

RICKWOOD TALES

Rickwood Calendar 6/2/22 to 9/2/22:

- **June 1 to July 17:** Bill Chapman's Color of Baseball ([BCRI](#))
- **June 2-4:** Jerry Malloy Negro League [Conference](#) (Sheraton)
- **June 2, 3, 5, 6, 19-22 & 27-30; July 1-3 & 20-31:** [Perfect Game](#)
- **June 4:** Lanier Longhorns
- **June 9:** Art Black's launch of his new Rickwood book, *At Bat* (Vulcan Park, 5:30-7:00 PM)
- **June 10-12:** [East Coast Sox](#)
- **June 18:** Fetch Rewards (Private)
- **June 24-26:** [CABA](#)
- **July 11-12:** Collegiate League
- **July 17:** Balch & Bingham (private)

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 SAVANNAH BANANAS PACKED RICKWOOD FIELD WITH A SELLOUT CROWD OF 10,000

On Saturday, April 16, the Savannah Bananas appeared at Rickwood Field as part of the club's [2022 Banana Ball World Tour](#). While some purists might decry the Bananas' brand of baseball as being too iconoclastic for an iconic ballpark, owners Jesse and Emily Cole have tapped into something very real, which transcends the game and its myriad traditions: **Fun**.

The Bananas promoted the game on their social media accounts with a [cool video](#) of their visit to Rickwood filmed earlier in the spring. Fans in Birmingham and visitors from 23 other states responded to the call for fun with enthusiasm. The Bananas sold an incredible 10,000 tickets in

only three days. This marked the first time Rickwood has been sold out since the first Rickwood Classic in 1996. The attendance also set a record for the Bananas as the club's largest crowd ever.

In his summary of the game, sportscaster Biko Skalla [described the moment for the Bananas](#) before they took the field, "*Chills. Big time chills. Once the fans started lining up outside the park, the real party started to kickoff.*"

Before the game, fans enjoyed the circus-like atmosphere of the Bananas' pregame show, which included a weigh-in, acrobatics, dancing, the "Man-Nanas"

(the Bananas' Dad-bod cheering squad), and a Lion King-inspired salute to a 6-month old baby, aptly named *Savannah*. The Bananas even got fans to do the wave, which may have been a first-ever for the ballpark.

The game itself was a thrilling contest between the Bananas and their rivals, the Party Animals, and included appearances by former big leaguers, [Eric Byrnes](#), [Jake Peavy](#), and [Bill "Spaceman" Lee](#). Although the Party Animals won the game, 3-2 in just two hours, they didn't spoil the party; and what a party it was!

- Photos from the game appear on page 10

THE JERRY MALLOY NEGRO LEAGUE CONFERENCE

The [Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference](#) is an annual event, which has been put on by the Negro Leagues Committee of the Society for American Baseball Research (SABR) since 1998. SABR notes that it is "the only symposium dedicated exclusively to the examination and promotion of Black baseball history." According to baseball historian John Thorn, the conference was named to celebrate the late [Jerry Malloy](#) (1946-2000), who was known as a trailblazing Negro League researcher and writer.

In 2020, Birmingham was scheduled to host the 21st edition of the conference,

which was set to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Negro National and Negro Southern Leagues. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of the event. After a virtual seminar in 2021, the conference is set for **June 2-4, 2022**, at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel in Birmingham. This will be the first in-person Malloy Conference since Major League Baseball finally decided to recognize seven Negro Leagues as being major leagues.

The event is open to all baseball fans and the full itinerary

appears on page two. We recently interviewed Ted Knorr who is one of the organizers of this year's conference. In the late 1990s, Knorr joined with other members of SABR's Negro League Committee, including Larry Lester, Dr. Leslie Heaphy, John Holway, James Riley, Dick Clark, Malloy, and others to start the conference.

Knorr is particularly excited to visit Rickwood Field for the first time, to photograph the park, and have a catch on the field if he "can find some trusting partner who doesn't mind chasing balls."

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JERRY MALLOY CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

All baseball fans are welcome to attend the Conference. To register, please visit <https://sabr.org/malloy/>. Panels and presentations will be held in the G-H-I room at The Forum, which is connected to the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel by a covered skywalk on the 3rd floor.

