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FRED McCAIN  
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas  
Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello  
Randy Cummings  
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Oral History Collection

Fred McCain

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello      Date of Interview: April 2, 1984  
Mr. Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello and Randy Cummings interviewing Fred McCain for the North Texas State Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on April 2, 1984, in Denton, Texas. We are interviewing Mr. McCain in order to get his reminiscences and experiences during the integration of North Texas athletics. More specifically, we're going to talk to him about the coming of the first two black football players--Abner Haynes and Leon King.

Fred, to begin this interview, just very briefly give us a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell us when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. McCain: I was born in Gainesville, Texas, on January 7, 1923. I went to school in Gainesville--at Gainesville High School--and played football there. I played five years in high school because at that time, if you were under eighteen years of age prior to September 1, you could come back for another year. Of course, all the people were doing that, so they would give us an incomplete on one section of whatever it

might be, and in my case it was English.

So there was five of us that came back, and we thought we were going to have a pretty good ball club. The year before, we were 9-0-1 and lost the district. We had a tie with Sherman, and they won it on penetrations. But in our fifth year in high school, we'd run out of gas and had some injuries, and then Joe Gibb and I...Joe and I grew up together in Gainesville, and we went to...in fact, I had a scholarship to Centenary. I went to Centenary in January of 1941, but I didn't stay there but about ten days. I didn't like it, and I guess I was pretty lucky because Centenary dropped football the next year.

The war came in at that particular time, so I came back. Then in the spring, Joe Gibb and I went to Hardin-Simmons to try out for football. At the time, Warren Woodson was the head coach there, and we spent a week there. They liked us, and they offered a scholarship to us.

But then we had, I think, thirty-five cents in our pocket, and we was coming home from Abilene, Texas. We hitchhiked and some fellow picked us up and stopped us in Fort Worth, and we went down to the old original Mexican food place, I remember. He said, "Go in there and order." He said, "I'll come pay for it." Well, we had thirty five cents, and we thought, you know, "If this guy doesn't come back, what the heck are we going to do?" So we sat there

for about an hour while he was conducting some business up in the hotel. When he came back, he said, "Why didn't you order?" We said, "Well, we didn't have any money. We didn't know whether you was really going to pay for our meal." He said, "I'd be back."

But, anyway, then we came back, and then my brothers had all gone to school here at North Texas, and they said, "Why don't you come talk to Jack Sisco down at North Texas?" And I said, "Fine." So we came down and talked to Sisco. Sisco was a very big fellow. He said, "Well, yes, you guys come from a good school, but you're awfully small. I don't believe...but I'll give you a chance."

This will just show you how green we were. We had an actual scholarship offered to us from Hardin-Simmons, but we came down here just to try out again. Of course, as it turned out, we did make the ball club and stayed then here through the years and came back after the war. We had a chance to go to Waco at the time. They wanted us to come to Waco to Baylor University, and we didn't go there. We came back here and finished up, and I'm glad we did.

Then I taught two years...I coached two years in Gainesville in the season of 1948 and the season of 1949. Herb Ferrill and I came here in August of 1950, and we've been here ever since.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up and talk a little bit more about your

youth and, more particularly, that time that you spent in Gainesville. What was the general attitude in the community, as best you can remember, with regard to blacks and race relations in general at that time?

McCain: Well, right behind us in the next block was black people. We had a black woman who was our maid, if that's what we would call her, but she was Aunt Julia to us. I was forty-five years old, and she was still calling me "the baby": "How's 'the baby' doing?" I ran with black kids. I knew there was segregation. We played football against each other, you know, tag football, marbles, and we fought among us. It was not unlikely for us to go down and have a fight.

There was segregation. I remember a story...I guess I was in New York City, and I was going to midshipman's school, and we were going to Philadelphia with some friends. There was four of us. When we got on the bus, there was five seats left on the bus, so we all sat down. By me there was an extra seat, and I could see that up in front of us, at the next bus stop, there was three blacks. Well, obviously, one of them was going to have to sit next to me, and I became more aware of segregation when I went up North than I was down South. I don't think I ever noticed it down South. We didn't have buses in Gainesville, I can assure you. We had wagons. But, anyway, just to keep from being involved, I got up and stood by my friends and talked to

them whenever we got to the next stop.

On the ship we had...we were segregated on the ship. We had a cook and we had what we called a mess boy that served us. I was an officer in the Navy. They only had certain jobs that they could do in the Navy.

After the war, the first two years, I don't think I ever thought too much about it, really, quite frankly.

Marcello: How large a black population did Gainesville have back in that time? You would have to estimate that, of course.

McCain: Oh, we had, I would imagine, a thousand people there or more--a pretty big black settlement there.

Marcello: And what was the population in Gainesville?

McCain: Oh, maybe 10,000. I might be fudging a little bit, but it was close to 10,000.

Marcello: Where did they go to school, in particular, high school?

McCain: At their own school. They had their own school.

Marcello: Was there a black high school in Gainesville?

McCain: Yes, sure. I don't remember the name of it right off-hand.

Marcello: You mentioned that you used to play with black kids and so on. How long did that continue, that is, up until approximately what age?

McCain: Oh, until I went to college.

Marcello: Did they for the most part live in one particular section of Gainesville?

McCain: Yes, we had two sections that they lived in. One was right

behind us. I lived sort of on the east side, and there was a settlement back in there along the railroad tracks--three or four streets that they lived on--and then there was a large section over in the northwest part of town that they lived in. That's where the schools were. We had some black athletes out of Gainesville that had gone to black universities before the war, and, of course, all of us who were supposedly athletes looked up to them because, heck, the Stone boys were at Texas Southern or Southern University and going to college. And they really were good people. They could run like heck. They were good athletes. We played pass-and-tag all the time, and it was a thrill to play with them.

Marcello: Did you ever go to any of the black high school football games when you were growing up in Gainesville?

McCain: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, everytime they had a football game, we went. They didn't have many rules at that particular time. They had a guy named Manuel Fitzpatrick. Manuel was about 6'3" or 6'4" and could throw the ball probably ninety yards and punt it that far. He would perform at the halftime at the white games--throwing it, you know, eighty yards and punting it eighty yards. Of course, each year he came back and played for the colored school there. You know, they'd just sign him up even though he didn't go to school. I'm sure he was twenty-five years old when he was still playing. But he was a great athlete; I mean, he was big and strong



and fast. He could do everything.

Cummings: Were there ever any problems with the white kids going to the black high school games?

McCain: Oh, no. Oh, the white people went to the football games. It was interesting football and pretty good football--for that period. Now you've got to remember that we're talking about in the middle 1930's. There wasn't many good football players anyplace...oh, there was, too. Gainesville always had a pretty good football team, and it always has been a good football town. They went to the bi-district in 1936 and went back again in 1938. As I say, we were 9-0-1 in 1939 and didn't get out of the district. We didn't win the district because of a tie. Then in 1940, we weren't very good. I don't know what we were, 6-4 or something like that, not good enough to even get out of the district.

Marcello: As you look back, how would you describe the relationship that existed between the black and the white community in Gainesville during that period when you were growing up? Were there tensions? Was it a cordial relationship?

McCain: No, there was never any tensions that I can ever recall. I don't ever remember an incident. I'm sure there were, but I probably was so naive that I didn't know it was happening. I knew that there was segregation in the theaters, and they had to go upstairs. I know that in restaurants they had to sit back in the kitchens. Of course, I knew that. Of course,

there was drinking fountains--a white and a black. But that's about all we had in Gainesville. There wasn't anything else you could be segregated over. They couldn't go to the parks.

Cummings: Did you ever question that either to your parents or your peers in high school as to why that was?

McCain: No, not that I know of. I think I thought it was just part of life. I knew the sun comes up and the sun goes down, and I didn't question that either.

Marcello: What was the attitude of your parents toward blacks at that time? Do you recall?

