

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 9/22/23 to 12/22/23

- **Sept. 23-24:** Perfect Game Tournament
- **Oct. 7:** Blues at the Ballpark
- **Oct. 15:** 2nd Annual Home Run Derby
- **Oct. 18-22:** Private Events
- **Oct. 23:** MLB Construction Begins
- **Nov. 5:** Private Event

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

Get Your Rickwood Gear!

Caps, t-shirts, jackets, posters, books, coffee mugs, and other Rickwood merchandise are available for purchase at <https://rickwood.com/shop/>



MLB GAME AT RICKWOOD WILL PAY TRIBUTE TO THE NEGRO LEAGUES

On August 3, 2023, Major League Baseball held a press conference at Rickwood Field to unveil the official logo for next year's game between the San Francisco Giants and the St. Louis Cardinals. Despite a heavy thunderstorm, which moved the event to Rickwood's concourse, spirits were undampened.

Former big leaguers Ryan Howard, CC Sabathia, Randy Winn, and Ron "Papa Jack" Jackson joined MLB Network analyst Harold Reynolds, MLB senior VP Mike Hill, Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin, and Rickwood's executive director Gerald Watkins for the unveiling. The game will officially be called "A Tribute to the Negro Leagues." The game will take place before a nationally televised audience on **June 20, 2024**. Each team will honor the Negro Leagues by donning throwback uniforms. The Cardinals will wear the uni-

forms of the St. Louis Stars, while the Giants will represent the San Francisco Sea Lions.

Hopefully, Willie Mays and Bill Greason, who played for the Birmingham Black Barons in the last Negro League World Series, will be able to attend. Mays texted Reynolds before the press conference and said, "I have wonderful memories of playing there with the Birmingham Black Barons when I was only a kid, which if you can believe it, was 75 years ago. I hope that the game will be a chance to remember so many really good ballplayers from the Negro Leagues who played at Rickwood Field but never got a chance to play in the big leagues."

Mayor Woodfin noted that Birmingham is excited to host the game, and gave context to the importance of Rickwood as the

host ballpark. He stated, "the Negro Leagues produced champions, in more ways than one ... Every single Black athlete, who has ever had the honor of picking up a bat, and competing against the best athletes in the world, owes a debt of gratitude to the legends who made history when the world attempted to deny them."

He added, "It has been stated, but it is worth repeating, that Rickwood Field is hallowed grounds where sports became more than entertainment. It was a source of empowerment. And that's what this game represents next year, progress, power, and my favorite, pride, in a city that exemplifies those terms."

Photos from the unveiling appear on pages 2 and 3 of the newsletter.

HOME RUN DERBY SET FOR OCTOBER 15, 2023

On **Sunday, October 15, 2023**, Rickwood Field will host the second annual "Home Run Derby". The event will closely mimic MLB's annual event but will feature retired MLB players and college stars. Gates open at 1:00 PM. The Derby begins at 3:00 PM. The schedule is subject to change.

Participants will include: **Ryan Klesko**, who played 16 seasons in the big leagues with the Braves, Padres, and Giants, and hit 278 homers while posting a stellar 128 OPS+; **Mike Cameron**, who played 17 seasons in