Thursday, June 2:

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.: Educational forum conducted by Dr. Leslie Heaphy (J-K room, The Forum)

12:00-1:00 p.m.: Lunch on your own

1:30-3:30 p.m.: Film screening TBA

4:00-6:00 p.m.: Conference Registration at Sheraton Birmingham Hotel (The Forum lobby area)

6:00-8:00 p.m.: Meet & Greet Reception (location TBA)

Friday, June 3:

7:30-8:30 a.m.: Conference Registration at Sheraton Birmingham Hotel (The Forum lobby area)

8:30-9:00 a.m.: Welcome by Larry Lester, SABR Negro Leagues Committee, and Lamar Smith, Rickwood Field SABR Chapter

9:00-9:30 a.m.: Paul Spyhalski, "Integration of Semi-Professional Baseball in Minnesota: Former Black Barons and Negro Leagues Make an Impact"

9:30-10:00 a.m.: Rich Bogovich, "The Overlooked Negro Leaguers of Bullock County, Alabama"

10:00-10:30 a.m.: Courtesy Break

10:30-11:00 a.m.: Gary Gillette, "Piper Davis"

11:00-11:30 a.m.: Kimberly White-Glenn, "Juxtaposition: Toni Stone and Mrs. Effa Manley"

11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.: Todd Peterson, "The 102 Greatest Negro League Players of All-Time"

12:00-12:30 p.m.: Keith Crook, "Branch Rickey's Law: How New York State's Ives-Quinn Act Opened the Door for Jackie Robinson"

12:30-1:15 p.m.: Lunch on your own

1:15-7:30 p.m.: Bus Tour of Birmingham Civil Rights Historic Sites

1:00-1:15 p.m.: Load buses at Sheraton Birmingham Hotel, travel to BCRI

1:30-2:30 p.m.: Visit Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Bill Chapman exhibit

2:30-2:45 p.m.: Load buses at BCRI, travel to Rickwood Field

3:00-4:00 p.m.: Tour of Rickwood Field

4:00-4:15 p.m.: Load buses at Rickwood Field, travel to NSLM

4:30-5:30 p.m.: Tour of Negro Southern League Museum

5:30-7:30 p.m.: Tour of Regions Field, home of the Birmingham Barons (with refreshments provided)

7:30 p.m.: Load buses at Regions Field, travel back to hotel

Saturday, June 4:

7:30-8:30 a.m.: Conference Registration at Sheraton Birmingham Hotel (The Forum lobby area)

8:30-9:00 a.m.: Welcome by Larry Lester, SABR Negro Leagues Committee

9:00-9:30 a.m.: James Overmyer, "Bud Fowler Becomes the First Black in Organized Baseball"

9:30-10:00 a.m.: Ken Bartelt, "Black Ball in Brew City: The Milwaukee Bears"

10:00-10:30 a.m.: Courtesy Break

10:30-11:00 a.m.: Clem Hamilton, "Ascent to Excellence: The St. Louis Stars (1923-31) and Birmingham Black Barons (1941-48)"

11:00-11:30 a.m.: Tom Thress, "Negro League Baseball at Retrosheet"

11:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.: Duke Goldman and Ben Alter, "Should Negro League Stats and AL-NL Stats be Combined?"

12:00-1:30 p.m.: Lunch on your own

1:30-3:00 p.m.: Panel discussion: The Negro Leagues Are Major Leagues: Statistically Speaking

3:00-3:30 p.m.: Courtesy Break

3:30-4:30 p.m.: Panel discussion: Black Ball and the Hall: Justice in Cooperstown?

4:30-6:00 p.m.: Trivia Contest preliminaries with moderator Ted Knorr

6:00-7:00 p.m.: Reception and cash bar

7:00-10:30 p.m.: Awards Banquet with former Negro Leagues players, plus silent/live auctions, Trivia Contest finals, and entertainment

"All baseball fans are welcome to attend the Conference. To register, please visit <https://sabr.org/malloy/>."

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA • JUNE 2-4, 2022



MALLOY CONFERENCE WILL HAVE A POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON BIRMINGHAM

- Continued from page 1

Knorr knows something about classic ballparks. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, not far from the former sites of [Greenlee Field](#) (the home of the Crawfords) and [Forbes Field](#) (the home of the Pirates and Homestead Grays and the primary model for Rickwood).

Birmingham previously hosted the conference back in 2010 and a return visit was a natural fit for Malloy. Knorr noted the success of the previous event, which included a tour of Rickwood for attendees, “a capable local committee [and] the opening of the [Negro Southern League Museum](#), [which] provided a strong basis for a return to Birmingham. Our goal is to be in cities that hosted Negro League teams. [Birmingham] had a Negro League team; in fact, only four other Negro League teams had a longer history (in terms of Negro League games played) than the Black Barons.”

Knorr also cited the [Birmingham Civil Rights Institute](#), the [Sixteenth Street Baptist Church](#), and the [Alabama Sports Hall of Fame](#), as important attractions for attendees. He added, “I remem-

ber the cuisine to be excellent. Birmingham represents the new South very well and I look forward to the conference.”

Knorr expects around 100 attendees will come to the Magic City from at least 25 different states to attend the conference. This will have a measurable and positive economic impact on the community, including the potential for several hundred room nights in local hotels as well as a benefit for local restaurants. However, Knorr noted that “there is a better return on exposure than economic impact, but that depends of course on how the local community markets itself and can exploit that publicity.”