McCain: Well, again, Aunt Julia worked for us for thirty-something years and was part of the family. My mother took care of ...Aunt Julia had several children and grandchildren that she took care of that my folks contributed to. We had a black person that worked for us. We owned a machine shop and a farm implement business, and during the war this fellow, Walter Ferguson, came to work for us, and he was ...not all black. He was a very, very good person. He was sort of our foreman working for us. In the latter years my father got very, very sick, and Walter and my mother ran the business. Walter would sit up at night with my father during the last few months of his life and worked in the daytime. But he was special to us, and I don't guess we looked at him as a black. You know, he was so good to us.

Marcello: Well, I think that's important in answering my question, though.

McCain: I don't think...well, you know, segregation...we knew it was there, but we never made any issue of it. We had fights, but it wasn't over segregation. It was over somebody cheating in marbles, you know, or something like that.

Cummings: Do you think the black kids had the same attitude toward it as y'all did?

McCain: I really don't know. I suppose they probably just accepted it. I don't really know.

Marcello: Was there any organized athletic competition between the black and white schools?

McCain: Oh, no. That was total segregation. They did use our field, and, of course, as so often happened, we'd give all of our old equipment to them. That's all they ever got, which was totally unjust. But, again, that's the way they did it. Whatever used equipment we didn't want, then they took it.

Marcello: This is kind of off the subject and out of sequence with what we're talking about, but you just brought up something that, I remember, came up in previous interviews. Did North Texas ever give any of its equipment to Fred Moore? Do you recall that occurring after you came here?

McCain: Yes. I vaguely remember that we gave them some uniforms. I can't remember when, though.

Marcello: Well, again, it was kind of off the subject we're talking about, but I wanted to ask.

McCain: I know that happened. I don't remember the details of it, but I know that we did give away some of our equipment, and then, of course, it became prohibited because of state regulations. You can't give away state property. You can burn it, but you can't give it away. I think one time we burned nothing and gave it away, anyway.

Cummings: Compare the style of the football that was being played when you were in high school and at your high school and across town at the black high school.

McCain: Well, there was still a little showboating. You know, they would come out and maybe do a forward roll out of the huddle and line up. Our football--white football--was very straight; I mean, there was one offense and one defense. The blacks would do "styling," is what they call it now, where, you know, they would turn a flip coming out of the huddle and line up.

Cummings: They'd do a flip coming out of the huddle?

McCain: Yes. You never have seen them do that? Well, they turn around out of the huddle and just do a forward somersault, and they'd line up on the ball.

Cummings: Was this just part of the show that they put on?

McCain: It was just routine. It was just what they called "styling." You'd ask, "What are you doing?" The guy would say, "I'm 'styling.'" Haven't you ever heard that?

Cummings: No.

- McCain: They were "styling." Sometimes a guy would intercept a pass, and he'd do the long, stretch-leg running--he's "styling." I guess that's a forerunner to the "quake" in the end zone and all that stuff. I don't know.
- Cummings: I guess it's kind of undisciplined then.
- McCain: Totally undisciplined. It was just like somebody took them and put them in sort of a uniform and played and had no rules or no regulations. They did have a black UIL, but didn't clean up all their act until...of course, the whites were doing as much recruiting in the early 1920's and the early 1930's as anybody else was. I mean, Mitchell did the same thing when he was in Pampa. They'd go out and recruit people. Breckenridge has done it for years. They'd bring them in there. They're oilfield workers, but their kids are pretty good athletes, too.
- Cummings: Some of that stuff that you'd see in the black games, boy, if you tried it in your practice...
- McCain: Oh, you wouldn't dare.
- Cummings: It's a "no-no."
- McCain: Well, you never even thought about talking back to a coach. That just wasn't done. It might have been done someplace, but not where we were. If the coach said run, you ran. It didn't make any difference. We worked out nine months of the year. We started working out when we came to school in the fall. Well, we actually had two weeks of camp. Then

when the season was over, we just kept on working out through the whole entire year.

Cummings: What did you white kids think of that brand of football the blacks played back then?

McCain: Oh, well, we thought it was funny. You know, I say the word "funny," but that's not probably... "styling." You know, it was like going back to Manuel Fitzpatrick. He could throw the ball eighty yards easy, and he could punt it eighty yards, and he could kick it off a hundred yards. He was a super, super athlete, but there was no place for him to go. I'm sure he didn't get out of high school even though he went to high school probably ten years or twelve years.

Marcello: Now when did you actually start at North Texas? You mentioned that awhile ago.

McCain: Well, I came here in the fall of 1941. I played in the season of 1941 and the season of 1942, and then I went into the service in 1943, 1944, and 1945. I came back in June of 1946, and I was a little emaciated. I think I weighed 140 pounds at that time, but I'd spent twenty-one months on a ship, and our food wasn't the very best. We got down to rather meager meals, and then being on an LSC, they didn't cater to you very much.

I came back in 1946, and all of us were veterans, of course, and it was horrible. We hadn't done anything in three years, and we went out and played Texas A&M the first

ball game, and, goodness, did they eat us up! But as we began to play...hey, most of us had not done a thing in three years other than just being in the war. We began to get a little bit better and a little bit better and a little bit better, and we finally came up to the last ball game, and it was the championship of the Lone Star Conference at East Texas. Of course, they were picked by twenty points or more to beat us, and we beat them 47-6. We beat the hell out of them. We was in the T formation. That was Mitchell's first year, and we just ran through them like a dose of salts. That 1947 team was a good ball club. We were good in 1947.

Marcello: So when you came here in 1941, Jack Sisco would have been the coach then. Is that correct?

McCain: Yes.

Marcello: Describe what kind of a coach he was.

McCain: Oh, he was a mean son-of-a-bitch! But a lovable guy. Whenever he said, "Run," I promise you everybody else had already been running. You didn't wait for it to echo. He was very physical. He hated women during the season. If you were walking with a girl and he saw you, hell, you ran. You didn't want him to see you because he was liable to cut you off a scholarship. That scholarship cost...we got \$18 a month. That's how much we got, and, of course, we could buy meals at "Greasy Lee's" for \$12.50 a month--three meals

a day. We could get a room for \$2.50 a month. So we had about \$2.50 a month to spend, which is really a lot. You could get by pretty easy then. No cars. You didn't have to worry about cars. If you went someplace, you walked.

Marcello: You could get your meals at "Greasy Lee's"?

McCain: Yes, for \$12.50 a month. If there was thirty-one days in a month, on about the twenty-ninth he'd give you good food, the twenty-ninth, thirtieth, and thirty-first to encourage you to come back the next month. But, boy, in between those, things were lean. Dang!

Marcello: This was a restaurant here?

McCain: Yes, a little restaurant.

Cummings: Here on campus?

McCain: Well, just right over here on Fry Street.

Marcello: So Sisco was quite a disciplinarian then?

McCain: Yes, and he was a good, honest person. Don't misunderstand me. He wasn't really mean. If he said it, you were going to do it. Of course, everybody loved him. Everybody was scared of him, too, because he was a giant. Of course, at that time, even though we had two other coaches with him, he was the coach. You just had usually one coach, and he coached everything.

But I know we played SMU the first ball game, and they beat us pretty bad. We actually had a good football team. We were freshmen. I remember he called me down around the



beginning of the second quarter, and he said, "Come here."  
He said, "Sit down and pee in your pants." He said, "I'm  
going to send you in." My eyes were as big as saucers.  
When he called me, I thought he wanted me to go up in the  
stands and get a coke or something like that (chuckle).  
Anyway, I played nearly three quarters of the ball game  
because he got mad at the seniors, see. They weren't doing  
what he wanted done, and he put them all on the bench.

After the ball game was over, he canceled...we had a  
meal there in Dallas, and he canceled that and said we were  
going to go back to Denton and eat. So we came back to  
Denton, and at that time the Eagle Cafe was on the west side  
of the square. They had a room upstairs where they could  
just feed us. So we went upstairs, and somebody got through  
eating and started to leave, and he said, "Hey, wait a minute!  
Don't any of you leave!" He said, "Don't any of you leave  
until all of you get through eating!" Everybody got through  
eating, and he said, "Okay, boys, I'm going to tell you  
something." There's a stairway on this thing going out the  
back way. He said, "You go down the stairway, and you walk  
down Oak Street." Hickory was the main thoroughfare then.  
He said, "You walk down Oak because I don't want anybody to  
think that you're football players, because you're not."  
He said, "Tomorrow is Sunday, and you better go to church  
and give your heart to God because your ass is mine on Monday."

