



## New Legacy League summer baseball launches, with help from USM students

*Special to The Clinton Courier*

The Legacy League, which includes the Clinton Big Wheels team, will make its inaugural debut this summer in Jackson at Smith-Wills Stadium. The summer baseball league is designed to develop college students both on and off the field and is led by former professional players with a focus on launching careers across multiple areas of sports.

The league will feature six teams representing the Jackson metropolitan area: the Clinton Big Wheels, Brandon Reservoir Dogs, Flowood Flyers, New Jack City Ballers, Madison Mockingbirds and Ridgeland Roosters.

University of Southern Mississippi sport management students recently partnered with The Legacy League Project as part of USM's sport venue and event management class.

Tim Bennett, commissioner of player and business development for The Legacy League, and Dr. Chris Croft, associate professor of sport management at the University of Southern Mississippi, discussed ways the new league and the class could work together to benefit both organizations. Croft and Bennett had previously collaborated on summer internship opportunities for students.

During the league's first year, with extensive set-up and administrative required, students worked in groups assisting with league office operations, game-day management and city-specific planning.

Student groups provided leadership for a team nickname contest in collaboration with city mayors, chambers of commerce and community members. The groups promoted fan voting to narrow selections to the top three names before working with their assigned city officials to determine final team names.

In addition, the students coordinated the design of city team logos, branding messages connecting each city and nickname, team mascots, team colors, baseball cap

logos and team songs. Each group completed a final project outlining city promotion plans that included community relations, fundraising strategies, season ticket campaigns, connections with former professional baseball players and job training initiatives.

Final project materials were shared with The Legacy League front office for potential implementation.

Former professional players supporting the league include Marquis Grisson, Bernard Gilkey, Tracy McGrady, Andrew Jones, Brian Jordan and Jair Jurrjens.

Additional backing comes from the son of Lary Aaron, son of Hank Aaron, along with former Major League Baseball players Marvin Freeman, Lou Collier, Edgar Renteria, and international scout Marco Paddy.

Bennett said the students played a critical role in launching the league.

"As with any worthwhile business initiative, getting started can be the most difficult time," Bennett said. "The same holds true for The Legacy League. While Mississippi continues to prove itself to be a baseball state, Professor Croft and his sport management team have proven why the University of

Southern Mississippi is a baseball school. Their dedication to detail and commitment to success has proven to be the game changer in the daunting task of starting not just a team, but an entire league."

Croft said the project provided students with valuable real-world experience.

"It was a unique, fun and challenging project, since everything was new," Croft said. "Students worked under real deadlines while communicating with outside organizations. Seeing their work reflected in websites and press releases further energized them as the project developed."

More information about The Legacy League is available at LegacyLeagueBaseball.com.

