meeting of the Rickwood Field Chapter of the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR). Attendees enjoyed grilled bratwursts on the main concourse. They were then given an update by Joe DeLeonard, Ben Powell, and Jeb Stewart on their research of the Hall of Famer players, managers, coaches, and umpires who appeared at Rickwood for games. We will announce their findings in our June issue of *Rickwood Tales*.

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

Many exciting things are happening at Rickwood Field these days.

In January, the Church of the Highlands brought their campus pastors to Rickwood for a friendly game of baseball. Approximately 40 pastors were outfitted with new uniforms from head to toe and divided into teams. The church brought “Hollywood” quality movie cameras and even [filmed the event](#).

In addition to some spirited baseball, the game featured a flyover by a remote-controlled airplane. The church brought two current major league pitchers to join the pastors: [Kendall Graveman](#) of the Chicago White Sox and [Garrett Whitlock](#) of the Boston Red Sox. They took the mound and wowed the players and spectators with 92 MPH fastballs. Everyone loved the park, had a great time and concluded the game with no serious injuries. Hopefully, this will become an annual event.

The good weather in January also allowed us to make some improvements to our playing surface. A long-time friend, supporter, and Rickwood fan, Scott Green, came down from New York and helped us rebuild our pitching mound and repair

the home plate area. Scott and his friend Jerri Dobler worked along with our staff, Jabreil Weir, Alvin Harris, and me, for two solid days. We also received some invaluable help from the Birmingham Park Board staff. These improvements are part of the requirements passed down from MLB. Thanks to all who helped with this project, especially Scott and Jerri, who donated their time to help make Rickwood a better place.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that Dee Jackson of WIAT CBS 42 in Birmingham recently produced a wonderful [story](#) on the history of our great ballpark. He packed a ton of information into the report, which showcased Rickwood Field in the best light possible. If you missed the broadcast, you can view it on Dee’s Facebook page.

I want to thank all those who made donations throughout the year. A list of recent donors is included on page 4 of the newsletter. Our board member and longtime supporter, Mickey Newsome, made additional donations of memorabilia. Our new “Friend”, Kenneth Ray Kelly also donated some wonderful historic photos. We also appreciate Art Black for introducing us to Kenneth.

We are pleased to announce that the Friends recently received two grants. First, we received a \$10,000 grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance to strengthen our capacity to communicate the cultural history of Rickwood Field. Second, as part of its Local Grants Program, the Society for American Baseball Research awarded a \$2,500 grant to the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter to help in our efforts to update the Rickwood Championships mural on our grandstand. We are deeply thankful for the generosity we have received from both organizations.

Finally, thanks to all our board members for their continuing efforts to keep America’s Oldest Baseball Park open for a new generation. Special thanks to Ben Powell, Lamar Smith, Randy Ferguson, and Joe DeLeonard for being available to come to the park when I needed their support. I would also like to give a *shout-out* to Ben Powell, Orvil Ifill, and Bob Woodward for joining me for the community clean-up day.

The 2022 season has started. Come out to the ballpark and see some baseball!

- Gerald Watkins

“Dee Jackson of CBS 42 in Birmingham recently produced a wonderful [story](#) on the history of our great ballpark.”

THE RICKWOOD COLLEGE CLASSIC AND THE SAVANNAH BANANAS GAME

On **Wednesday, March 30, 2022**, Rickwood will host the UAB Blazers and Birmingham-Southern Panthers in the inaugural Rickwood College Classic. Just like our traditional Classic, this game will be held on an afternoon.

We hope everyone will show up and support our local collegiate teams as we begin another tradition at our historic ballpark.

America’s newest baseball sensation is also coming to America’s Oldest Ballpark! The Savannah Banana game is less than two months away and will take place on **Saturday, April 16, 2022**, as part of the [2022 Banana Ball World Tour](#). The first pitch is scheduled for 5:00 PM. Savannah will take on the Party Animals in the world’s fastest and most entertaining brand of baseball—Banana Ball!

This is a huge event for Rickwood and the game is already a sell-out with 9,000 tickets sold!

Our local fans have stepped up, joining visitors from 23 other states, to buy tickets. We are proud to announce that we will be hosting the largest crowd in Bananas history. We hope everyone got their tickets and we look forward to seeing you there!

DID YOU KNOW?

“Special thanks to our January and February donors: Mickey Newsome, Tony Renta, Dr. Allen Yielding, David Wininger, and Mike Warren!”