On Monday we worked out until six o'clock, and he said, "Be back here at seven." So we came back at seven, and we worked out until ten o'clock. Of course, some of the seniors said, "Hell, if we don't win this week, I'm quitting." And he did work us unmercifully. But punishment was a phase of improving. At that time we all understood that, and I think that was part of everybody's life at that time. We did beat Hardin-Simmons, and I think we were 8-1 that year.

Marcello: So you went into the service in 1942?

McCain: In 1943, actually. I joined in 1942. You could join the Reserves, and then they would call you up when it came time for you to go to midshipman's school or OCS or whatever it might be. I joined the Marine Corps and was sent to Rustin, Louisiana, and it was hot over there. Louisiana Tech now is a very beautiful school, but at that time it wasn't a very pretty school--old, rundown dorms. Hotter than hell. No air conditioning at all. Of course, nobody had air conditioning then.

Cummings: Other than the change in head football coaches, what kind of changes did you see in the whole football program and the players and so forth from these first couple of years after you returned?

McCain: Well, even the second year...Lloyd Russell was our coach during the second year. He had played ball at Baylor University, and we instituted the T formation whenever he

came up, but we weren't going to use it until we got into the conference play. The first two or three ball games, he was actually trying to...his whole thing was to win the conference. So we didn't display the T formation until the beginning of the conference. I was a quarterback, and I really thought I was pretty fast, but I was about like a turtle. I couldn't even outrun my footprints. But I remember that on a T formation quarterback sneak, I'd run eighty yards. I don't think they ever knew what happened to them. I'd just run right up the middle eighty yards for a touchdown. Lloyd used to say, "You're the only guy that if you were going to take a picture, you don't have to slow it down to see it because he's in slow motion to begin with." But it was a little innovative. This was in 1941, and we had a single wing formation, but our blocking back was also our quarterback. We would get up by the side of the center as if we were the forerunner to the T formation quarterback. Then the next year we did get into the T formation with Lloyd Russell.

Then in the season of 1946 and 1947, Mitchell was a strictly T formation person. He was innovative. I think he was one of the forerunners in doing things. We did motion and that type of thing, so it was risqué', I guess, at that particular time--flankers and different formations.

Marcello: By the time the 1942 football season rolled around, was the

team beginning to be decimated by that time?

McCain: Oh, total. Yes, we were pretty poor.

Marcello: Had a lot of those guys already gone into the service?

McCain: Yes, some of them had gone to the service. See, after December 7, 1941, well, the next spring, they began to sign up. We signed up for the Marine Corps, I remember, on November 28 or 29 of 1942 and sang the Marine Corps hymn all the way back to Gainesville. We went over to Rustin, Louisiana, and got so discouraged that Joe Gibb and I went AWOL, and they didn't even miss us. We came back the next day, and they didn't know we'd been gone. We weren't very important (chuckle). We were supposed to go to OCS school, and OCS school was full at Quantico, so they were going to put us back another four months. So they said, "We'll tell you what we'll do. We'll give you a thirty-day leave and let you go join the Navy." We said, "We'll take it." We didn't know what the hell the Navy was about.

So we took a thirty-day leave, and I went to Columbia University, and Joe went to Northwestern. You talk about a country boy going to a big city. God! I remember we were over in New Jersey, and we rode a subway across the river and went underground, and we finally marched up the top, and, hell, we're right in New York City and marching down the street. I'd hit the big time.

Cummings: A country boy in a big city.

McCain: I was there for five months and never could get the right subway going back to Columbia University. I'd wind up in Harlem.

Marcello: When you came back...let me ask you this, first of all, since we're talking about the subject of integrating North Texas athletics. Did you have very much contact with blacks once you went into the service? You mentioned that aboard ship you had mess attendants and that sort of personnel who were black?

McCain: We had two blacks. We had two blacks. Actually, we had two black cooks and a mess boy. One of the cooks said, "When we go through the Panama Canal, and when I get to San Diego, I'll have gonorrhoea and I won't go any farther than that." Ten days outside of the Panama Canal, our pharmacist's mate put him on the sick list because he showed all the signs of having some venereal disease, and he got off the ship in San Diego.

Marcello: But I do think we do have to remember that all the services were segregated at that time.

McCain: All the services were segregated.

Marcello: And I think even within each service, there were only certain slots for blacks such as commissaryman and mess attendant and stuff.

McCain: Cooks, yes, yes. Our mess attendant was named Lee Miller. On the ship, you know, when we were overseas, the officers had to read all the letters and censor them. Then we would

stamp it and sign it on the outside. What we didn't like, we cut out. Lee's letters always were the same. His first was, "Hellohowyougetalong?"--one word. "Hellohowyougetalong." Lee was a little ol' dapper black. I don't know how big he was. He weighed maybe 135 pounds, but he was extremely strong. He was from over in North Carolina and that area there. Nice looking. I remember one time he had some trouble. The crew beat him up one time because he got over there, and he got our food before...just broke in line and got the food. We only had one stove on the old ship, and what we told him, "Hey, you either got to serve us before or you've got to serve us afterwards. Don't walk in the line there." Of course, they kicked his ass pretty good, so he never did that again.

I remember we was over on northern Luzon one time, and, of course, the crew can always find girls. I don't give a damn if they were in Alaska--they could find girls; or if they was in hell--they could find girls. Anyway, Lee came in one morning, and he was peeled. He had got a couple of gals over there, and the native girls liked him better than they did the whites. Of course, the whites thought he was taking them away from them, and they really peeled his face pretty bad. I remember that. They didn't damage him, but they really beat the hell out of him.

I know that when he was on air raids, he was a loader

--ammunition--and you couldn't work him down.

Cummings: Was that probably the first incidences of really bad friction between blacks and whites that you can recall in your life?

McCain: That's the only thing I can recall offhand. I don't remember anything else that was like that.

Marcello: But, first, you've got to be careful when you say "friction" because had a white guy jumped in that chow line, he'd have probably been taken apart, too.

McCain: I think he would have been, too, yes. We only had five officers on the ship, and we had a wardroom that was a little bit bigger than this office that we all slept in. Then we had a table we worked on and did all of our work. Then we had a little ol' coffee thing where we could make coffee. Lee would serve us our meals. Then, of course, he would make up our beds and do our laundry for us, too.

Cummings: Well, after the war, when you got back to North Texas and finished out your playing career, I know the North Texas team was still segregated then, but did you play any teams that had black players on them at that time?

McCain: No, we didn't play them in 1946 or 1947, but in 1948, I guess, when we played the University of Nevada, they had a black, I think. I really can't remember. Leon Heath was their quarterback,..I can't remember.

Cummings: Do you recall the team, the players themselves, talking about

the fact that they were going to play a team that had blacks on it?

McCain: Well, I don't think in 1946 or 1947 we ever thought about that at all. A lot of us had had some bad war experiences, and I think we were just glad to be back, you know, and drinking red soda pops.

Marcello: When you came back, was your scholarship still good at North Texas yet?

McCain: They offered me a scholarship yes.

Marcello: I see.

McCain: We had a scholarship offer to Baylor University--Joe and I did. The fact is, we had a fifty-dollar bill in an envelope and a bus ticket. We was pretty good, I guess. Frank Kimbrough was the head coach there. "Jarring John" Kimbrough, who was at Texas A&M, was his brother. But Frank Kimbrough was the coach at Baylor University, and he later went to West Texas State. But we had a bus ticket and a fifty-dollar bill, but we didn't want to go to Baylor. We didn't know anybody in Baylor, and neither one of us were very intelligent, and we'd have to learn all the faculty again so we could con them into a passing grade.

Cummings: Kind of go into the process of how you got your first job up in Gainesville.

