SIC Alum’s Heart and Literary Mind Remain in Southern Illinois

The rhyme and rhythm of small town-life often inspires conflicting emotions in young people – those who are fine with it, and those who want desperately to make a break.

Golconda native and Southeastern Illinois College alumnus Toby Brooks was definitely one of the latter, but even now, in his current job as Assistant Professor of Athletic Training at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, his thoughts still turn back to southern Illinois, with the news that his book, *Season of Change*, has been accepted for publication by Southern Illinois University Press.

Brooks has worked previously as an athletic trainer and/or faculty member at the University of Arizona, University of Texas at El Paso, Liberty University, and Southern Illinois University, as well as with various professional teams. He also owned and operated Born Athletic, an athletic development and sports performance business, Marion from 2007-2009.

During that time frame, Brooks also served as a trainer during the inaugural 2007 season of the Southern Illinois Miners baseball team. Due to the fact that Rent One Park’s construction was not yet complete, the Miners were forced to split their spring training between Marion High School and John A. Logan College.

"Prior to the first practice at Marion High, manager Mike Pinto introduced me to the team," Brooks writes in the preface of his new book. "I greeted the players and proclaimed to all just how honored they should be to get to be a part of local history in the making. ‘You are the first professional athletes that southern Illinois has ever known, so carry yourselves with pride,’ I insisted."

Shortly thereafter, as the workout continued, Brooks was approached by an older gentleman who told him he was dead wrong – there had been a whole league of teams spread across southern Illinois in the first half of the 20th century, with a team based in West Frankfort that was affiliated with the St. Louis Cardinals.

Brooks simply couldn’t let that tidbit go – though he couldn’t understand at first how he could have lived his formative years in the region as a sports junkie without hearing of this team and league. With a little bit of research, he found out not only about the team, but the rich history of West Frankfort and the southern Illinois coal industry. Those items intertwine with stories of the 1948 Illinois State League Champions – the West Frankfort Cardinals – in *Season of Change*.

With his previous writing focusing primarily on academic research and textbooks related to athletic training and strength conditioning, Brooks found a pleasant surprise in departing from those genres to write *Season of Change*.

“This book has opened my eyes to how powerful and moving history can be,” he said. “The stories I discovered in researching this book convinced me that I just had to write it.”

Brooks said he expects *Season of Change* to be published either in late 2011 or early 2012. In the meantime, he has established the Web site [www.westfrankfortcardinals.com](http://www.westfrankfortcardinals.com), and plans to add a wealth of information on the team and the town this summer.

As to his decision to attend Southeastern, Brooks said that he understood the appeal of going straight to a four-year college, both wanting to do so as a freshly minted Pope County High School graduate, as part of his "escape," and now, seeing all the friendships his wife built at the four-year university she attended from the start.

“However, I simply wasn’t ready for that emotionally, and likely would have transferred back had I tried to go (to a four year school) right out of high school,” Brooks said. “Throw in the small class sizes and tremendous cost savings, and it is clear that SIC is the perfect choice for a student like I was.”

Brooks said the level of personal attention he received at Southeastern planted the seed for his interest in writing. His first college class was an English 101 course taught by Jonah Rice – who now serves as SIC’s President.

“My high school English teacher, Wilda Young, had really encouraged me to write and helped lay the foundation, but Dr. Rice really stoked the fire,” Brooks noted. “His encouragement and teaching so connected and resonated with me. He really cared and was invested in his students’ success.

“Education and knowledge are great, but it was that genuine concern he had that still makes me thankful to this day that I went to SIC.”