

# ABF Lead Off Dinner History



Tommy Lasorda, baseball ambassador, ex manager Los Angeles Dodgers for 22 years in which his teams won four National League pennants and two World Series titles was the featured speaker at the inaugural ABF Lead Off Dinner. Tommy was named National League Manager of the Year in 1983 and 1988. Tommy also lead the USA National Team to a gold medal at the 2000 Summer Olympiad in Sydney, Australia. Known for his generosity toward others, Tommy donated his time to the ABF in its inaugural event on February 9<sup>th</sup>,

2002. Tommy's words to live by: "God delays but does not deny".

Holder of twelve Major League records including most games, most at bats, total bases and runs batted in, Hank Aaron spoke at the second ABF Lead Off Dinner on February 13, 2003. A Mobile, Alabama native whose life is part of the ABF BASIC curriculum, Hank overcame obstacles during his career to become one of the greatest players ever to wear an MLB uniform. Hank's message directed to Central Alabama youth was to focus on the task at hand, both on the athletic field and in the classroom. This is similar to the ABF's message in BASIC.

Hank shares a memory with ABF board member Jeffery R. Dugas, M.D.



The only player to win the Rookie of the Year, Most Valuable Player and the Cy Young Award in the history of professional baseball, Don "Newk" Newcombe was one of the first African American players to cross the color line in 1949. As a pitcher, Newk won 149 games over a 10-season career with a .623 winning percentage. Don also places ninth on the all-time pitchers' batting list boasting a lifetime .271 batting average. Newk entertained the local fans with his stories of his first years in the "biggs" and his post-baseball life of spreading positive values as a Los Angeles Dodger featured speaker. Don's life is also part of the ABF BASIC program.

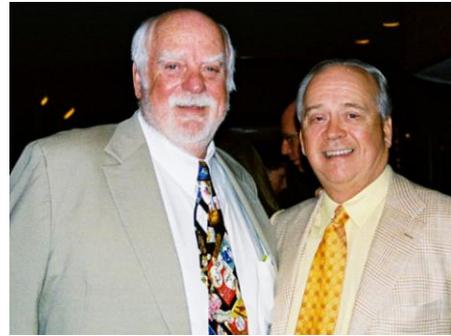




On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 the ABF featured two dynamic pitchers as speakers for its 4<sup>th</sup> annual event. Chicago Cubs ace Mark Prior shared the podium with Tom House, ex Atlanta Braves, Boston Red Sox and Seattle Mariners pitcher. House led off with his mother's oft-repeated axiom, "No "A", no play". Prior stressed his education that includes a degree in economics from University of Southern California where he was the second pick in the 2001 baseball draft. He noted that his degree exists as his building block for a future beyond baseball.

Mark and Heather Prior

Hall of Fame great Gaylord Perry entertained the audience at the ABF's 5<sup>th</sup> Lead Off Dinner held on January 26, 2006. Perry a veteran of 22 MLB seasons in which he won two Cy Young Awards pitched 5350 big league innings. Perry and his brother Jim hold the second highest number of MLB wins for a brother combination at 529. A native of North Carolina, Gaylord thrilled the audience with his stories of a small-town boy made good on a national stage.

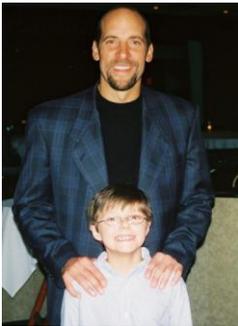


Gaylord pictured with ABF board chairman, James R. Andrews, M.D.

San Francisco great, Will Clark spoke at the 6<sup>th</sup> event on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Will a graduate of Mississippi State University and a native of Louisiana, began his talk with a story about Birmingham great Bo Jackson, who barreled into Will on his first at bat against the Giants. Bo who attended the event to recognize Dr. Andrews with the ABF Leadership Award, noted that he hadn't tried to hurt the rookie. Will "The Thrill" recounted many stories of his fifteen year career in which he batted a lifetime .303 and was named to the all-star team six times.



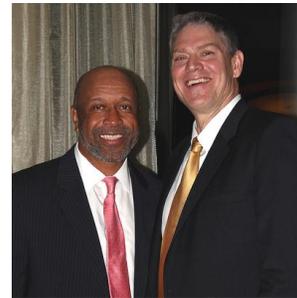
Clark flanked by ABF supporters John and Jack Odle



Atlanta Braves great John Smoltz graced Birmingham with his strong message to area youth at the 7<sup>th</sup> Lead Off Dinner held on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008. John a future Hall of Fame inductee based on his remarkable competitive career at a starting and then a closing MLB pitcher dating back to 1988. A 1996 Cy Young Award winner and known for his great post-season winning percentage, John exhorted Birmingham enthusiasts to “follow your dream, even though others are skeptical”. He summarized his life philosophy saying, “I would love to leave a legacy with my children to know that God had a hand in my life, to know that HE changed me from a decent person to a

God-fearing, loving person, and that servant mind-set, humility, thinks of others before himself.”