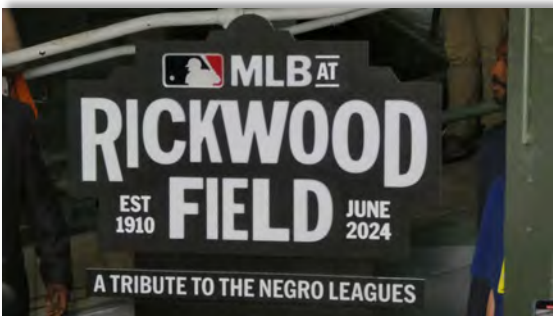
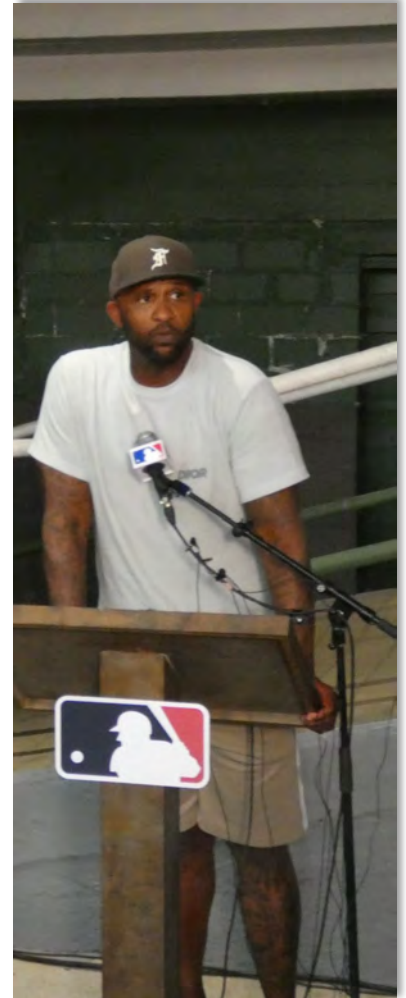
the majors for the White Sox, Mariners, Reds, Mets, Padres, Brewers, Red Sox, and Marlins, and also hit 278 home runs. Cameron played in the first Rickwood Classic for the Barons in 1996; **Desmond Jennings** of Pinson Valley High School, who had 55 home runs in the show; **Matt Adams**, a 10-year MLB veteran, who hit 118 homers in the big leagues, with a high of 21 for the Cardinals and Nationals in 2018; **Andy Phillips**, who played 5 years for the Yankees, Reds, and Mets and hit 175 homers in his professional career, including the minors and Japan; **Ian Hancock**, a slugger for Birmingham-

Southern who won Rickwood's inaugural Home Run Derby in 2022; and **Trey Rutledge** who hit 7 homers for Miles College in 2023 with a 1.073 OPS.

Another former MLB star joining us will be **Ron "Papa Jack" Jackson**, who had a 10-year playing career and coached for 20 years. He served as the Boston Red Sox hitting coach during their historic 2004 World Series Championship season. Papa Jack will offer hitting advice to the competitors.

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PHOTOS FROM MLB'S ANNOUNCEMENT AT RICKWOOD





LEFT: Top: Strong thunderstorms moved the announcement to Rickwood's covered concourse. Middle: Mayor Woodfin addresses the crowd; Mike Hill, senior VP of on-field operations for Major League Baseball and MLB Network host Harold Reynolds unveil the official logo for the game; CC Sabathia speaks about his connection to the Negro Leagues and the ballpark. Bottom: the official Logo; Sabathia, Ryan Howard, and Randy Winn at the announcement. RIGHT: Top: The logo is now next to Rickwood's familiar scoreboard. Middle: Artistic depictions of how the ballpark will look during next year's MLB game. Bottom: Birmingham's own Ron "Papa Jack" Jackson addresses the crowd, while Sabathia, Howard, Winn, and Reynolds look on.



RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1959 BIRMINGHAM BLACK BARONS

If you wander over by the third-base side of the grandstand, you will notice that the Friends of Rickwood have commemorated the championship clubs that have called America's Oldest Ballpark home from 1910-1987. This series remembers those seasons.

In 1959, Winfield Welch headed a group that purchased the Black Barons. Fans were soon excited to learn that his former protégé, Piper Davis, had been hired to return to manage the Negro American League club.

If there was a Mount Rushmore-style monument to Birmingham's baseball legends, Lorenzo "Piper" Davis (1917-97) would be on it. With the Black Barons, Davis could play any position, but was best known as a second baseman; he appeared in seven East-West All-Star Games batting .308 and turning 11 double plays with no errors. Davis helped Birmingham win three NAL pennants (1943, 1944, 1948). Davis became the Black Barons' player-manager in 1948 and discovered Willie Mays. His mentoring of Mays launched his hall of fame career. Baseball-Reference.com credits Davis as an accomplished .293 hitter during his eight seasons with the Black Barons in the Negro Ameri-

can League. However, Dr. Layton Revel, Executive Director for the Center for Negro League Baseball Research, determined that Davis had an incredible .348 average during his career with the Black Barons.