McCain: Oh, me. Of course, I wanted to get into college coaching, and I had no master's degree. I got my B.S. degree in



January of 1948, and then I got my master's...it might have been in August or January of 1949. I don't remember when it was. But I didn't lack but just...the only thing I lacked, when I got out of college, was my thesis. And I signed up and took it and then wrote that. I don't remember how long it took me, but it wasn't very long. See, when I came back after the war, I probably had close to ninety hours in school then. Of course the people in Gainesville knew me, and they wanted me to come up there. But Chillicothe, Texas, they wanted to meet me in Gainesville, Texas, at the Kerner Hotel, which was a pretty big hotel...it was a nice hotel at that time. The school board and the principal came down to see me, and they wanted me to be the head coach.

Cummings: Where is this now?

McCain: Chillicothe. Chillicothe is out there going toward Vernon and that area. I said, "I don't have any experience. I don't want to be head coach." They said, "Well, yes, you do, too. We're going to help you be head coach." I said, "No, I don't want to be head coach. I want to get some experience." They said, "Hey, we'll help you." And they were trying to tell me I wanted to be a head coach, and I was trying to tell them I didn't want to be. So finally, I did not accept it, and I think probably I did the right thing. I knew I didn't have any experience. I was twenty five-years old, but I still didn't have any coaching experience.

I could probably have stumbled through it, but I didn't want to go through that. I wanted to get in the process where I could find a pretty good base to move from.

Of course, all the people in Gainesville had been following my career, and they wanted me to come up there and be an assistant coach. That was my first taste of where you get into a little politics. Some of the school board said, "Well, we had to have you back up here because we wanted to get rid of the other guy." I thought, "Oh, me! What have I gotten into now? I don't want to be a part of this." So I told the coach what had happened. I said, "Hey, I don't want to be any part of this, but I want you to know I'm on your side. I don't want to play games." And we never had any problems. As I said, that was my first experience where they really tried to divide you up. Even the school board was trying to divide up the staff.

Cummings: So after your two years at Gainesville...

McCain: Well, Mitchell called...and Dee Walker did. Mitchell and Dee Walker needed some help, and so we came down here. We came in August of 1950, and I know we got \$3,300 for the year. But that was more than I was making. My first year in high school, I made \$2,175 a year. My wife made \$2,200-and-something over in Fort Worth and wasn't even coaching. I guess that's why I married her. She was making more money than I was making.

Cummings: So you were hired by Coach Mitchell specifically for what area? Quarterback coach?

McCain: Freshmen and offense. Of course, at that time we were still playing one-platoon football. Herb Ferrill was the line coach, and I was the backfield coach, basically for the freshmen.

Cummings: So when you and Herb came, that made it a four-man staff?

McCain: Four-man staff, yes. We made a four-man staff.

Marcello: Describe the process by which this all came about. Think back, if you can, how you got the telephone call or however you were contacted by Coach Mitchell about coming up to North Texas. Do you recall anything about that?

McCain: Well, Dee Walker was the one that contacted me, if I recall correctly, and wanted me to come down and talk to them, which I did. They were a two-man staff, and they just needed help. They were using part-time help. They were using the golf coach part-time and the track coach part of the time, and they wanted two full-time people, and they had to have a freshmen team. Of course, it was a thrill to me.

Cummings: I'll bet.

McCain: This was what I wanted to do.

Cummings: Did you look at this move as a move to the big time at that time?

McCain: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, sure, it was, I mean, for me it was.

Marcello: Now when you came back from the service, like you mentioned

awhile ago, Odus Mitchell was the coach. Describe what kind of a person Odus Mitchell was.

McCain: A naive individual. I say that with a great deal of love and respect because I do love him and respect him a good deal. He had always been around high school kids, and, of course, you're dealing now with twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four-year-old kids because that's what we are. All of us had been drinking, and all of us had been smoking. Hell, when you shoot bullets out, you do a lot of things, and you really don't worry about it. He didn't handle any of those problems.

He let Dee Walker. Dee was a veteran. He was a captain in the Marine Corps, so he was more attuned and younger than Mitchell. He was more attuned to knowing what we had done and also knowing that you're not going to die if you drink a beer or smoke a cigarette. He handled most of the problems like that. In fact, he handled all the problems.

Of course, Mitchell was a...the worst word that he's ever said was "crap," or "for craps sakes." That's all he ever said. I never heard him, in all of my years with him, say a four-letter word of any kind--"hell" or "damn" or anything. He was just a super guy.

Whenever Dee Walker left here and went to Amarillo as athletic director up there, then I assumed Dee's role of

handling the budget and the discipline and all the paper-work. Mitchell and I had, I thought, a rather good relationship because all the boys knew that he was straight-laced, and they knew he was a straight arrow. There was no doubt. So if I had a kid that had committed something that was, you know, not a real major offense but that you want to do something about, I'd say, "Hey, Randy, I'm going to think about it for a day or two, but then I'm either going to tell Mitchell or not. If I tell him, he's going to get after you. He's probably going to cut you off of scholarship, is what he'll do." That was my way of holding...we had a big hold over you because you knew that if I did, he probably would have cut you off. But he and I had already talked about the discipline. I'd handle discipline, and we'd see what happened. But he was aware of what I was doing. But it was a great hold for us to get the kids to do what we wanted.

Cummings: But even though he was so-called "straight-laced," I take it he had the respect of the players...

McCain: Oh, yes.

Cummings: ...and the admiration of the players.

McCain: Oh, yes. This is why it was such an easy thing for me to say, "Hey, if I tell him that I caught you drinking, he's going to run your ass off. You know that, and I know that." "Oh, Coach, don't tell him! Don't tell him!" I'd say, "Hey, I'm going to think about it for a day or two." Well,

I wasn't going to do anything to him, anyway, but it just kept the kids in line, knowing that "hey, you can't do this in front of him. He just won't put up with it. He'll run you off."

Marcello: During that period of time, that is, after you came here as a coach, where did you recruit the bulk of your ballplayers? From which section of Texas?

McCain: Well, Ken and Herb were...at this time, of course, Dee had left, and so then we hired Ken Bahnsen to come in. Ken, of course, was a tennis coach and Herb was a golf coach, and they didn't spend a great deal of time recruiting because of their sports. They worked the Dallas-Fort Worth area mainly, and then I worked the rest of the state. Mitchell would work West Texas because he was out of that area.

Marcello: How about East Texas? Did you get a lot of ballplayers from East Texas, like, Tyler Junior College and Kilgore?

McCain: Oh, yes. Tyler Junior College...I guess I must have recruited a hundred kids out of there. I don't remember how many from Tyler and Kilgore. I don't know how many. Wagstaff was the head football coach there, and, of course, that's where Bahnsen...I saw Bahnsen play, and then we came back and recruited Bahnsen out of Tyler Junior College in 1950. But Wagstaff had a good relation...Dee had established a good...of course, Mitchell coached against Wagstaff when he was in Marshall. But Wagstaff was a friend

of North Texas, and he was an alumnus from North Texas. I never looked at a film in my life from Tyler Junior College or any junior college. I'd go to "Wag," and he'd say, "Hey, Fred, take Bill, Tom, Dick, and Harry and leave those other son-of-a-bitches alone." And he would say that to the kids. I mean, boy, he was tough. Whoever he said to take, I took. I never looked back. I never looked at the films. This guy knew a football player when he saw one. If he didn't, then we was all wrong. I don't know, but we must have got maybe a hundred starters from Tyler Junior College. At Kilgore Junior College, if Joe Turner said, "Hey, take those two," I took those two and never looked back. I didn't have to look at films.

**Marcello:** So a large percentage of those teams, then, did hail from East Texas.

**McCain:** Well, now, of course, Tyler and Kilgore both recruited all over the United States. You've got to remember that Wagstaff was one of the most prominent coaches...and so was Joe Turner. Both of them were super basketball coaches. But "Wag" also coached football. Both of those two guys were known from the East to the West Coast. They got all kinds of kids in there--good football players, good basketball players.