[Lamar Smith](#), a member of SABR, the Friends of Rickwood, and the leader of Malloy’s local committee, is also excited about the event’s return to Birmingham. Smith was instrumental in getting the conference to return but was quick to credit others in a team effort. “Friends of Rickwood Chair Gerald Watkins and the FOR Executive Committee were very encouraging when I mentioned that I was thinking about preparing a bid proposal for the conference to come to Birmingham. The Negro League Southern Museum was a key component for our proposal and the

museum had not been built when the conference came to Birmingham in 2010. [Alicia-Johnson Williams](#) and [Dr. Layton Revel](#) could not have been more supportive.”

Smith is excited about the opportunity “to honor the participants of one hundred years of Negro League baseball ... [and] I’d expect attendees are going to be blown away by the Negro Southern League Museum. [They] will not want to leave the museum.”

Smith also credited our local government and corporate communities for the financial success of the conference. “Alabama Power, the Jefferson County Commission, Spire, Protective Life Foundation, Birmingham Coca-Cola, and the City of Birmingham could not have been more generous in their support.”

Smith noted that the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitor’s Bureau will provide staff to assist with registration and provide each attendee with a goody bag.

We will provide a report and photos from the Malloy conference in our September issue of *Rickwood Tales*.

“Knorr expects around 100 attendees will come to the Magic City from at least 25 different states to attend the conference.”

THEY PLAYED THE GAME SO WELL

“Many of the men whose names have echoed during this event and are synonymous with the glory days of the Negro League are no longer in our midst.”

They played the game so well. Many of the men whose names have echoed during this event and are synonymous with the glory days of the Negro League are no longer in our midst. But they left us with unmatched memories - memories of baseball brilliance, of unparalleled talent and savvy. Most never played in the Major Leagues but most major leaguers would have a hard time carrying their gloves to the ballpark. They received much smaller salaries than we hear of today-but they managed to take care of their families and educate their children-they were men.

They were men who could read the hops, go to the hole, steal signs with the best of them, turn the double play, cut the ball, drive the bus, hit with power, run like gazelles, play through pain, deliver blazing fast balls and wicked curves. They were quiet and reserved and some flamboyant to the end. Yes, **They played the game so well.**

They rode the bus all night, laced spikes on swollen feet, entered the field of play and proceeded to tattoo and buggy whip the ball while stopping the opponent with dazzling defense. And when their playing days were over each went on his way, making it hard, at times, to know who was still around. Yes, many have gone on—so in the name of many we call but a few who played the game so well.

Winfield Welch - Lloyd “Pepper” Bassett - Mr. Rudd the bus driver - Nathaniel Pollard - Alonzo Perry - Ed Steele - Wiley Griggs - Harry Barnes - Johnny Cowan - Roosevelt Atkins - “Cap” Brown - and Lorenzo “Piper” Davis.

They played so well!

- Faye J. Davis

Written on the occasion of the Alabama Negro League Players Salute Celebrating the 125th Anniversary of the City of Birmingham in 1997. Republished with permission.

REV. BILL GREASON REMEMBERS

Reverend Bill Greason fought on Iwo Jima as a Montford Marine during World War II. After the war, he became an ace starter for the Birmingham Black Barons from 1948-50. In 1948, he won two games in the playoffs against the Kansas City Monarchs helping the Black Barons win the Negro American League pennant. Against the Homestead Grays, in the last Negro League World Series ever played, he started the only game of the series Birmingham would win. He later pitched for the St. Louis Cardinals, played eight years in the high minors, and served as a pastor of Bethel Baptist Church of Birmingham, Alabama for many years. In 2012, he was awarded a Congressional Gold Medal for his military service. On October 24, 2018, Greason spoke at the Negro Southern League Baseball Conference at Rickwood Field and took questions about his remarkable life. At 97, he is the oldest living veteran of the Negro Leagues and the third oldest major leaguer. Reverend Greason lives in Birmingham and is expected to make an appearance at the Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference at the Awards Banquet.

Q How did the players in the NAL and NNL compare to ones in organized ball?

A We could have competed with any team, any major league team. We had people like [Willie Mays](#), [Artie Wilson](#), [and] [Bob Thurman](#). We could have played in the league, but at that time there was not any integration until Jackie went up. I pitched against his all-star team after the season in Montgomery and pitched a 1-hitter against him, [Larry Doby](#), and [Roy Campanella](#). They had all those guys. We were pretty good.

Q How were [Piper \[Davis\]](#) and Artie as a double-play combo?

A Name a combo in the majors anywhere.

Q Let's say [Baker](#) and [Banks](#) because they were the first all-Black double play combination.

A [Shaking his head no] Artie Wilson and Piper Davis were the greatest combo of ball players I've ever seen play. Artie was quick and had good hands. Piper...many balls wouldn't hit in the palm of his glove – they'd hit off the heel – and he would [direct the carom of the ball to Wilson].

“We could have competed with any team, any major league team.”

GREASON REMEMBERS (CONTINUED)



Q And they had a tall first baseman to throw to?

A [Alonzo Perry](#) played first base and also pitched. He was about 6'6". Anybody tall can come over hand and create problems.