In the early 1950s, Davis signed with the Oakland Oaks in the PCL and hit .287 over five seasons. He hit .282 for the Ft. Worth Cats in 1958 and decided to retire as an active player.

During spring training Davis predicted his team would compete for the 1959 Negro American League pennant citing the outstanding performance of Bobby Sanders, a 21-year-old shortstop. Other members of the Black Barons included Tony Lloyd (2B), James Ivory (3B), Joe Cotton (C), Sam Allen (LF), and Ernie Harris (CF). The pitching staff was anchored by left-hander Willie Smith, who also played first base, and right-hander Pete Mumford.

Newspaper coverage of the NAL was inconsistent at best in 1959. However, by June 29, the *Birmingham News* reported the Black Barons

had built an 8.5-game lead in the NAL. According to Bill Plott's book, *Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962*, the Black Barons outpaced the entire league over the entire season as Birmingham had a record of 32-14 and "was 12 games ahead of the Monarchs" by late July.

On August 29, 1959, Marcel Hobson of the *Birmingham World* reported that the Black Barons had "captured the 1959 Negro American League Championship as they conquered the Memphis Red Sox, 7 to 5, in the official season's final game at Chattanooga, Tenn., Monday night, August 24."

It took another 62 years for the 1959 Black Barons' pennant to be added to Rickwood's championship wall. Thanks to Bill Plott's research and a SABR grant the club has finally been honored.



"It took another 62 years for the 1959 Black Barons' pennant to finally be added to Rickwood's championship wall."

TONY LLOYD'S MEMORIES OF THE '59 SEASON

Thanks to a Local Chapter grant from the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR), the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter in conjunction with the Friends of Rickwood was able to update Rickwood's Championship Wall in advance of the 2022 Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference. Pennants appear on the third base side to the grandstand remembering championship seasons for the Birmingham Barons, Black Barons, and Athletics. One of the teams that has been added is the 1959 Black Barons, which won the

NAL pennant under manager Piper Davis.

On July 23, 2023, Joe DeLeonard and I met with Tony Lloyd at Rickwood Field to visit the wall, have brunch, and talk about his memories of the ballpark and playing in the Negro Leagues.

Tony, who is now 87, played second base for the Black Barons in 1959, which was his only season in professional baseball. We took some photo-

graphs of Tony under the championship wall and the championship pennant honoring the 1959 club. We then joined him and his ex-wife and driver, Joyce Lloyd, for brunch at the East of Mississippi Diner nearby, where several pictures of Tony are displayed. The owner's wife was happy to see Tony and came from around the counter to hug him and check on how he was doing. We then returned to Rickwood and interviewed him in the conference room.

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Anthony Carl "Tony" Lloyd was born on April 27, 1936, in Fairfield, Alabama to Arthur and Alberta Alley Lloyd. His father was from Evergreen, Alabama, and found work at the Fairfield Sheet Mill. He had six siblings: brothers Arthur, Jr., Joseph, Richard, and William; and sisters Myrtle and Barbara.

Tony attended kindergarten at St. Mary's Catholic School and later Robinson Elementary in Fairfield. There was no Little League baseball in his community, but the kids played sandlot baseball and formed teams representing different neighborhoods, including Fairfield, Ensley, and Westfield.

He got a late start playing baseball, but by 11 or 12, he played for a team in Fairfield called the Outlaws. A neighbor presented Tony with a glove she found. He recalled that the glove was slightly too large for his hand, but after using it he always preferred having a larger glove. He initially played shortstop but soon discovered that his throwing arm was not strong enough to make the long throws to first, so he moved to second. Robert Underwood was an older shortstop for another team, who later played with the Black Barons in the mid-1950s.

While growing up in Fairfield, Tony occasionally attended Black Barons' games at Rickwood Field. There was a hole in the right-field side of the ballpark, and he used to sneak into games. Although there was an employee stationed near the fence who could have stopped Tony and his friends, he "turned the other way" when he saw them coming. Inside Rickwood, he saw Piper Davis and Willie Mays play for the Black Barons. He recalled Mays was able to catch everything in the outfield because he was so fast.

Tony also attended a few Birmingham Barons' games and remembered seeing Jimmy Piersall play. Piersall was a mem-

ber of the Barons in 1951 and 1952.