**Cummings:** You mentioned a second ago that when Walker left, you took over a lot of the paperwork duties. When exactly was that that he left?

McCain: 1954.

Cummings: Okay, I know part of those duties that you assumed was the scheduling.

McCain: Well, no, Mitchell did the scheduling.

Cummings: Okay, when you got there at North Texas in 1950, was Ole Miss and Southern Mississippi and Mississippi State on the schedule? Didn't you play them regularly year-in and year-out?

McCain: Oh, yes, we played them regularly up until we became integrated, and then they couldn't play us because it was against the...

Cummings: That's what I was driving at. But they were on the schedule when you came back as a coach in 1950. They were already on the North Texas schedule.

McCain: No, no, we started playing them somewhere around 1951 or 1952.

Cummings: A couple years after you got there.

McCain: Yes. We played Ole Miss and Mississippi State and Mississippi Southern and Chattanooga. All of those were good teams. Of course, they told us that it was against the state law for them to play us: "We just can't play you." Of course, we said, "We can't come without them." Of course, we just severed our relations with them. Ole Miss was always very kind to us. I know Ken Bahnsen was always our scout, and I know that whenever he'd go over to scout at Ole Miss, Johnny Vaught would send whoever had scouted their opponent that particular day to talk with Ken and give him everything he wanted to know. They were always very kind to us.



- Cummings: You had a very good working relationship with them.
- McCain: Yes, they knew Mitchell real well. Everybody in the world knew Mitchell.
- Cummings: Is that right?
- McCain: I'd go to a NCAA meeting with him someplace, and guys would walk by...Bud Wilkinson would come across a room to say hello to him, and Bear Bryant and Duffy Daugherty and all those guys that were, you know, the big time. Then all the assistant coaches would come by and say hello to him. He'd say, "Hey, Fred, I don't know these guys' names, or I'd introduce you." And he didn't know them. But they were young coaches that liked Mitchell and knew of him.
- Marcello: I guess the Ole Miss game was quite a money maker at that time for North Texas.
- McCain: At that time, yes. I think we got \$20,000, which was pretty big money then. Yes, it was a pretty big thing for us.
- Marcello: That was quite a financial sacrifice, I guess, not to be able to play them after the program integrated.
- McCain: Yes.
- Cummings: How did Coach Mitchell react to those teams suddenly dropping North Texas when they were the good money makers and he apparently had a good working relationship with the staff there?
- McCain: Integration was coming about. We were already integrated, and they weren't. He just accepted it, you know, that they can't play us. It was against the state law to do it.

Marcello: On the other hand, I think this also says something about the North Texas coaching staff. Correct me if I'm wrong, but you could have very easily said, "Okay, we'll come and leave the blacks at home." You could have done that.

McCain: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But, hey, when you've got your horse, you're going to ride him. You don't leave him at the home. In this case, he wasn't about to leave Abner at home. He might leave the team at home, but he's not going to leave Abner at home. Yes, that's true. We could have done it. They said, "Hey, just leave your blacks at home."

Marcello: And that way you could have still picked up \$20,000.

McCain: Yes, but we'd have never had a chance to win, either. Oh, that's not true, either, because the year that Abner came in 1956, we actually had a super recruiting year. I think we had nineteen freshmen, and seventeen of them graduated. I won't miss it by over one or two. That's a hell of a percentage. One of those was injured; he spent another year. But we had a great year.

Marcello: Let's talk about that class of the 1956 year. Who were some of the guys that you personally recruited? Do you recall?

McCain: I don't remember.

Marcello: How about Vernon Cole?

McCain: Well, Mitchell and I worked on him for months. Vernon was a good basketball player and a good baseball player, and I remember we went to Lewisville to see him play and watched

him play baseball twice. Of course, his brother was here with us, too. Charlie Cole was here with us.

**Cummings:** Did Charlie have very much of an older brother influence on Vernon?

**McCain:** No, Vernon was a very independent individual. He was one of the better athletes I've ever been around. He could do it all. He could play football; he could play basketball; and he could play baseball; he was a super golfer. He just was a super athlete. Good, smart kid.

**Marcello:** Describe Vernon Cole as a person and as a leader.

**McCain:** Oh, man! Very strong, knowledgeable. He could perform on anything. He was intelligent.

**Marcello:** What kind of an influence did he have over the other players on the team?

**McCain:** Great leader. Whenever he said it, it was done. Whatever he said, they believed in him totally. He was an excellent quarterback and probably had as much knowledge about offense as anybody I've ever coached. He knew what we wanted to do, and he knew our plan, and he could carry it out. At that time, you know, you weren't doing much signaling to the quarterback. You'd talk to the quarterback and tell him what you wanted to do, and Vernon understood it probably as well as anybody I've ever coached. Steve Ramsey was probably as good on that knowledge. In fact, I've been blessed with ...I've had a lot of fun coaching at North Texas. I've had

a lot of good quarterbacks, among others. Basically, I worked with quarterbacks, and there were just a great number of quarterbacks that were really outstanding players.

Marcello: Everybody we've talked to--and this includes both coaches and players--have commented very positively about Vernon Cole.

McCain: Well, I'll tell you, all the players liked him, and as I said, he could do any damn thing. And he could probably whip everybody because he was an extremely raw-boned 190-pound kid. I mean, hell, if he'd put on weight, he'd have weighed 225, 235, 240. But he was a very stout 190-pound person. Just intelligent and low key. I'll tell you, the damn guy really couldn't run, but you couldn't catch him; I mean, he'd just run fast enough that you couldn't catch him. He didn't run very pretty, but you still couldn't catch him. He was married his last year or two. We had three or four married people, and a lot of the players gravitated toward them and would go to his house. He had a lovely wife.

In his last year or so of his life, you know, he was in such pain. I'd tell my wife, "I'm going to call him, but I'm damn sure not going to break down this time." I'd get me a drink or two and try to get fortified, and I'd call him, and we'd visit and make chit-chat and talk about things, and he'd finally say, "Fred, damn it, it hurts." Well, I'd just come unglued. I just didn't have no control there, and

I'd just bawl, and I'd apologize. But I know he was hurting pretty good because he and I were very, very close. We talked to each other very closely. But it was one of the saddest things I ever had to do. I wanted to talk to him every day, but, hell, I couldn't...I just would break down when I talked to him.

As an all-around athlete, he was probably one of the best I've ever been around in all the sports. He was a scratch golfer, and he was a good basketball player and a hell of a baseball player. Then he got to using a bow and arrow, and that's the way he hunted--with a bow and arrow--because of the sport involved in it.

Marcello: But on top of all these things, in terms of pure physical abilities and so on, he had those intangibles such as leadership, character, and all those things.

McCain: Yes. He didn't do many things wrong. He wasn't straight-laced, but he didn't smoke, and he didn't drink, and he didn't cuss. He just led by doing.

Cummings: And it didn't take very long that freshmen year before that leadership quality came out.

McCain: Well, I'll tell you, we had a little trouble. Vernon was going to quit school because he didn't feel like he was getting to play enough. This was his sophomore year. In his sophomore year, he wasn't getting to play very much, and he was rather displeased and didn't like it and

was going to transfer and so forth. We were struggling a little bit in 1957. We had a couple quarterbacks, and we never could make up our mind, and we were trying to play them...I don't remember all the details, but I remember that he was really displeased. We would visit a little bit about it, and, you know, you just got to take your time. It's going to happen. There's no doubt about that. You know it, and I know it, but we're going to have to take our time about it.

Cummings: So he hung it out.

McCain: Yes.

Marcello: Something else happened around this time that I'd like to get your comments on. North Texas was about to enter the Missouri Valley Conference.

McCain: We were in the Missouri Valley Conference.

Marcello: Now, normally, how long does it take to get the wheels in motion and then actually get into a conference? In other words, you can't decide one year you're going to get in the conference and get in the next.

McCain: We had been in the Lone Star Conference up to about 1949 or 1950, and then we got into a conference called the Gulf Coast Conference with Trinity and Houston and...I don't remember who else. But that folded, and the Missouri Valley Conference was interested in us, and I think it just took one year for us to get into that.

