



## BEN COOK

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Ben Cook, a sportswriter and radio host whose encyclopedic knowledge of Birmingham's baseball history was matched only by his love of the game, died Friday.

Mr. Cook, who had been recently hospitalized following a series of health issues, was 69.

A 1964 graduate of Birmingham's West End High School, Mr. Cook worked in the sports department at The Birmingham News in the late 1960s and early '70s, and he later became a sports columnist for the old Birmingham Post-Herald. He is perhaps best remembered as the lead host of the "Triple Play" baseball show on sports radio station WJOX and for co-hosting an afternoon sports-talk show on that same station for about 12 years.

"God rest his soul," Herb Winches, Mr. Cook's radio partner at WJOX, said Friday. "We had a chance to spend some time together and we reminisced over some great times. . . .

"When I think of Ben, he was such a gentle person, such a knowledgeable person," Winches added. "His sports vernacular was as deep as anybody's, but his forte was baseball."

In a career that touched on parts of six decades, Mr. Cook lived his dream, reporting on and writing about many of the nation's iconic sporting events -- from the World Series and the Major League Baseball All-Star Game to the NCAA Final Four and at least 10 Sugar Bowls. He covered Alabama football

legend Paul "Bear" Bryant's record-breaking 315th win at Legion Field, and was in the press box the night Atlanta Braves great Hank Aaron hit his historic 715th home run. He also wrote five sports books, and at the end of his career, he worked in the call center for AL.com's High School Sports Network.

Although he was a man for all seasons, it was baseball that brought out the little kid in Mr. Cook.

As a boy growing up in West End, he began attending games at Rickwood Field with his father, Ben Cook Sr., in the early 1950s, and later, as a grown man, he became the public address announcer in that same ballpark where his father instilled in him the love of baseball in general and of Rickwood in particular.

The Birmingham Barons moved out of rickety, old Rickwood in 1987, but Mr. Cook never left. He became a regular at the Barons' annual Rickwood Classic turn-back-the-clock game, and he was a loyal supporter of the Friends of Rickwood, the group of historic preservationists and baseball lovers who have kept the 105-year-old ballpark alive.

"Let me say that Ben was a close friend of all of ours," David Brewer, executive director of the nonprofit Friends of Rickwood, said Friday. "He was a friend of the ballpark. He was a friend of the organization. He was part of that group of guys who experienced Rickwood history first-hand."

In 2005, Mr. Cook also wrote a book, "Good Wood," about the history of the ballpark and his memories of it.

"My days covering baseball at Rickwood Field were fun," Mr. Cook wrote, "but they could not hold a candle to the times I spent at the ballpark as a little kid growing up in Birmingham."

In 2013, Mr. Cook got to join some of his childhood heroes when he was inducted into the Birmingham Barons Hall of Fame. Fittingly, the ceremony took place during the Rickwood Classic.

"I keep thinking about when I was like 10, 11 years old, running around this ballpark," Mr. Cook said in an interview with AL.com prior to his induction.

"The Barons players were such heroes to me. To be included in their hall of

fame is just overwhelming and humbling."

Mr. Cook is survived by his wife, Cathie Cook; his stepdaughters, Amber Arbo and Crystal Arbo Basham; a son-in-law, John-Paul Basham; and two grandchildren, Levi Basham and Titus Basham.

The visitation for Mr. Cook will be held from 12:00 PM until 2:00 PM, Tuesday, July 14, 2015, at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church, 1343 Hueytown Road in Hueytown, with a memorial service to be held at 2 PM.

A gofundme.com page has been set up to handle donations for the Ben Cook Memorial fund at <http://www.gofundme.com/bencookmemorial>.