Q What did Piper say about balls hit to right field for [Ed Steele](#) and left field for [Bobby Robinson](#) when Willie was in center field?

A He just told them "from your position to the line. That's all you go for. Anything left center or right center stay away from it because Willie could handle all of that."

Q Willie could cover a lot of ground?

A If you could have seen Willie [Mays] at that time. He had all the tools: he could run; he could throw; he was fast; he had a great arm. The only problem he was having was hitting. Willie was just awesome. He was a rarity among ballplayers and out of that he gained a lot of respect. Piper Davis had to help him hit, especially the curve ball. He could hit a fastball. You remember the first year he went with the Giants he had a hard time, but then Piper called him and told him about some of things he did, and he began to become a great hitter. I believe if he hadn't gone into the service -- he had about 660 home runs -- he would have had 7 or 800 home runs. He had power to all fields, and he was quick with the bat. He was a great ballplayer.

Q Was Piper Davis ever hard on you as a manager?

A One time in a close game [Johnny Britton](#) missed an easy ground ball and it went through [his legs]. So, when I got the ball and got on the mound, I just lobbed the ball up there. And I did it again. By the time I got ready to throw the next one Piper Davis was in my face. And I won't tell you what he said. He didn't use too much profanity. He said, "do you throw a strike every time you throw the ball? ... Then how the hell do you think he's going to catch everything?" He said, "Don't do that anymore," and after that he didn't have any more problems out of me.

Q What was it like when you left the Black Barons and signed in the Texas League?

A I went to Oklahoma City. I went to the ballpark and E. J. Humphries came to the clubhouse and said, "this is another player that we've signed to play for us, and I don't want you to look at his color or anything. I want you to treat him like you would do your own." And this happened in the clubhouse. And I never had any problems when I played baseball with my fellow players. They accepted me because I was quiet and unassuming. I just did my job. But they accepted me, and I accepted them.

Q And didn't he tell you that you had to be better?

A Yeah, he said, "I didn't bring him out here because he's as good as you. He's got to be better." I proved I was a little better. It was a great year. I won 9 and lost 1 and had a 2.14 earned run average. That's pretty good isn't it?

Q Well, you were the box office?

A What you talking about!? [Laughing] ... wherever I would go, like in Shreveport, that's where I'd get the most "stuff". But, whenever I was scheduled to pitch the park would fill up, everywhere we would go.

Q Now Humphries had a chance to sell your contract?

A Yeah, the Yankees and the Red Sox offered \$100,000 after I went 9 and 1, but he said "I'm going to let him stay one more year here because next year I'll get more than that for him." So, the next year they had me in spring training in Galveston, Texas. This little hotel I was living in was right by the water and I caught a cold in my arm. So, he sold me for \$25,000 and four players [to the Cardinals].

"Artie Wilson and Piper Davis were the greatest combo of ball players I've ever seen play."

"If you could have seen Willie [Mays] at that time. He had all the tools: he could run; he could throw; he was fast; he had a great arm."

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GREASON REMEMBERS (CONTINUED)

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“[Roberto Clemente] called me his brother, mi hermano, cause he started when he was young, and I was the one that encouraged him.”

Q Tell us about your confrontations with [Dave Hoskins](#) [of the Dallas Eagles].

A Oh, what a day that was! I could hardly get to the ballpark because they had the first Black player and Oklahoma City had me; I was the first Black to play for them. On the way to the park, I could hardly get in there; and I pitched against them and we won that day. I beat him, 3-2, and it was a great game. They had over 11,000 people there in the park.

Q Did you have a favorite ballpark or city that you enjoyed playing in.

A No, you know, we were limited in where we could go and what we could do. So, we made the best of where we were. It didn't bother us because we were used to that kind of stuff.

Q What did you think of Rickwood Field?

A [Rickwood was] one of the best ballparks we played in. Everything here: accessibility, and vision – wherever you were seated you had a good view of the field. One of the best I played in ...

Q Reverend Greason, when you were on the Rochester Red Wings, they played an exhibition game against the Havana Sugar Kings before the U.S. embargo went into effect. Is it true that one of your teammates got shot during the game?

A We were playing in Havana, Cuba on the night that Fidel [Castro] took over Havana. He came to the ballpark with some of his troops; and they were celebrating – firing those weapons into the air. One of them [a bullet] clipped one of our player's ears. They had a big write up about it when we got back home ... They were just celebrating the liberation. I think the leader of that nation had been Batista. That's pretty good for 94-years old! [Laughing]

Q Reverend Greason, you spent a lot of time in Puerto Rico. You led the league several years in wins. Can you share about a couple of those teams you played on, and the teammates that were behind you? It must have been great knowing you were going to get a bunch of runs from hitters like [Roberto Clemente](#), Mays, [Buzz Clarkson](#), Bob Thurman, and [George Crowe](#).