Tony enrolled in Fairfield Industrial High School, where both Davis and Mays had graduated. He played second base on the Hornets' baseball team. He credited his coach, William Brown, with teaching him how to hit and field. He picked up the rest of the game by watching. One of his high school teammates nicknamed him "Bucket" because whenever a ball was hit to Tony it was "in the bucket" (i.e., an out).

Tony also made Fairfield's football squad as a reserve. When he graduated high school in 1954, coach Brown recommended him to the head coach of the Tuskegee Institute's baseball team. At Tuskegee, Tony earned a degree in Mechanical Industries.

His skills as a baseball player paid immediate dividends when he arrived on campus. As a freshman, he beat out an upper-classman and was named the starting second baseman for the Golden Tigers' varsity team, which was nearly unheard of in those days. The player he beat out resented losing his job and vowed revenge if Tony dared to pledge the baseball fraternity, so he remained independent. As Tuskegee's first-ever four-year starter, he was later honored with a *gold baseball* from the team.

As a junior, Tony also became a two-sport star when he joined the football team. He played defensive back and running back. He was a backup until a starter got injured. During his senior season, he scored the only touchdown of his career on a 70-yard punt return, which the *Huntsville-Times* described as "sensational," and helped lead Tuskegee to a 28-12 road win over Alabama A&M University.

Tony graduated from Tuskegee in 1958 and was later inducted

into the school's Sports Hall of Fame in 2007. After graduation, he traveled to New York and lived with his older brother Joseph in Brooklyn. He worked odd jobs at the post office where his brother worked, but he dreamed of playing professional baseball.

That winter he saw an advertisement in *The Sporting News* for Ken Boyer's Florida Baseball School in Tampa, Florida. The ad claimed that "900 players from our camp have signed contracts since 1946," and he hoped he could join them. The coaches at the school included Boyer, Hal Smith, Hoyt Wilhelm, and Spud Chandler. The camp included two sessions from February to April of 1959. Tony saved up the \$100-125 tuition, which was a lot of money at the time. He boarded a bus for a 2-day ride to Florida to follow his dream.

Tony recalled that games at Boyer's baseball camp were not segregated, but this caused no issues, as integrated baseball was becoming the norm, even in certain parts of the Deep South. However, Black players suffered the indignity of having to find housing outside the camp because of Jim Crow laws.

Tony honed his hitting and defensive skills at the camp. When Boyer found out he was from Fairfield, he spoke glowingly about Willie Mays. Major league scouts watched the games and Tony hoped one might sign him to a minor league contract. By the end of the camp, he learned from Boyer or Smith that he was not going to be signed. However, he knew he was good enough to play professionally.

Because of the quota system that existed in organized baseball at the time, Black players "had to be super good to make the team," he recalled.

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"As Tuskegee's first-ever four-year starter, he was later honored with a gold baseball from the team."

TONY LLOYD REMEMBERS RICKWOOD, BLACK BARONS

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He returned to Fairfield and heard that the Birmingham Black Barons were holding a tryout camp at the American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO) field. The tryout camp was held on Saturday, March 8, and invitations were extended to players from 15 to 21 years of age. Although he was 22, Tony was still young enough to dream and believed playing professionally in the Negro American League would give him another chance to get to the big leagues. His audition with the Black Barons went well and GM Arthur Williams signed him to play with the club for \$150 per month, although he never received that much.

That spring, Black Barons president Winfield Welch hired Piper Davis to manage the team. Welch had managed Davis from 1942-45 when he was a player with the Black Barons, and the club had won NAL pennants in 1942 and 1943. Davis himself was the player-manager of the team in 1948-49, and the Black Barons won the 1948 NAL pennant. It was Davis's last season as a professional manager.

Tony loved playing for Davis. He recalled that his manager had a reputation for being a hothead, but he never saw that side of him. Davis was a good guy and taught him a lot about playing baseball. Davis, who had mostly played second base during his career, showed Tony how to pivot when turning a double play. He also taught him how to hit behind a runner.