Marcello: What I was going to ask was this. If you got into the Missouri Valley Conference, you surely knew that you were going to have to play against teams that had black ballplayers, whether you played at Wichita or Drake or Cincinnati or whether they came here. Was that ever discussed very much perhaps in terms of problems it might create in those teams coming here with their black ballplayers?

McCain: Well, it would have been a problem, and there was a problem, whenever people came here with visiting teams. They couldn't have any place to stay. We'd put them down in what I call "across town" with a friend of ours named Pillie Miller. She worked over there...she was a fast cook person for the restaurant there on...well, now it's a bookstore on the corner of Fry street and Hickory. She was a friend of all of us, and all the veterans hung out in there. This was in 1946, and she knew all of us--who we was dating, who we was chasing, and who was doing this and who was doing that. Then after I came back in 1950, of course, there had to be someplace for them to stay, and so I called Pillie, and she said, "Yes," that she would take them. We had the Nevada team come in here, and Pillie and her husband, who was named "Chick"...he worked at TWU, and she worked as a fast cook over there, and she made good money. The inside of her house was very, very lovely and plush, and whatever new convenience that was out, she had. She was a very lovely

person and a very true person, and I took I don't know how many teams down there with the coach and the three or four blacks. She would give them a little welcome speech: "We are very proud of you as our people, and we're glad to have you in Denton here." Of course, they paid her. She got paid for it. I don't remember what it was now. I'd also ask her, if the players wanted some girls, you know, to arrange it. This was a common thing, I think, and it got to be pretty good because they stayed out all night.

Cummings: Wear them down.

McCain: Yes.

Cummings: When was the first year that you started doing this? Was this before Abner and Leon got here?

McCain: Yes, this was before Abner and them got here. This must have been 1953 or 1954 or 1955. I don't remember. Somewhere in there.

Marcello: That would have been when you played Nevada or someone like that because you don't get into the Valley until 1956.

McCain: 1956, yes.

Cummings: Was that Reno team probably the only team that came to Denton to play that had blacks?

McCain: No. I can't remember...if I could have a little chance to go through some papers, I could find that for you, but I don't remember right offhand.

Cummings: But there was several.



McCain: Yes, we took them there, and, of course, the word had gotten around to other coaches that "goddamn, if you go down there, don't let the kids get out of that house because they ain't any good." I remember the last time...I guess about the last time we did it because within the next year, you could stay in the motels. But you couldn't eat, you know, so that's another step that we had to take. I took the coach and the players down there, and I remember it was close to Thanksgiving. Pillie said, "Coach we have a lot of our young ladies that are home from school for the Thanksgiving holidays." He said, "Whatever you do, don't let these two guys out of this room. You keep them here until I pick them up tomorrow." On the way back, he said, "I've already heard about this stuff."

Marcello: I asked you this question awhile ago with regard to Gainesville, and I want to pursue it a little bit further with regard to Denton. What sort of a relationship had been established between the black and white communities in Denton at that time? Was it a cordial one? Was there friction?

McCain: When I came here in 1941?

Marcello: No, let's say during this period in the postwar years when you were here as a coach.

McCain: They had a good high school there--Fred Moore High School--and they were very successful with their football program. I think Mr. Redd was the principal over there, and he was the

fellow that ran it his way. Then, of course, they came along with Coach Collins over there, and he was an extremely straight guy. I mean, hey, you could do things, but you weren't going to be a bum. He doesn't put up with it now. He is sort of an assistant principal at the high school here. He was a beautiful person.

Of course, I happen to believe that blacks like discipline. I've never had a problem. I think they understand discipline, and I think they really basically want discipline. If you don't give it to them, then they'll run over you. But I've never had any problem with them at all. Of course, I just always said, "Hey, we're going to do it this way." There wasn't any arguments; there wasn't any debate; there wasn't any conflict. It was just, "Hey, it'll be done this way, period."

Marcello: At that time, did North Texas employ quite a few blacks either as janitorial personnel or cooks and things of that nature?

McCain: Janitorial and cooks, yes. That was about all.

Marcello: I guess it was probably a pretty good employer for blacks?

McCain: Yes. See, we had all the different dorms with all the different cafeterias, and then the custodial service. I have a friend of mine named Will Gray. Will was on the staff here, and we became friends in 1946. We used to take a lot of our old clothing and give it to him, and he'd

take it down to colored town and sell it. We just let him have it. Will then was working downtown on a tire, and the rim popped out, and he lost an eye. Then he went over on the security force at TWU, and then the last few years he's working at the First State Bank. He came by to see me. He and I are friends, and we've always been very close friends. But that's the only occupation, I think, in town that blacks... custodians basically were black.

Marcello: When you came here as a football coach, did you ever have a chance to go down and watch Fred Moore High play football?

McCain: No, I didn't. Mitchell worked Denton, like I think all head coaches should work their hometown. This is special to us, we think, in terms of coaching. This is Denton, and we feel like there is a very close relationship, and Mitchell did the same thing with Denton High School. We all watched Fred Moore High School play because he had a lot of athletes. They had great athletes.

Marcello: Describe what the football games you saw at Fred Moore were like.

Cummings: Had the games changed from what you saw in the early 1940's up in Gainesville over what they were during the 1950's?

McCain: Well, yes, there was good football then. I don't remember the guy's name. Garrett played there, you know. He was rookie of the year for the American Football League. They had some outstanding kids.

Marcello: How about in the pre-Abner Haynes period? Did you go down and watch football very much then?

McCain: Yes, we always watched. I think we always would watch any ball game. I mean, you know, in that profession you're looking to see what someone else does, and if you can steal one word of it or steal one play and then incorporate it into your system, then you would do that.

Marcello: Now in that pre-Abner period, when you went to watch a team such as Fred Moore play, did you ever say to yourself, "Hey, man, I wish we could recruit some of those good black ball-players out there."

McCain: Sure. I had a black friend of mine--and I don't remember his name now--in Gainesville. I don't believe anybody could ever outrun him. Boy, he was like the wind. We played pass-and-tag. We lost one ball game in three years. But this guy was so fast. He could run so fast. Of course, we were playing down on the creek bank where we had pie-shaped fields and whatever it was. I don't remember his name, but I believe that's the fastest guy I've ever been around in my life. He probably couldn't run a ten-second flat, but, I mean, at the time he was extremely fast.

Cummings: But even here in Denton, over at Fred Moore, there was some players who you thought...

McCain: Oh, yes. One of them or two of them went to New Mexico Highlands, and one went to Sul Ross that was a hundred-yard

dash champion of the NAIA. Then they had those Garrett boys and others, but those are right off the top of my mind. I remember that they were good athletes. They weren't very good students. Lawrence James was a super football player.

Cummings: What was probably the most popular black college or university in Texas at that time?

McCain: Paririe View A&M, I imagine. Then Texas Southern became stronger, and then Southern University over in New Orleans was very popular. Those are about the only three that I was fairly familiar with.

Cummings: When you came back to North Texas in the early 1950's, were there any blacks going to school at North Texas?

McCain: Yes, we had a black woman in 1952 that came over here, and I don't remember...I was under the impression...but I've read since then, you know, that the Lucy case was won over in Alabama, and that was supposed to be the thing that broke segregation, but we were integrated before she ever came in.

Marcello: Oh, yes.

McCain: We had people come to school, and at that time J.C. Matthews wouldn't let the press on the campus to talk to them. He said there was no need to. I thought it was a black person--black man--who was the first.

Marcello: I guess the first black students were graduate students. Is that right?

McCain: Yes, they were graduate students. Yes, that's true.