Back in 1914, Rickwood Field looked much different than it does today. The distant outfield fence was made of wood, the scoreboard was in right field and was much smaller, and the familiar stands in right had not yet been built. Games at Rickwood were wildly popular; fans dressed up for the occasion and came from all over the city using Birmingham's extensive streetcar network. The Barons won the [Southern Association](#) pennant by 3 games over the [Mobile Sea Gulls](#). Jimmy Johnston set the Barons' all-time steals record with 81. Future Hall of Famer, [Burleigh Grimes](#), joined the Barons late in the season and remained with the club for 1915 and 1916, winning 37 games and posting a 2.10 ERA.

BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

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

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

(and also gets a patch); and (4) Level 4 is a "Gold Glover" for a \$100 donation (and also gets a Rickwood shirt). To donate, please visit <https://rickwood.com/donate-to-rickwood-field/> or write us at:

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

Special thanks to our January and February donors: Mickey Newsome, Tony Renta, Dr. Allen Yielding, David Wininger, and Mike Warren!



RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIP: THE 1928 BIRMINGHAM 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.

Before the 1928 season, Rickwood Field got a massive makeover. Owner Rick Woodward built the familiar mission-style arcade entrance that stands today, replaced the wooden outfield fence with a concrete wall, and erected Rickwood's huge scoreboard in left-centerfield. In addition, the roof was extended on the grandstand and right-field stands were added.

[Johnny Dobbs](#) managed the [1928 Birmingham Barons](#) to a record of 99-54 (.647) in the Southern Association (A), good for the most wins of any team in Barons' and Rickwood's history. The club finished first in the first half of the SA but slipped behind Mobile in the second half by 1.5 games. Any frustration the Barons may have had over the club's second-half finish in the SA regular season was exorcised in a 3-0 sweep of the Memphis Chicks in the SA playoffs as the Barons captured their first pennant since 1914. Birmingham batted an incredible .335 as a team.

Rickwood's concrete outfield walls included distances of 478 to left and 448 in center field, so the Barons were more speed than power as the club hit 66 home runs and stole 184 bases. The club was loaded with great hitters including [Elliot Bigelow](#) (.395, 8 homers), [Yam Yaryan](#) (.389, 16 homers), [Jimmy Johnston](#) (.338, 5 homers—he also played on the 1914 Barons), and [Stuffey Stewart](#) (.318, 4 homers). Bigelow's average remains the highest in Barons' history and nine other batters hit over .300.

The pitching staff had a 3.66 ERA led by [Eddie Wells](#) (25-7, 2.78, 291 IP), [Luther Roy](#) (19-5, 3.85, 257 IP), [Bill Morrell](#) (14-7, 3.75, 180 IP), and [Ralph Judd](#) (12-6, 3.87, 135 IP).

After dispatching the Chicks, the Barons faced the Texas League Champion, the [Houston Buffaloes](#), in the 1928 Dixie Series. Houston had some good hitters including [Red Worthington](#) (.352) and Frank Snyder (.329), but batted .289 as a team, nearly 50 points under the Barons' average. The Buffaloes had four starters who won 20 games and a team ERA of 3.12. They were led by ["Big Jim" Lindsey](#) (25-10, 3.49, 240 IP), ["Wild Bill" Hallahan](#) (23-12, 2.25, 276 IP), [Frank Barnes](#) (20-9, 2.95, 259 IP), and [Ken Penner](#) (20-8, 3.47, 236).

Baron great Eddie Wells defeated Wild Bill in Game 1, 2-0 at Rickwood. The Barons then took a 2-0 series lead over Houston with a 5-3 win over Penner and Wild Bill who pitched in relief. Out in Texas, Big Jim held the Barons to 6 hits and Houston won Game 3, 6-4. The next day, Wild Bill shut the Barons' bats down, striking out 11 in the 6-0 win over Eddie Wells to even the series. Houston completed its "Texas-three-step" to win 5-4 in Game 5. Wild Bill relieved Penner in the ninth inning with two on and no outs. He struck out two and induced a ground out to end the game.

Back in Birmingham, Frank Barnes shut down the Barons at Rickwood, 5-1, as the Buffaloes clinched the Dixie Series. The Buffaloes outscored the Barons 25-16 for the series, but the Barons only scored 9 runs in the last 4 games, as great pitching prevailed over great hitting.

The Dixie Series loss did nothing to diminish Birmingham's accomplishments in 1928. Many fans believe this was the greatest team in Barons' history. With 17 players out of Birmingham's 20-man roster from 1928 eventually making the big leagues this is an easy conclusion to reach.

