

COMMENTARY

Porter Field Memoirs Could Be Home Run

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By – Jim Bailey

When Norris Guinn and Willis Callaway started writing their recollections about playing baseball at Lamar Porter Field — growing up at Lamar Porter Field, essentially — they did it for family and friends. They had no intention of publishing a book.

However, under persistent encouragement from other Porter Field alumni, they changed their minds and widened their scope. A 320-page, soft cover tome, Lamar Porter Field and Memories of Sports in Little Rock during the 1950s, was recently issued.

Lamar Porter Field opened in 1937 at the corner of Seventh and Johnson streets and eventually became the thriving home to Peewee League, Midget League, Little League, Pony League, American Legion and semipro baseball teams.

The rampaging Little Rock Doughboys flourished there as the only Legion team in town until they were replaced by an eight-team Legion league in 1954. Obviously, Hall of Fame third baseman Brooks Robinson became Porter Field's most distinguished graduate.

"The 1950s," Callaway explained in his area of the book, "were a unique time in history.

"It was before drugs were used recreationally, there were no major wars, the economy was good, schools were safe, no X-rated movies or videos existed and there was no profanity on radio or TV. There was respect for other people's lives and property that we do not have today. Most everyone, even in the cities, did not lock their doors at night or while they were at work during the day."

No element of the Porter Field experience is overlooked, including Winkler's Drive-in just across the street from the ballpark. Guinn wrote, "We ate there almost every night [after games].... There was a pinball machine in the corner, which was always in use, and each booth had a jukebox that would play a song for only a nickel."

Guinn and Callaway met at the age of 9 in 1949, when both spent most of their summer days at Porter Field, either playing baseball or participating in organized playground activities sponsored by Little Rock Boys Club. They soon became close friends, but were never on the same team until 1957, their final season at Porter Field, when they were together on Coleman Dairy's American Legion state championship team.

Guinn said last week that he had tried to interest some other Porter Field graduates to add their memories to his and Callaway's, but there were no takers.

"However, just about every [former] player who saw copies of what we were doing urged us to get it published," he said. "I don't guess it would mean much to people who can't remember the 1950s."

He said a recent interview on KABZ-FM, 103.7, The Buzz, "started our phones ringing [with book orders]."

The book is for sale only at The SportsStop and Troy's Sports Center in Little Rock. The cost is \$25, but \$5 from each sale goes to the Friends of Lamar Porter organization, which maintains the facility.

Actually, when and if the book's sales cover the cost of publishing, all receipts will go toward maintaining and improving Lamar Porter Field. Obviously, these authors aren't in it for the money.

If just a small fraction of people who played or watched games at Lamar Porter Field in the 1950s hear about the book, Callaway and Guinn should have a smash best seller on their hands.