

Wed. Oct. 21, '64



BLACKIE SHERROD



They're Right Off the Bat

ATLANTA—The visitor realizes he's in the South's most progressive spot when old friends meet him at the airport with jack daniels and grits and hustle him through a maze of freeways to where major league baseballers will soon live.

This is the sleek new stadium being built almost in the heart of Atlanta. Bulldozers are shoving deep into the rusty Georgia clay and concrete tiers are thrusting up amid the ever-changing skyline of the oldtime city.

"We're going to play an exhibition with the Yankees in this stadium on April 9," says Bob Richardson, a top governor's aide and one of the forces behind the new sports ambition. "And we'll open the season in it on April 15."

By "we", the Atlanta citizenry means the Atlanta Braves, who will make the jump from Milwaukee in a matter of days.

There is much official hush-hush about it, lest an earthquake or the Supreme Court or some other act of nature spoil the pudding at the last second. And it's typical of baseball's pussyfooting attitude that the Milwaukee-to-Atlanta move hasn't been openly declared before now.

The Milwaukee directors are meeting today in Chicago. And they'll vote to approve the shift. The National League officials meet in New York later this week and will doubtless okay the franchise transfer.

The stadium is a rush act. When the Atlanta leaders suddenly decided they wanted in the Big Swim, they didn't waste time with flim and faddle and political strings and twiddle dees and twiddle dums. A couple rich Johns said they'd underwrite the thing, so start digging and all the details would be worked out later, like dividing the stadium cost between the city, county and state and retiring it with revenue bonds. So the dirt commenced flying. The contractors will have to forfeit \$2,000 every day past April 15 it takes to complete it.

On the Way

THIS CITY desires very much to be the sports center below the Mason-Dixon and it dang shore will be.

It's just a question of time until a pro football team locates there.

Atlanta had the St. Louis football Cardinals, for a couple days anyway. The Bidwell brothers wanted to move their NFL franchise to that city. And the hustling Atlantans offered them a rock-bottom rental deal. But when the Bidwells returned to St. Louis to talk things over, they were offered a better deal by a citizen of that city, one who owned a small chunk of the stock. So they had to pull out of their Atlanta commitments. For the time being, anyways.

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The baseball people are anxious to land this splendid radio-television market. At Milwaukee, the Braves are sandwiched between Chicago and Minneapolis. At Atlanta, the nearest major league franchise will be Cincinnati.

Familiar Faces

AND THE BRAVES should fit right in like homefolks. A couple of the Negro players, Hank Aaron and Lee Maye, say they are muchly agin moving to Atlanta because of the segregation business. But they'll play where they're told, or else get another job.

Ed Mathews, the Braves third baseman, was a minor league star here in 1950. Coaches Whitlow Wyatt and Dixie Walker both managed minor league teams here. Coach Jo Jo White is a Georgia native and Manager Bobby Bragan is from nearby Birmingham.

Lloyd's of London once made a study and predicted that Atlanta would be the largest city in the world at the turn of the next century. At least that's what some local citizens claim.

And it's believeable because the impressive notion about this city is its drive, its scorn of redtape and meaningless hours around conference tables. There is more action than talk. Atlanta wanted to be bigtime in sports, so some of the riches underwrote the project and they went out and got results. It was as simple as that.