

Chattanooga's Historic Engel Stadium was the site of the third annual Southern Association Baseball Conference on April 8, 2006. The threat of severe weather was a concern and delayed the arrivals of several of the participants. When it was time to start Saturday morning, we had a beautiful day at Engel. This was especially important since the conference was set up in the seats behind home plate. What a venue for a baseball conference!

The concept of taking the conference on the road away from Rickwood was influenced by several factors. The upcoming release of two new books on baseball in Chattanooga, and the availability of having the conference at one of the few remaining great Southern Association ballparks, Engel Stadium were two of the reasons. We also wanted to show our support to Dan Creed in his efforts to create a "Friends of Rickwood" type organization to save this old ballpark.

Our Saturday program included:

1. David Brewer, the director of The Friends of Rickwood, gave an overview of the whole effort to save Rickwood Field. This was especially important to Dan Creed and the political and civic leaders attending to answer the questions on how and why to save Engel Stadium.
2. Stephen Martini reviewed his new book, "The Chattanooga Lookouts & 100 Seasons of Scenic City Baseball," relating to the ways the fans have stepped up over the years to save the franchise on several occasions.
3. The highlight of the day was our player Q & A session with three former Lookout players, Hillis Layne, Roy Hawes and Henry "Lefty" Delay. All it took was a few questions to get them started and the old "war stories" began. We enjoyed their incites into the history of the Lookouts based on their personal experiences. Also during the player interview segment, the local sports talk radio show did a live remote. This was a first for the conference.
4. Derby Gisclair, from New Orleans, gave an overview of the early history of the Southern Association told through his collection of early tobacco baseball cards. His interesting stories about these relatively unknown players were very informative and entertaining. Derby also gave us an update on the aftermath of Katrina and its impact on the other baseball associates from the area. We were especially glad to hear that Arthur Schott, noted baseball historian, was doing well and had not lost any of his extensive baseball library.
5. David Jenkins, former Lookouts beat writer reviewed his new book, "Baseball in Chattanooga." His comments focused on the outlandish and sometimes politically incorrect promotional stunts that owner Joe Engel used to draw fans to the games.

6. Dan Creed informed us of his plans to form an organization like the Friends of Rickwood, to oversee the restoration of Engel Stadium. We all agreed this is a very worthy undertaking, and plan to support Dan in every way.

7. We closed the day with an informal tour of the old ballpark. Highlights of the park included the incline in centerfield, the location of the old Negro Entrance, and both seven-foot Coca-Cola Bottles that once sat on the wall in centerfield. These bottles were the only part of the old stadium taken to the new park in 1999.

We thank Dan and his wife Cathy for hosting the conference. We also enjoyed viewing Dan's extensive collection of Chattanooga Lookouts memorabilia set up in the old souvenir shop. We were pleased to have attending Mr. Oreon Mann son of Earl Mann, former owner of the Atlanta Crackers.

We are looking forward to being back at Rickwood in 2007 and Skip Nipper's plans to host the 2008 conference in Nashville.