

Southern Association Baseball Conference



FRONT ROW (l to r): Lenny Yochim, Mel Brookey (both former New Orleans Pelicans players), Clarence Watkins (*Friends of Rickwood*), Barton Leaf (*Triple Play Club*)
BACK ROW (l to r): Mark Stang, Darrell O'Mary, Skip Nipper, Joe Deleonard (*Triple Play Club*), Lamar Smith, and David Brewer (both *Friends of Rickwood*)

Nearly 30 attendees arrived at historic Rickwood Field in Birmingham, Alabama on October 8 and 9 for the First Annual Southern Association Baseball History Conference hosted by the Friends of Rickwood. The gathering brought together authors, former players and fans of the old Southern Association and its colorful franchises.

The conference started off on Friday night with a dinner featuring two former New Orleans Pelicans players, catcher Mel Brookey and pitcher Lenny Yochim and their wives. The players regaled everyone with stories of their playing days, especially their strained contract negotiations with the famed Branch Rickey, then General Manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, of whom the Pelicans were the top farm club of the early 1950's.

Saturday featured research presentations by seven speakers on a variety of topics. Among the subjects covered was a history of Sulphur Dell, the legendary ballpark of the Nashville Vols presented by Skip Nipper; a review of the history of the New Orleans Pelicans by S. Derby Gisclair; the brief career of Nat Peeples, the only black player to ever appear in the Association's history made by Ken Fenster; and a slide presentation on Joe Engel, the colorful owner of the Chattanooga Lookouts presented by Mark Stang. In addition to the presentations, a wide array of vintage Southern Association memorabilia was on display, courtesy of several of the attendees. Dozens of scorecards, photos, equipment and other paper ephemera were highlighted by four original flannel jerseys of the Birmingham Barons, Chattanooga Lookouts and the Memphis Chicks.



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