As a hitter, Tony was a respectable .280 pull hitter. He recalled hitting one home run, either in Memphis or Mississippi. He did not hit for much power otherwise but hit a lot of line drives. He used speed on the basepaths as his primary weapon. He stole a lot of bases and reckons that he led the club in steals. He was

given a green light to run whenever he was on base unless Davis signaled him to hold. Although there are few box scores available, Tony was rated highly as a hitter in the limited news coverage.

In a preview for a game between the Black Barons and Memphis Red Sox in Oklahoma, the *Daily Ardmoreite* reported: "The [Black] Barons will count heavily on their three top hitters to make life rough for [Ace] Robinson. They are center fielder Earnest Harris, second sacker [sic] Anthony Lloyd and right fielder Buddy Jackson. Lloyd rates as one of the top athletes in the tough Negro American League and has been one of the league's leading hitters. He hails from Fairfield, Ala." Other stories observed that Tony was having such a solid rookie campaign that he was even drawing comparisons to Willie Mays, presumably for his hitting and speed.

He was also a solid defender. In 1959 he played every game for the Black Barons except one. In the second game of a doubleheader, Davis inserted himself in the lineup and played second base. "He did good for an old guy," Tony remarked with a wry grin.

The Black Barons played on Sundays at Rickwood Field when the Birmingham Barons were on the road. Tony remembers the patrons who came out to games after church wearing their Sunday best. The crowds were also loud at the ballpark as the fans rooted hard for the Black Barons. As a professional ballpark, Rickwood had a nice infield and made playing defense easier than many parks in small towns.

Most of the Black Barons' other games were played on the road and required the

team to travel long distances in the hot and cramped condition of a bus, which was driven by former Negro Leaguer Paul Hardy, who even played catcher in a few games that season.

The Black Barons played in a few major league parks that season. Tony played in Comiskey Park, Connie Mack Stadium, and Ebbets Field. Those games were especially important because he knew scouts were often watching from the stands. "I wanted to play in as many parks as I could hoping to be signed," he noted.

There was an added importance of playing second base at Ebbets Field, which was not lost on Tony. This was the position Jackie Robinson primarily played when he was a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers, who had moved west after the 1957 season. Playing the same position as Robinson in his home ballpark "felt real nice. I felt honored to play where Jackie played," he recalled.

The Black Barons finished the 1959 campaign by playing three games against the Memphis Red Sox. Birmingham took two of three games to claim the NAL pennant. One of the critical moments in the series happened when Tony hit a triple to drive in a run. On the next pitch, he stole home, which was a key contribution to the Black Barons' securing the NAL pennant.

Tony hoped he would be discovered by a scout who would sign him to a professional contract, but it never happened.

That fall, he visited his older brother Arthur, who worked for General Motors, in Detroit. He was looking for off-season work until he could return to the Black Barons in 1960. He considered joining the Army and even spoke

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"One of the critical moments in the series happened when Tony hit a triple to drive in a run. On the next pitch, he stole home, which was a key contribution to the Black Barons' securing the NAL pennant."

to a recruiter. He then ran into some friends from Cleveland who told him there were more opportunities there. He took a job with the Post Office working with the letter sorting machine. He told his supervisor that he wanted to take a leave of absence to play for the Black Barons in 1960 but was told that returning to his job would not be guaranteed and he would even have to reapply. Leaving a good job with benefits behind to continue to chase a dream was too great a risk. So, Tony made the difficult decision to retire from baseball at only 23.

He worked for the Cleveland Post Office for 14 years. While living in Cleveland he attended Indians and Browns games at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium. In December 1973, he transferred to another Post Office in Detroit, which promised better opportunities. While

living in Detroit, he took up running marathons as a hobby. In 1981, he finished a Canada to Detroit Marathon in 4 hours and 30 minutes. He also has four daughters, Wanda, Barbara, Karen, and Anthonette, who is named after him.

After 19 years of working for the Post Office in Detroit, Tony retired in 1992. He moved back to Alabama and has lived here ever since. He has been a regular attendee of the Rickwood Classic over the years.

Tony wishes he had gotten a fair shake to play in the major leagues, but he refuses to live in the past and has no bitterness. He added, "We were good. We had players that should have been in the majors, but who weren't because of segregation.