A That was one of the greatest teams that I believe I played on in '54 in Puerto Rico. We had George Crowe, who played with Boston, at first base, [Ron Samford](#) with the Giants, [Don Zimmer](#), Buzz Clarkson, Roberto Clemente, Bob Thurman, Willie Mays, and our catcher was [Valmy Thomas](#). Our pitching staff was [Sam Jones](#), [Ruben Gomez](#), and myself.

Q How could you lose?

A We didn't.

Q What did Roberto Clemente call you?

A Mi hermano – My brother. Yeah, we were brothers, we were real close. He was a great soul, Roberto was. He was on his way to bless some people when that plane crashed. It was a heck of a blow to us, you know, cause when you're close to people and they leave it bothers you when you think about it. [Roberto Clemente] called me his brother, mi hermano, cause he started when he was young, and I was the one that encouraged him. I'd put my arms around him if he would strike out and I encourage him and say, “just catch the ball.”

Q I just looked it up, and you're number 20 on the list of oldest living MLB players [ed: he is now third], and you're number one in terms of Black players.

A You got that right! [laughing] The oldest.... there are not many of us left.



BILL CHAPMAN'S SHOW—THE COLOR OF BASEBALL— IS COMING TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS INSTITUTE

Bill Chapman, a veteran documentary photographer with over 50 years of experience, will be presenting some of his photographs of former Negro League players and Rickwood Field at The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute from June 1 to July 17, 2022. His photographs have been widely published and exhibited. In 2010, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Rickwood Field, he also exhibited at the Civil Rights Institute. [The Color of Baseball](#) exhibit will include images by [Ernest Withers](#), [Teenie "One Shot" Harris](#), and [Moesia Davis](#).

Growing up near Fenway Park, Chapman got to watch players including [Pumpsie Green](#) and [Minnie Miñoso](#), both anomalies at that park at that time. His interest in baseball continued during his life. During the 1990s, he photographed all 26 of the major league parks at the time. He then began to work for the Pawtucket Red Sox for the next 12 years. Upon meeting and befriending Dr. Ernest Withers, the noted Civil Rights, Southern music, and Negro League photographer, Chapman began to spend time in the South, learning from Ernest but also photographing minor league teams in the region. He resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Bill Greason photo by Bill Chapman

"The Color of Baseball exhibit will include images by Ernest Withers, Teenie 'One Shot' Harris, and Moesia Davis."

RICKWOOD'S 181 HALL OF FAMERS

The 13th annual Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference was held in Birmingham in 2010. The conference program reported that "A record 107 Cooperstown Hall of Famers stepped onto Rick Woodward's Rickwood Field." That number was considered final for a decade, albeit with occasional additions as new members were inducted into Cooperstown. New sources soon began to reveal additional Hall of Famer members who appeared in games at Rickwood. The Friends of Rickwood soon realized that 107 was merely the floor, not the ceiling, and additional research was needed.

From 2021-22, members of the Friends of Rickwood and SABR, Joe DeLeonard, Ben Powell, Lamar Smith, and Jeb Stewart formed the Rickwood Hall of Fame Project Committee. The goal of the project was to confirm every member of the

National Baseball Hall of Fame who appeared in a game at Rickwood Field as a player, manager, coach, or umpire, and to do so before the 22nd Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference.

The committee is pleased to report that 181 members of the Hall of Fame participated in games at the ballpark. Even so, this number is not final. There are 27 members of the Hall of Fame for whom more research is needed; and the committee still has to decide whether to count Hall of Fame executives, such as [A.B. "Happy" Chandler](#) and [Bill Veeck](#), both of whom visited the park.

The most Hall of Famers to appear in a single game at Rickwood happened on April 4, 1927, when 13 future Cooperstowners took the field. The Washington Senators, managed by [Stanley "Bucky" Harris](#), were led by [Sam Rice](#), [Tris Speaker](#), [Goose Goslin](#),

and [Stan Coveleskie](#). The Senators were outmatched, losing 10-3 to the New York Giants, who were managed by [John McGraw](#). The Giants' roster featured [Mel Ott](#), [Fredie Lindstrom](#), [Edd Roush](#), [Rogers Hornsby](#), [Bill Terry](#), and [Burleigh Grimes](#). Future Hall of Famer, [Bill Klem](#), umpired the game. Two other Hall of Famers, [Travis Jackson](#), and [Walter Johnson](#), missed the game. Both played at Rickwood on other occasions.

We will publish a complete list of the Hall of Famers who have appeared in games at Rickwood in a future issue of Rickwood Tales.

We would love to hear our readers' suggestions on how to memorialize each Hall of Famer's appearance at Rickwood.

"We would love to hear our readers' suggestions on how to memorialize each Hall of Famer's appearance at Rickwood."

SPECIAL BASEBALL EXHIBIT AT VULCAN PARK & MUSEUM

The call was answered, again, when Vulcan Park & Museum suggested a collaboration with the Friends of Rickwood on a special baseball exhibit for their large gallery. Several years ago the request led to a tribute to the Industrial League teams from the Birmingham area with game worn uniforms, autographed photos and various news articles.