- Marcello: Tennyson Miller is the name that sticks in my mind as perhaps having been that first black.
- McCain: Okay, I don't remember, but we just didn't have any publicity about it. It went by, and there was no problem at all, as far as I knew.
- Marcello: Do you recall that court order in 1955 in which North Texas was ordered to integrate? This would be the case that reached the Federal District Court in Sherman.
- McCain: I just knew it happened. I was oblivious to it. It was out of my hands. I didn't worry about it. I think all of us knew it was going to happen. We were looking for it. We felt like we could recruit blacks. We lost a lot of blacks that we could have had, but we had a rule...
- Cummings: So when that court order happened, you as football coaches didn't look at it as, "all right, now we can get our hands on some blacks."
- McCain: Well, we had already been told, unfortunately, that we can't recruit them. They can come on campus, fine, but we're not going to go out recruiting. Matthews said that.
- Cummings: Now did he say that before this court order, or was it along during this same time?
- McCain: During this same time. I don't remember when exactly. He didn't mind if they came on, but we were not going to go recruiting them.
- Marcello: How did that all come about? In other words, once the court

order had come about, did the coaches then inquire as to whether or not this meant they could recruit blacks, or did J. C. Matthews take it on his own to let you know?

McCain: Yes, Mitchell talked with Matthews, and Matthews said that "they can play, but we're not going to recruit them."

Marcello: Okay, so maybe this is a good transition, then, to talk about the coming of Abner Haynes. Describe the scene when you first heard that a couple of blacks were going to try out for football. How did you get the word, first of all?

McCain: Abner's father had brought him up there and talked to Mitchell, and, of course, we knew that he was going to come to school in the fall, so we began to prep our kids. We said, "We are going to have two blacks come to school up here now." And some of them said, "Well, we're going to kill that son-of-a-bitch." But we said, "No, you're not going to do anything illegal now. That's not going to happen, I promise you. If you run him off...it's the same as anybody else. You can run him off, but you're not going to do it illegally. You're not going to do anything that's not right."

Of course, I remember Mac Reynolds, who was a very, very anti-black, and he even is probably a little bit still today. He said, "Well, I'll kill that son-of-a-bitch!" I finally got Mac to calm down enough and said, "Hey, run him off. That's fine. Run anybody off. That's fine. But you're not going to do it wrong now." Well, it didn't take but one day,

I think, for all that stuff to go out the window.

Marcello: Did you know that Leon King was coming, also?

McCain: Yes.

Marcello: Had you ever heard of either one of these two guys?

McCain: I had not. I knew who Abner was because he was a Denton person, and I knew he was a good football player, but I had never seen him play. We had already been told, "Don't recruit them."

Cummings: When Abner and...I believe it was his brother...or his father...

McCain: His father.

Cummings: ...brought him up to talk to Coach Mitchell, were you in the offices at that time at that meeting?

McCain: No, I wasn't.

Cummings: So you just heard about it from Coach Mitchell?

McCain: Yes, Mitchell told me.

Cummings: Did he get the staff together and say, "Well, guess what's happening, guys."

McCain: Well, we were the staff (chuckle). Well, I think we all knew it had to happen. There were so damn many good black athletes at that time. We couldn't go get them, which was the sad part.

Cummings: But it wasn't a case where he got the staff together and said, "They're coming, and we need to map out a strategy for how we're going to handle this,"



McCain: He was going to live over across town. There wasn't anyplace in the dorm for them to stay. We'd just cross that bridge when we got there.

Marcello: Now at that point, that is, when the staff found out that the blacks were coming, did they then in turn notify or talk to Dr. Matthews about this? Was there any contact that you know of with Dr. Matthews?

McCain: I'm sure Mitchell did, but none of us did.

Marcello: Now who was it that decided that they had to live off campus?

McCain: I don't know that anybody really decided. I think it was just, that there weren't any dorms. Of course, Abner didn't want to live in the dorm. The blacks didn't want in the... we could have moved them in the dorm way before they moved into the dorm, which was in 1964, but they didn't want to live in there. We were giving them their full ride, their full scholarship, and they were still staying in private houses. Finally, they got a house over here on the corner of Avenue C and Hickory. There's a brick house on the south-east corner, and they rented that for several years. They all lived in there. They all enjoyed it.

Marcello: Now did they also take their meals off campus as well?

McCain: Yes, yes.

Marcello: What was the deal when they came so far as giving them a full scholarship? Had you used up your quota of scholarships...it was kind of late when they got here, wasn't it, that first year?

McCain: Yes. They weren't on scholarships. They came on pretty fast. They were both good athletes. Leon was a good athlete. He didn't run as tight as Abner, and like so often happens, I think he probably had already peaked. He didn't want to sacrifice to remain at the level that he needed to remain. But they were both good athletes. Abner obviously was the superior one. Leon became self-satisfied, and I would call him now "noncompetitive." I don't think I called it that at the time, but now that I think about it a little bit more, he became noncompetitive. If you're noncompetitive, then you need to move on.

Marcello: Which, of course, is what he eventually did.

McCain: Yes, we took him off. I remember one time I was talking with Abner, and Abner says, "Why do you keep Leon King here?" I said, "For your company." He said, "Hell, I'm old enough to take care of myself. I don't need anybody with me."

So we took him off that year, and then we brought in two other blacks, Billy Joe Christle and Art Perkins. We got Art out of Fort Worth, and Billy Joe came out of Corsicana. Both of them were good football players. Art went ahead and played pro ball up in Canada. Billy Joe was the only black that we had through 1966 that didn't make the pros. But Billy Joe was little bitty. We called him "Peanuts," and he was tougher than a pine knot. You couldn't hurt him. But we're talking about 5'7", and he just wasn't big enough.

He went up in Canada, but he just didn't make it. But all the other blacks we had made pro ball. All of them were pro players.

Cummings: Did you get a chance to talk to some of the white players that maybe were still living in Denton that summer of 1956?

McCain: Yes, we talked to them all, as many as we could.

Cummings: Whenever you saw them?

McCain: Yes, and we told them we were going to have blacks, and we wanted to be careful, and we didn't want to have any kind of problems. If the guys didn't want him to stay, well, run him off. But it was the same as the other freshmen. If they don't want to play, run them off. We encouraged it.

Cummings: So by maybe word-of-mouth, do you think most of the white players knew it?

McCain: All of them knew it. There was not any doubt.

Cummings: So on September 1, there were no surprises among the white players.

McCain: No, they knew they were coming back, and there would be blacks. No, none whatsoever. After the first time we scrimmaged, there was no surprises. That ended all segregation right there.

Marcello: Describe Abner Haynes the first time you saw him. What did he look like?

McCain: Well, he had grace. He carried himself well. He was very positive, even as a freshman. He was very sure of himself.

I'll tell you, he was knowledgeable that he was in an integrated school.

Marcello: What do you mean by that?

McCain: Well, I mean, you know, he knew that he was a black in a very...one of two blacks in a white school. It didn't phase him, but he was well aware of it. To see him run was graceful. He was probably the best football player I've ever been around in my life. I've talked about Vernon being great, and I've talked about Joe Greene being great. All of them were great, but Abner at this particular time was so fantastic. Anytime he touched the ball, he could be on the scoreboard. He could score from anything.

Cummings: That first year, though, he really didn't have the physical appearance of being a quality player. Wasn't he rather skinny and bony?

McCain: No, he wasn't. I tell you, he had so much strength, and whenever you saw him scrimmage against us, he ran through us like a dose of salts. You knew damn well he was talented. You knew damn well he had grace. You knew he had talent. It didn't take you very long; I mean, even dumb ones like us could figure that out.

Marcello: What kind of a personality did he have at that time?

McCain: Open, positive. You've got to remember that he came from a preaching family. His father was a bishop, and his brothers are preachers. He was outward-going and willing to express

himself. He just played it real, real cool, if that's what we want to say. He didn't try to push or lean, you know, because he was doing this or he was doing that.

Marcello: How about Leon King? Describe what sort of a person he was.

McCain: Leon King was very, very introverted. I think he knew he was along for the ride; I mean, he was there because he was rooming with Abner. After the second year, we didn't keep him.

Marcello: You perhaps have answered my question, but I'll ask it, anyhow. Suppose Leon King had been the only black to come up here and try out for the football team in 1956. Do you think things might have been different?