Author of two books designed to educate the professional and amateur sporting public, Atlanta Braves great Dale Murphy entertained an adoring public on January 29, 2009 with a combination of stories from his playing days in which he was the most exciting Braves player for fifteen seasons during which he collected awards for his hitting and fielding prowess. During his peak career years, 1982-1987, Murphy was widely considered the best all-around player in MLB. Dale, husband of Nancy and father of seven boys and one girl, heads the “I Won’t Cheat Foundation” that promulgates vital values for America’s youth. The Foundation values are the same one that are taught in the ABF BASIC program.



Dale poses with Yankee great Oscar Gamble



Tim Hudson’s friendly manner brought many smiles to more than 380 fans who gathered on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Lead Off Dinner. Children especially seemed to be drawn to his open smile and were intrigued to find out how an undersized boy through very hard work



and much persistence made it to the heights of his profession.



Tim noted that as a boy his mother had to take in his baseball pants so that he could “suit up” for the local games in Opelika, Not finding any pro offers after high school, Tim studied at a junior college until Auburn University gave him his opportunity to compete at a high level. All present could identify with his determination and courage in pursuing his dream.

Many of the youngsters attending peppered Tim with questions ranging from his most feared rival to how he spent his time off the field with his family.

On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Atlanta Braves Hall of Fame pitcher, Phil Niekro addressed Central Alabama fans in the 10<sup>th</sup> annual ABF Lead Off Dinner. Phil stressed the value of family, as being more important than on-field heroics. He related the story of how he attempted to nurse his father through a serious illness and also win his 300<sup>th</sup> game, giving him a new contract and a berth in the Hall of Fame.



He also emphasized his belief in never giving up. Phil nurtured the thought that if on a given day an opponent beat him with the bat, that there would come another day in which each, he and that batter, would pick up the implements of the sport to face each other, and that Phil would know that he would win that that day.



On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 Hall of Famer Andre Dawson headlined the 11<sup>th</sup> annual ABF event held in Birmingham, Alabama. Dawson is one of three MLB players to have stolen more than 300 bases and hit more than 400 home runs during his career. Andre noted that statistics to him were of secondary importance, as he took pride in the longevity of his career that included 12 operations to his knees. He suggested to the Central Alabama fans that overcoming obstacles was a key ingredient to success on and off the playing field.

Introduced at the ABF 12<sup>th</sup> annual event on January 25, 2013 by former MLB pitcher and Hartselle AL native, Steve Woodard, Craig Kimbrel, who hails from Huntsville, AL offered the 350 fans on hand for the January 25th, 2013 ABF event his recipe for success-never listen to the negative advice given to you.



Craig Kimbrel related his 3rd grade teacher's admonishment to rewrite his essay on Craig's dream of becoming a Major League pitcher, as the goal seemed too difficult to be achieved. Much the same as another Alabama product and Braves pitching great, Tim Hudson (2009 ABF Lead Off Dinner) who was told repeatedly that size was a disqualifying factor in the quest for a berth in pro ball, Kimbrel had to ignore the negative vibes as he won starting berths at Lee High School, Hanceville Community College, and now the star closer for the Atlanta Braves.

Signing with the Braves and ascending rapidly in the minor leagues gave Craig the opportunity to test his mettle against all rival hitters. When asked whom he feared most among Major League hitters, Craig noted that he feared no one, as he was going to defeat the opposition in

every instance. Kimbrel's rise to instant stardom in the Major Leagues belies his philosophy and his great God-given talent.



Roger Clemens headlined the 13<sup>th</sup> annual event on January 6, 2014. Roger noted that he developed a strong physical workout routine early in his sports development that served him well as he competed at higher levels of the sport.

He noted that once in the Major Leagues he sought and obtained advice from ABF board president, James R. Andrews, M.D. that assisted his competitiveness during his twenty-two year career.

His message to the Birmingham public was to pursue life's goals vigorously and to remain focused on the steps needed to attain the goals.

*For more information regarding the ABF Lead Off Dinner, held pre-season annually in Birmingham, AL, contact David Osinski, ABF executive director. Tel: 205-558-4235; email: [abf@asmi.org](mailto:abf@asmi.org)*

**2660 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, Suite 620 \* Birmingham, AL 35205 \* Tel: 205-558-4235 \*  
email: [abf@asmi.org](mailto:abf@asmi.org) \* web: [americanbaseball.org](http://americanbaseball.org)**