Due to the very positive public response, a second request immediately started the ball rolling with several theme ideas. The two entities agreed on a recognition of the twelve Alabama-born baseball players who are members of the Baseball Hall of Fame.

With Friends of Rickwood board member Lamar Smith taking the lead, fellow board members began scouring their memorabilia collections for items related to the twelve.

While most of the group were easily recognized names ([Willie Mays](#), [Don Sutton](#), [Hank Aaron](#), [Ozzie Smith](#), [Billy Williams](#), [Willie McCovey](#), and [Satchel Paige](#)) others were a little less well known and from decades or a century ago ([Heinie Manush](#), [Joe Sewell](#), [George "Mule" Suttles](#), [Early Wynn](#), and [Monte Irvin](#)).

The timing of the exhibit was perfect as Major League Baseball proclaimed that the former Negro Leagues were major

leagues. Five of the group (Mays, Aaron, Paige, Suttles, Irvin) were prominent former Negro League players.

Visitors to Vulcan were able to enjoy the exhibit from May of 2021 through January of 2022. At that time Smith modified the memorabilia to focus on the five former Negro League players and assembled an exhibit for the downtown Birmingham Library for Black History Month in February. A mission of the Friends of Rickwood is an education component to share baseball artifacts and memorabilia with the general public and children in particular and the two special exhibits were very well received.

"Five of the group (Mays, Aaron, Paige, Suttles, Irvin) were prominent former Negro League players."

DID YOU KNOW?



"After joining the Negro American League, the Black Barons captured pennants in 1943, 1944, and 1948."

The Birmingham Black Barons played in Birmingham from 1919 to 1962. When the Barons were playing in another Southern Association city, the Black Barons would frequently play at Rickwood Field and their Sunday afternoon games were a community event. The Black Barons won Negro Southern League pennants in 1923, 1926, and 1936. After joining the Negro American League, the Black Barons captured pennants in 1943, 1944, and 1948. Unfortunately, each time the Black Barons played in the Negro League World Series they lost to the Homestead Grays of the Negro National League. The 1948 series was the last Negro League World Series ever played. That year's edition of the Black Barons included Piper Davis, Artie Wilson, Bill Greason, [Jimmy Zapp](#), Ed Steele, [Bill Powell](#), [Jay Heard](#), [Jimmie Newberry](#), and a 17-year-old center fielder named Willie Mays.

RICKWOOD'S CHAMPIONSHIPS: THE 1926 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 to 1987. This series remembers those seasons.

For years, the Friends have been discussing the need to correct some of the years on the mural, as well as to include some missing titles, which had been obscured in the long history of the ballpark. Thanks to a generous grant from the Society for American Baseball Research, which was made as part of its Local Grants Program, the Friends and the Rickwood Field SABR Chapter are updating the championships mural in time for the Jerry Malloy Negro League Conference.

One of the teams, which will be added to the grandstand is the 1926 Birmingham Black Barons. Information about the Black Barons' 1926 season comes entirely from two books by Bill Plott, [Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962](#), and [The Negro Southern](#)

[League: A Baseball History, 1920-1951](#). Thanks to Plott's tireless research the stories of the early years of the Black Barons have been preserved.

The team was managed by [Clarence Smith](#). [Buford "Geechie" Meredith](#), [Poindexter Williams](#), and Harry [Poindexter Williams](#) were again big performers on the Black Barons and were joined by shortstop [Saul "Dixie" Davis](#) and [Joe "Goose" Mitchell](#).

During the season, Birmingham faced a lanky young pitcher from Mobile, who debuted with the Chattanooga White Sox, [Leroy "Satchel" Paige](#). Paige became a pitch-

ing sensation for the Black Barons the following season and would anchor the staff into the 1930 season.

The Black Barons outpaced the other clubs in the newly revived Negro Southern League and finished in first place with an incredible record of 55-21 (.724). In the postseason, Birmingham defeated the Memphis Red Sox 5 games to 2 to claim the NSL playoff championship as well.

Because of Bill Plott, the 1926 Black Barons will always be remembered as the Negro Southern League champions.



"Because of Bill Plott, the 1926 Black Barons will always be remembered as the Negro Southern League champions."

BECOME A FRIEND OF RICKWOOD

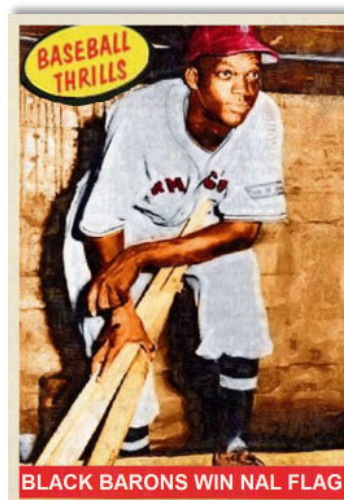
The Friends of Rickwood is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1992, and is dedicated to preserving America's Oldest Ballpark. Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by making a donation to the Friends.