Some guys didn't have the opportunity and went to their graves never knowing."

He uses a cane to steady himself now. At the end of the interview, Tony walked slowly through the tunnel to look at the field at Rickwood where he played a young man's game 64 years ago. He proudly stared out at the field for a few minutes as the memories washed over him.

This was the first time Tony had seen the 1959 Black Barons' pennant on Rickwood's championship wall and it was wonderful to see how happy this made him. For both himself and his teammates, he added, "It makes me feel proud to be remembered."

- Jeb Stewart

"At the end of the interview, Tony walked through the tunnel to look at the field at Rickwood where he played a young man's game 64 years ago. He proudly stared out at the field for a few minutes as the memories washed over him."



On July 23, 2023, Tony Lloyd finally saw Rickwood's updated championships mural, which includes his 1959 Black Barons.

JABREIL WEIR GOES TO WILLIAMSPORT

Rickwood's head groundskeeper Jabreil Weir is making the most of his opportunities. Recently Jabreil along with Chairman of the Board, Gerald Watkins, were invited to Williamsport, Pennsylvania for the sixth annual MLB Little League Classic. The game was played on August 20 at Historic Bowman Field and featured the Philadelphia Phillies and the Washington Nationals, with a national television audience watching. Birmingham's real star of the game was Jabreil, who worked to get the field ready.

"At the press conference for the big game next year at Rickwood, an MLB representative thought it would be a good idea for Jabreil to come up [to Williamsport]" Watkins stated. For Jabreil, it was his first plane flight. "I was terrified at first, but it was amazing!"

"They showed the layout of what the field would look like. There is not a lot of difference in what they do (in preparation for the game) and what is being done here now. There is more day-to-day work."

Jabreil worked hard during his time in Williamsport, soaking up all the tips, instructions, and advice to get the field ready for a big league game. He noted,

To be sure, Jabreil gained some important knowledge. He learned to be patient while working with the more seasoned groundskeepers at the ballpark. For an MLB game
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"Jabreil worked hard during his time in Williamsport, soaking up all the tips, instructions, and advice to get the field ready for a big league game."



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

So many good things have happened at Rickwood Field since our last newsletter that it’s hard to know where to begin.

The Friends of Rickwood board members and city officials worked hard with Major League Baseball to finalize plans to bring big league baseball to Rickwood Field, America’s Oldest Baseball Park. We were trying hard to keep all details under wraps until agreements could be reached and details ironed out. Then the inevitable leak occurred in May, approximately one month before the official announcement. What followed was an avalanche of phone calls, emails, texts, and media requests. Rickwood Field was getting the attention it so richly deserved. However, we had to try and hold off for another month until the official announcement in June.

Then on June 20, MLB announced that Rickwood Field would host a “Tribute to the Negro Leagues” game. Our old ballpark became the most popular topic in baseball circles around the country. The level of interest has been more than incredible. Reports of the “Game” and our ballpark have

been featured in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and many other media outlets both nationally and locally. Although the “Game” has been at the forefront, so much behind-the-scenes work has gone on to make the dream a reality.

Much has been said about the great support of Mayor Randall Woodfin, Chief of Operations Chaz Mitchell, and the Birmingham City Council. Without The City’s buy-in, none of this would have happened. The Friends of Rickwood cannot say thank you enough for that participation and support!

We also had some great success in our fundraising efforts. Thanks to Steve Spencer, a retired Alabama Power executive, the Logan family, and Tom Cosby, we received the following generous pledges:

- Alabama Power: \$250,000
- Regions Bank: \$100,000
- Blue Cross Blue Shield: \$100,000
- Protective Life: \$100,000
- ACIPCO: \$50,000
- Encompass Health: \$50,000

While these donations will greatly support our efforts to ready the park for the MLB game on June 20, 2024, our fundraising efforts for the restoration of Rickwood are ongoing.

While the MLB game took center stage, our old ballpark continued to do business as usual. In July, we had the busiest month in Rickwood Field’s recent history. We hosted Perfect Game tournaments for 17 days.