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BIRMINGHAM BARONS SEPTEMBER 13, 1928

JOHNNY DOBBS MGR. MICHAEL O'BRIEN TRNGR. AL WOODWARD MGR. COACH
SIMONS 1B - STEWART 2B - BALLENGER 3B - JOHNSTON SS - BIGELOW RF - SHIRLEY 1P - ZORNHELD 2P - CARLISLE CF - YARYAN C - COOPER C - SMITH LF

The Friends of
Rickwood

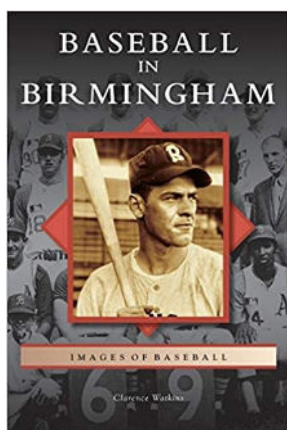
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<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood/>



THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Baseball In Birmingham*

[*Baseball In Birmingham: Images of Baseball*](#) by Clarence Watkins is an indispensable pictorial guide to the history of the game in the Magic City from the 1880s through the early 2000s. With nearly 200 photographs, many of which have rarely been seen, Watkins proves Arthur Brisbane's well-known adage that a picture really is worth a thousand words. Even so, Watkins' detailed captions for each photograph show the kind of attention to detail and historical accuracy that is rarer still.

Baseball's story in Birmingham is retold chronologically and begins in 1885 when the Birmingham Coal Barons played at Lakeview Park in the original [Southern League](#). The club soon became the Barons and began playing games at [West End Park](#), which was nicknamed "the Slag Pile" for the enormous mountain of slag that extended beyond the outfield fence. Slag was a byproduct of Birmingham's burgeoning iron industry and the mountaintop was poised neatly above the field. Budget-minded fans who did not want to purchase a ticket to sit in the park's wooden grandstand would make the hazardous climb to the top to watch games for free. By 1909, A.H. "Rick" Woodward purchased the Barons during their final season at the Slag Pile. He soon decided to construct a ballpark with a state-of-the-art grandstand that was the very best in the Deep South, [Rickwood Field](#). Watkins writes:

"Every fan will tell you about the old ballpark and how unique and grand it was. But only Birmingham, Alabama, had what was arguably the best minor-league ballpark in the nation. When Rickwood Field was built in 1910, there were only three major-league ballparks that were made of concrete and steel: [Forbes](#) in Pittsburgh, [Shibe](#) in Philadelphia, and [Comiskey](#) in Chicago. The other 13 major-league teams were still playing in wooden ballparks from the last century. With the 1928 face-lift and additions, we have the Rickwood we know today."

Watkins describes the civic pride that Rickwood came to represent for Birmingham as the Barons had the best ballpark in the [Southern Association](#) from the 1910s through 1961 when the league finally collapsed. However, the Barons soon returned to Birmingham in 1964 and later rebranded as the Birmingham A's in 1967 winning both the [Southern League](#) and [Dixie Series](#) titles with stars [Reggie Jackson](#), [Rollie Fingers](#), [Joe Rudi](#), and [Dave Duncan](#) leading the way. The A's left Birmingham following the 1975 season and the ballpark was without a permanent tenant for five long years.

He also masterfully tells the parallel story of Black baseball in Birmingham. The Birmingham Giants were formed in 1904 and later became known as the Black Barons. The Black Barons also played regularly at Rickwood from 1920 to 1962. With players like [Mule Suttles](#), [Satchel Paige](#), [Piper Davis](#), [Willie Mays](#), and [Artie Wilson](#), it is easy to understand why Birmingham was always competitive in [Negro Southern](#), [Negro National](#), and later [Negro American](#) leagues. The Black Barons played in the [Negro League World Series](#) three times in 1943, 1944, and 1948.

Finally, Watkins recalls baseball's rebirth of baseball in Birmingham when [Art Clarkson](#) brought the Barons back to Rickwood in 1981 through the end of the 1987 season, when the club won its final Southern League title at the park, before moving to the Hoover Met the following year. *Baseball In Birmingham* was released in 2010 by Arcadia Publishing just in time for Rickwood's 100th birthday and is an essential book in the Rickwood library. Watkins has also authored books on baseball in [Montgomery](#) and his native [Memphis](#).

- Jeb Stewart