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**



"Anyone can become a Friend of Rickwood by making a donation to the Friends."

PHOTOS FROM THE BANANAS' GAME

“The Friends of Rickwood thank the Savannah Bananas for coming to Rickwood Field. We look forward to having them back in 2023!”



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

The last three months featured some exciting events in the history of Rickwood Field. We hosted our inaugural “Rickwood College Classic” on March 31 featuring local baseball powers UAB and Birmingham-Southern. UAB won the game, but the real winners were the teams and the fans who saw baseball played at our historic ballpark. Both coaches agreed the game was special and will return in 2023.

What began with a phone call turned into one of the biggest events in Rickwood’s storied history. On Saturday, April 16, 2022, the Savannah Bananas brought their World Tour to Birmingham. A reported crowd of 10,000 fans braved threatening weather to see the Bananas play the Party Animals. The Bananas brought their *Fans First* spirit to life before a sell-out crowd that included Mayor Randall Woodfin, Councilor Carol Clark, and movie star

Garett Hedlund. The Bananas mixed baseball and entertainment in a way that kept fans excited for the entire two-hour game. The game drew the largest crowd in Bananas history. Bananas owner Jesse Cole shared that they could have sold at least 5,000 more tickets. There is talk of a return engagement in 2023. Stay tuned.

Hosting an event for a huge crowd was a challenge for the Friends of Rickwood and staff. Months of preparation went into making the game a reality. Groundskeepers **Jabreil Weir** and **Alvin Harris** worked tirelessly to get the field ready for the game and worked on Easter Sunday to clean up. The **FOR board and family members** did an amazing job managing parking, selling merchandise, and doing just about anything to keep things running smoothly. Special thanks also to the **City of Birmingham, Mayor Randall Woodfin**, and his staff. The Ba-

nanas game would not have been possible without their generous support. Thanks to our **City Councilor, Carol Clark**, and the **entire City Council** for all of your support. Thanks to the **Birmingham Police** and **Fire Departments** for making our event safe and secure. Thanks to CrossPlex Director **Ruben Perez** for allowing us to use CrossPlex for remote parking. Thanks to **Robby Yarbrough** for handling the food and beverage service. Thanks to **Fred Richards** and **Richard & Sons Construction** for providing equipment and staff to clear off brush to create additional parking spaces. Thanks to the **Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau** for its support. Finally, thanks to **Joey Richerzhagen** and **Kevin Stone** who answered a Facebook post and came out on a moment’s notice to cut grass at the park.

- Gerald L. Watkins, Jr.

“The game drew the largest crowd in Bananas history. Bananas owner Jesse Cole shared that they could have sold at least 5,000 more tickets.”

THE RICKWOOD COLLEGE CLASSIC WAS A HUGE SUCCESS



On Wednesday, March 30, 2022, UAB faced Birmingham-Southern College in the inaugural Rickwood College Classic. The Panthers are ranked third in the latest Division III poll, but were no match for the Blazers under the high skies of Rickwood Field, as UAB won, 10-4. [John Marc Mullins](#), [Christian Hall](#), and [Logan Braunschweig](#) led the attack with 7 of the Blazers’ 9 hits in the win. [Brian Williams](#) and [Andrew Dutton](#) combined to go 5 for 9 with Williams hitting a homer for the Panthers. Before the game, the Friends of Rickwood presented UAB head coach [Casey Dunn](#) with a game ball signed by former UAB coach [Harry “the Hat” Walker](#) from the Blazers’ first season in 1979.

“Before the game, the Friends of Rickwood presented UAB head coach Casey Dunn with a game ball signed by former UAB coach Harry ‘the Hat’ Walker, which was used in the Blazers’ first game in 1979.”

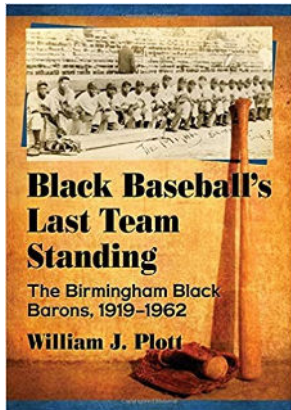
The Friends of
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<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofrickwood/>



THE RICKWOOD LIBRARY: *Last Team Standing*

Bill Plott has woven a masterpiece. His recent book, [Black Baseball's Last Team Standing: The Birmingham Black Barons, 1919-1962](#), is the definitive book about the Black Barons and beautifully tells the story of Birmingham's place in Negro Leagues (including the Negro Southern League, the original Negro National League, and finally the Negro American League). The book provides a year-by-year analysis of each season, and also a critical examination of the sports press, whose collective interest in regularly (and accurately) reporting on each season was frequently lacking. Plott cites numerous issues with the newspaper coverage including the lack of box scores; league standings where the collective number of wins often did not equal the number of losses; inaccurate or incomplete player statistics; inconsistent spellings of player's names; regular disputes over the actual league champions for a particular season (with a marked local bias); and several seasons, which seemed to disappear into the mist, as newspaper accounts simply ended in a sea of indifference.