The MLB news has also made Rickwood an even more popular destination for baseball fans. On a random day in August, I met a visitor who was friends with a baseball star from the 1960’s, Jim Gentile. The visitor called Jim, and we had a telephone conversation about his memories of playing for the Mobile Bears in the Southern Association in 1955. When I told Jim that I was at Rickwood Field, he replied, “I hit a home run there in 1955 off Ralph Terry!”

Until next time, we’ll see you at the ballpark!

- Gerald Watkins

“Much has been said about the great support of Mayor Randall Woodfin, Chief of Operations Chaz Mitchell, and the Birmingham City Council.”

RICKWOOD’S HOME RUN DERBY

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There will be a one (1) hour public autograph session at 1:15 PM. Autograph tickets cost \$50 for one (1) autograph of each star. We encourage fans to visit our website at www.rickwood.com to order autograph tickets, as there will be a limited number available.

The Home Run Derby will be a great event and will be the last time for fans to see the ballpark in its current configuration before the renovations for the MLB game. **Tickets are on sale now.**



JABREIL WEIR

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“everything is done on a time schedule,” Jabreil emphasized. It is also important to have the necessary equipment to prepare and maintain a field in accordance with MLB’s requirements. The lessons Jabreil learned in Williamsport will be invaluable as we prepare for the MLB game next year.

In the future, Jabreil wants to learn more about groundskeeping. “I want to get a turf management certification from the University of Georgia. I would then be able to handle the chemical applications for the Rickwood turf.” He added the certification classes can be done online.

As to the people he worked with at historic Bowman Field, Jabreil had nothing but nice comments. “Everybody was nice, patient, on time, and trustworthy. (They) put you at ease.” For his hard work, attitude, and enthusiasm, Jabreil was awarded the game ball. Now that is a souvenir of a lifetime!

- Joe DeLeonard

“Join us from 1 PM to 6:30 PM at Rickwood Field for Good Music and a Good Time.”

DISTRICT 8

BLUES

AT THE BALL PARK

OCTOBER 7TH

JOIN US FROM 1 PM TO 6:30 PM AT RICKWOOD FIELD FOR GOOD MUSIC AND A GOOD TIME. WE'LL HAVE FOOD TRUCKS, FREE PARKING, AND VIP PARKING WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR \$25. NO OUTSIDE FOOD OR DRINK WILL BE ALLOWED IN THE PARK.

OUR LINEUP

MS. JOHNNIE AND THE JAMMERS, "HURRICANE" ELAINE HUDSON, CHARLES "SUGAR HARP" BURROUGHS, ALBERT WHITE, ARETTA WOODRUFF, ROB HARRIS, ELNORA SPENCER, JEFF JENSEN BAND, JOSE RAMIREZ, NIKKI HILL.

FRIENDS OF RICKWOOD FIELD

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BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

DID YOU KNOW?



The filming of the *Cobb* movie gave Rickwood a financial shot in the arm at a critical time in the history of the Friends' efforts to preserve the park. In this scene, Cobb attacks a heckling fan, who was played by musician Jimmy Buffett. During a break in the filming, Buffet climbed onto the back of a flatbed trailer and played an impromptu concert for the actors and crew members. The Friends mourn the loss of Buffett who died on September 1, 2023. Photo By Sidney Baldwin: Courtesy Warner Productions Limited and Monarchy Enterprises CV (1994).

“During a break in the filming, Buffet climbed onto the back of a flatbed trailer and played an impromptu concert for the actors and crew members.”

BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

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

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

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

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

We need your help more than ever. Thanks!



Satchel Paige painting by Graig Kreindler
from the collection of Jay Caldwell

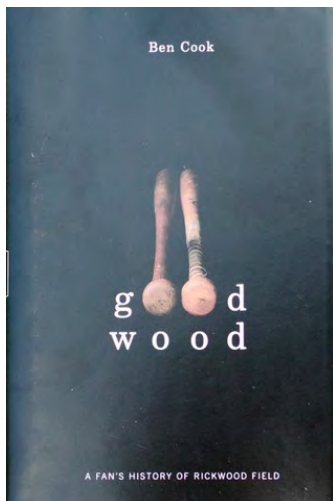
The Friends of
Rickwood

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

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friendsofrickwoodfield@gmail.com



