

Charles Frank

Southern Association Pioneer

By
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He was a respected field general, a winner of six pennants, and one of the organizers of the old Southern Association.

Charles Frank was born in Mobile, Alabama on May 30, 1870. He began his career pitching for local semi-professional teams where he caught the attention of "Honest" John Kelly, manager of Mobile who immediately signed Charley. Charley spent four seasons with the Mobile club before going to Memphis where he would win the Southern League batting crown with a .354 average. He graduated to the St. Louis Browns (Cardinals), participating in 120 contests and batting .298, in parts of 1893 and 1893.

Charles returned to Memphis the following year, 1895, to manager Memphis in the Southern League. After stops in Toledo, Minneapolis, Columbus, and Grand Rapids in the Western League, Charley returned to the Southern League as skipper of the Memphis Red Stockings in 1900.

At the conclusion of the 1900 season, Charley, along with Newton Fisher and Abner Powell organized the Southern Association. The new league issued a salary cap of \$1,200 per man with 12 players on each team, also brought stability and respectability to the clubs. The original members of the new league consisted of: New Orleans, Memphis, Shreveport, Selma (AL), Little Rock, Nashville, Birmingham, and Montgomery. The League would last sixty years.

In the Association's first season, 1901, Charley took over the reins of manager and owner of the Memphis Reds. His teams finished in the first division each of the three years he led the team, winning the pennant in his last year, 1903.

During the 1902 campaign, circumstances involving Charley would rock the league and cause the ouster of the league president when Charley used pitcher James St. Vrain, ruled ineligible by the Southern Association. Charley sidestepped the league's ruling and pitched St. Vrain. As a penalty, the games in which St. Vrain pitched were forfeited. With the backing of General Samuel Carnes, president of the club, and Caruthers Ewing, a prominent attorney, Charley pursued the matter in court and won. As punishment for his actions, that fall Charley was barred from the league. Only after preliminary discussions with wealthy backers forming a rival league was he reinstated and, along with the club, both were reimbursed for any losses they had. Because of the actions taken in the matter, J.B. Nicklin, president of the league, stepped down.

With the St. Vrain matter behind them, 1903 saw Charley win the first of six pennants in his career, as Memphis defeated the Little Rock Travellers by one game.

Following his tenure in Memphis, Charley found himself in New Orleans where he would lay the groundwork for one of the greatest franchises in the history of the Southern Association.

During his time in New Orleans, Frank brought respectability, winning three pennants and missing a fourth in ten years. His 1905 club is interesting not because of finishing 10 games in front of Montgomery, but for the last month of the season, saw the Birds win the pennant on the road due to the last outbreak of Yellow Fever that struck the Crescent City.

Three years later Charley took on a new role as President/Manager of the Birds, and had them in a pennant race for much of the season, only to lose to Nashville on the last day of the season, 1 – 0.

He reached his high water mark as skipper, winning two consecutive pennants, 1910 – 1911. One of his players, Joe Jackson, who went on to bigger things, tore up the league batting .354, scoring 82 runs and stroking out 165 hits.

At the close of the 1913 campaign, because of differences of opinion with Cleveland owner Charles Somers, Charley was relieved as President/Manager of the Pels. He did, however, secure a two year contract as a scout representing the South.

After his contract with Somers ran out, Frank gained control of the Atlanta Crackers team. Rumor had it he had an option of \$1.00 in buying the club. He would bring two more pennants, 1917 and 1919, his last. He would retain management of the Crackers until ill health forced his resignation in early 1922.

On May 24, 1922, while resting at his sister's residence in Memphis, Charles Frank passed away at 51. The cause was attributed to heart and Bright's disease. After a funeral mass at St. Peter's Catholic Church, Charles was laid to rest at Forest Hill Cemetery in Memphis.

Out of respect to Charles Franck's memory, games in the Southern Association were stopped for a few minutes, while Atlanta and New Orleans, the last two teams Charles was associated with, cancelled their games with Little Rock and Chattanooga respectively for a day in tribute to Charles Frank, a true Southern Association pioneer.