Despite the limitations of available research, Plott breathes life into the early years of the Black Barons as the stories of players like [Forest "One Wing" Maddox](#) and [Buford "Geechie" Meredith](#) come to life from his meticulous research and crisp writing style. Echoing threads connect throughout the book, which create context and texture to the stories, as Plott not only describes these players' time as Black Barons, but makes sure the reader does not forget them. Just one case in point was [William "Dizzy" Dismukes](#). Plott tells the story of young Dizzy as a player in 1924, recounts his season managing the Black Barons in 1938 and describes his reappearance as a Yankees' scout in 1953, and his death in 1961.

Plott also provides this best account of [Satchel Paige's](#) time with the Black Barons (1927-30) that has come to light, and gives proper attention to the high tide of the Black Barons from 1943-1948, as the club won the Negro American League Pennant three times (1943, 1944, and 1948), but was never able to defeat the Homestead Grays in the Negro League World Series. Plott's research of Piper Davis, [Herman Bell](#), Ed Steele, Artie Wilson, Wille Mays, and many others, brings a fresh look at those players' lives and the stories of those teams. Throughout the book, Plott uses the dwindling attendance of the annual East-West All-Star Game, which was the showcase event of the Negro Leagues, as a bell-weather for the declining health of the Negro Leagues.

Finally, Plott tells the untold story of the Black Barons and the Negro American League after the integration of Organized Baseball by [Jackie Robinson](#) and Larry Doby (1947) and the last Negro League World Series, and the collapse of the Negro National League (1948). This period, from 1949 to 1962, tells the sad story of the long and inevitable death of the Negro Leagues, including seasons where the NAL was reduced to only 4 clubs, while players like [Otha Bailey](#), [Jake Sanders](#), and [Charley Pride](#) endured interminable bus rides and played before sparse crowds because they dreamed of playing in the major leagues. Without much fanfare, Organized Baseball ultimately drained the NAL of its best players and caused the league's quiet collapse. [Ike Brown](#), who played for the Kansas City Monarchs in 1961, was the last Negro League player to make the Major Leagues.

Using the last news stories on the team, Plott fairly declares the Birmingham Black Barons as the last survivor of the Negro Leagues in 1962. *Black Baseball's Last Team Standing* is a testament to the humble beginnings, roaring middle years, and withering end of the Black baseball in America. The book is truly a tape-measure home run and should occupy a prominent place on the shelf of any fan of Rickwood Field.

- Jeb Stewart

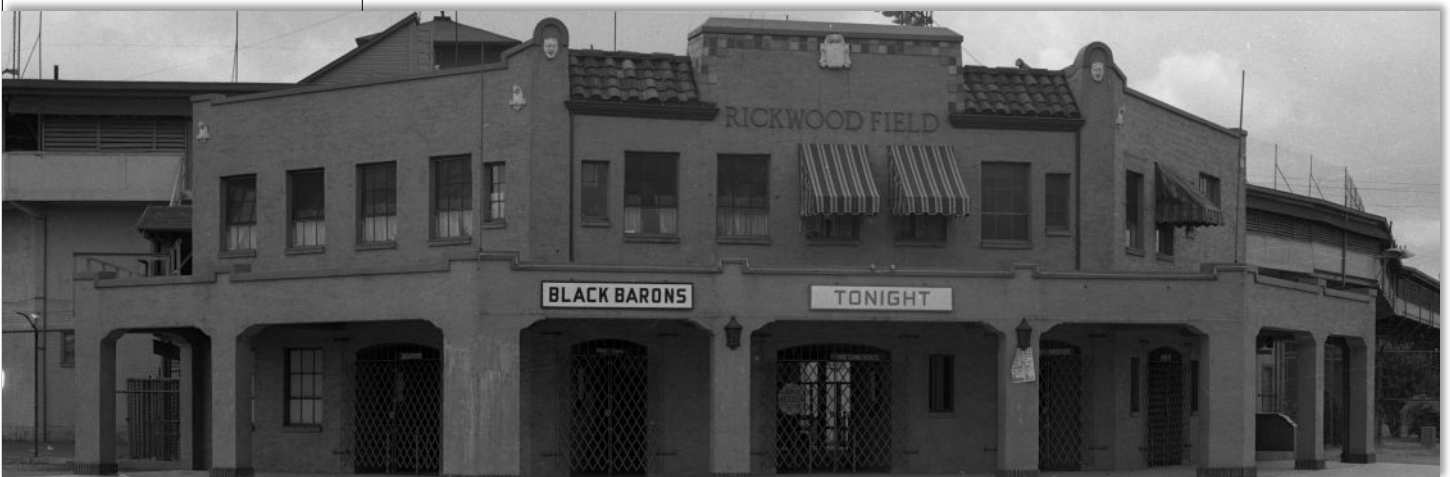


Photo: The Birmingham News, Alabama Media Group/AL.com