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



THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Good Wood: A Fan's History of Rickwood Field*

Ben Cook always saw Rickwood Field with the wide eyes of a fan. He considered the ballpark his “second home” as a child when he attended games there in the 1950s and ‘60s with his Dad. He graduated from West End High School in 1964, which was the same year the Barons returned to Birmingham following a two-year absence after the collapse of the Southern Association. Cook later covered the Birmingham A’s and Barons while working as a sportswriter for the *Birmingham News* and also served as Rickwood’s public address announcer. His 2005 book *Good Wood: A Fan’s History of Rickwood Field* is Cook’s love letter to the ballpark and provides the perspective of someone who lived much of its post-war history.

The book is neatly divided into 17 unnumbered chronological chapters and appropriately begins on August 18, 1910, when the park hosted its inaugural game for a baseball-crazed city. Shops downtown closed early that afternoon as fans boarded Birmingham’s streetcars to see the first concrete and steel ballpark in the South. At 4:00 PM, A.H. “Rick” Woodward, the owner who constructed Rickwood for the princely sum of \$75,000, threw the first pitch in the game between the Birmingham Barons and the Montgomery Climbers. As Cook explains, Woodward’s throw was not merely ceremonial; rather, it was an official pitch. Woodward was wearing a Barons’ uniform and had named himself the starting pitcher. The umpire called his toss a ball, but the owner had the good sense to remove himself in favor of Harry Coveleski. The Barons won the game, 3-2, by dramatically scoring two runs in the bottom of the ninth to christen the ballpark.

Good Wood traces the history of Rickwood, beginning with the early years. In 1914 the Barons won their first Southern Association title when the club was led by venerable manager Carlton Molesworth. Cook also covers the exciting Barons’ clubs from 1928-31 that won three SA titles, and two Dixie Series titles, including the Barons’ 1-0 win over the Houston Buffaloes in Game 1 of the 1931 Dixie Series, which was played before 20,000, who crammed into the park to see 43-year-old Barons’ pitcher Ray Caldwell battle Dizzy Dean. He also includes the Birmingham’s Dixie Series titles in 1948 and 1958, along with the 1967 A’s.

Cook remembers some of the greatest players in baseball history who played games at the park, including Ty Cobb, Shoeless Joe Jackson, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams, Satchel Paige, Reggie Jackson, and Hank Aaron. But he does not forget to tell the stories of others who were perhaps even more important to its everyday use, such as Stuff Stewart, Yam Yaryan, Elliot Bigelow, Norm Zauchin, Walt Dropo, and Jimmie Piersall.

Rickwood had the finest grandstand of any stadium in the South, so it made sense for colleges to also use the park for football games in the fall. From 1912 until Legion Field opened in 1927, the Alabama Crimson Tide played their Birmingham home football games at Rickwood. Before Alabama could “remember the Rose Bowl,” the Tide had to win big games at Rickwood; and in 1925 and 1926, Alabama won three games each year at the ballpark on the road to the school’s first two national championships.

Cook includes stories about the Birmingham Black Barons, with particular attention paid to the exciting era of the 1940s when the club won three Negro American League titles. The Black Barons regularly played at Rickwood when the Barons were on the road, especially on Sundays. He also tells how Piper Davis discovered and mentored young Willie Mays, who became arguably the greatest player ever.

Good Wood also covers the decline of the park, the rise of the Friends of Rickwood, and the Rickwood Classic. Cook always found solace at Rickwood, especially in quieter moments when the voices of its ghosts were most pronounced, writing, “Every time I walk into Rickwood Field now I look over that walkway and see my Dad standing there, one leg propped up on the railing. He passed away years ago, but to me he is one of the lingering spirits still very much alive at the park. Old-time baseball fans can walk in and see Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb and Christy Mathewson and Dizzy Dean and old Ray Caldwell. I walk in and see my Dad. Rickwood Field does that to you.” Ben Cook died on July 10, 2015. We are thankful he left *Good Wood* as his legacy for fans of the park, and the Friends of Rickwood have 200 copies for sale. The book is located in the essential section of the Rickwood Library.

- Jeb Stewart