McCain: I think probably he would have quit. I wouldn't have been surprised if he wouldn't have just checked it in and said, "It's not worth it to me," if he'd have been by himself.

I think it took somebody like Abner who was forceful and an outgoing person to begin with, and, as I said, he maybe didn't use the most perfect English, but he could express himself well. But that came from his father's side where they were all preachers. He'd listened to his father preach for years and years.

Marcello: We've also heard this said, that Abner could cope with prejudice better than Leon. In other words, if somebody called Abner a "nigger," it didn't bother him. On the other hand, it could really get to Leon.

McCain: Oh, yes. That didn't bother Abner. Well, I think that's because Leon was trying to put up a false front because I think he knew he was very short on athletic talent. I think perhaps that was a cop-out. But Abner was so sure... I don't mean he was cocky. He wasn't cocky. Not in my estimation was he ever cocky. He was just sure of himself. You know, some people are just sure of themselves.

Marcello: Most of the great athletes are that way.

McCain: Well, I think they are. I agree. There's a mystique there that just comes out. Right or wrong, it's there. He was a great athlete. He was absolutely a great athlete.

Marcello: Okay, the scene that we get is, these two blacks come to the field that first day by taxi, get out of the taxi, come across the field where here's all these white dudes waiting. Can you remember that scene, and if you can, can you describe it?

McCain: No, I can't remember that. It was about like that. I don't remember that. I guess I was trying to be nonchalant, myself, perhaps, and I think probably I remember it enough to say that I just didn't want us to have any kind of confrontation with our kids--none of the kids, you know, to go over and make an ass of themselves by doing something or saying something that wasn't called for.

Marcello: On the other hand, do you recall any of the white players, especially on the freshman team, who went out of their way

to welcome these two blacks to the team?

McCain: I would suspect that probably Vernon Cole did, and I really don't know that. I'm speculating now. But, you see, the freshman were all aware that they were going to have two blacks, and, of course, they worked together for two or three days by themselves. We didn't just throw them out to the lions because at that time we would keep our freshmen separate. We would do maybe some drills, but we didn't put them in there and try to bang them up because we didn't feel like it was fair to them. But I know that Ken had already said, "Hey, that son-of-a-bitch can play!"

Marcello: And Bahnsen had played with and against blacks in the NFL, had he not?

McCain: Oh, yes, yes. He said, "Boy, he can go!" There was no doubt about that. I don't remember how many days, but it was a few days before we ever did scrimmage. Whatever prejudice our other varsity people had, they did not have it again because they could see the writing on the wall: "Boy, this son-of-a-bitch can go in the dark,!" He was super. I'm telling you, he ran through us as just a freshman.

Marcello: They still might not necessarily like blacks, but they could recognize talent and that this guy would help them win ball games.

McCain: Yes. I remember whites that played ball with us that I really detested, but I did respect them as football players.

But as an individual, I just didn't like them. I didn't want anything to do with them. One guy in particular, wouldn't give you the time of day for him. But he was a hell of a football player, and so I would accept that. I'm talking about when I was playing. So I think that's true. I think that's true all the time. A lot of times you have hatred between two people, but, hey, I respect you because you're a damn good football player, you're a damn good basketball player, and together we're going to win. But that doesn't mean I've got to go with you.

Cummings: During those last few days before September 1, which was when you had your first workout, during those last few days when the coaching staff was getting all prepared and getting everything ready, do you recall any sense of edginess or fear that something might happen when Abner and Leon showed up?

McCain: Yes. I was afraid we might have some sort of an incident. I guess I've always been...I'm probably a total introvert. I'm happy back behind the scenes and always have been. I don't like confrontations. I don't like them, and I don't think they're necessary because I think we can all talk. I know that isn't always the logical thing to do, but basically I wanted to be sure that we had nothing that would have any kind of distaste to the townspeople or the school or the community.



Cummings: Do you think that feeling was prevalent among all four of the coaches?

McCain: I think all of us felt that way. We just knew it was going to happen. Let's just let it happen and don't make an issue, please.

Cummings: And that attitude came partially from President Matthews. Wasn't that kind of the way he felt about the situation?

McCain: Well, probably. We knew we had the makings of a pretty good ball club, and we just wanted to get it on with and get it that way. It was fun to compete in the Missouri Valley Conference. It was a nice major conference, and we felt like it was a plume in our hat to be able to play and win in there. We felt like we were getting good athletes to compete with them.

Marcello: To your knowledge did the boys in the press come around and try to give this event very much publicity?

McCain: I think it was probably the opposite. I don't think we tried to have too much PR. We just tried to let it happen. I think this is the way the university had done it all the way through: "It's going to happen. Let's don't make an issue. Don't bring the cameras on board. Don't follow the person with the press. Let them go to class. Let them go where they want to go."

Marcello: So in other words, when any publicity releases went out, there was never one to the effect that "North Texas Accepts

First Black Athletes," or "North Texas is the First School in the State to Integrate."

McCain: Oh, I'm sure we had some of that. I don't remember. But I don't think we were consciously doing it. I know we had some write-ups, obviously, but I don't remember them. I don't think we ever tried to hide it. We didn't try to promote it, though.

Marcello: During those first few practice sessions, did you observe some of the older guys testing these two blacks to see what they were made of?

McCain: Well, the first time we scrimmaged they tried to test them, but just like I said, they hadn't touched him yet. If you can't touch him, then you can say, "Hey, he's going to wear green and white, also. Let's get him up to the varsity status pretty fast."

Cummings: What were some of the ways that they tested back in those days?

McCain: Oh, they'd knock the hell out of you. You know, they'd catch you from the blind side or try to run over you and maybe clip you a little bit and elbow you. Just the normal dirty tricks that you try to do to somebody that you didn't like.

Marcello: Were you watching the conduct of any particular white ball-players and were ready to jump on them in case they did do any of this sort of thing?

McCain: Yes, Mac Reynolds. I was watching him very closely.

Cummings: He was, I guess, above everybody else as far as his anti-black attitudes.

McCain: He lives in Marshall right now, and he's not anti-black. He just thinks that everybody ought to have a "nigger." And he calls them niggers. He's a mean son-of-a-bitch. Hell, I bet he'd shoot them. He doesn't care. He's a very wealthy person, but he grew up on those things, and he'd fight them today. I was with him a couple of years ago, and he has a place out on Caddo Lake. Whenever we would go from the sporting goods store out to his camp, he reached in and took out a pistol. I said, "What are you going to do with that thing?" He says, "I'll tell you. We got to go down through a section here on the outskirts. They gave me some trouble there. If they do it today, I'm going to shoot 'em." I said, "Mac!" He said, "I don't give a shit. I'm going to shoot if they stop me! I'll shoot every Goddamned one of them!" And I know he would have.

But he likes Abner Haynes. He respects talent. I think everybody respects talent. I think that's the thing that all of our kids in 1956 could say: "Hey, the guy's got talent." It doesn't take anybody a miracle to know that. He just had so damn much talent.

Cummings: Do you recall that Abner Haynes-Mac Reynolds relationship over the course of the years ever growing into one of friendship?

McCain: Oh, yes, respect. Hey, you've got to remember that this guy is super, and I don't care who you are--you all know that he was a great football player. Just like I say, I don't care if you were purple, if you had this much talent, you've got to respect it. And he's on your side. Mac came around eventually. Mac tried to whip Joe Greene one time. Joe broke his arm (chuckle).

Cummings: Was that in an alumni game?

McCain: Yes. Mac was going to test him, and, of course, you've got to remember that Joe Greene is so big and so massive that you don't really...you know he's big, but you still don't know how big he is. He's a damn giant. Mac was a rough, tough East Texas kid, and he grew up fighting all his life. He was going to go over there and do some things to Joe, and Joe flipped him over there and broke his arm so damn easily.

But, anyway, Mac is a good friend of mine, a very close friend of mine. I know him because he's a heavy contributor, and he helped me when he was in junior college. I got all kinds of kids from him. He was at Tyler Junior College.

But he's wild. I went down to see him last summer, and he got to laughing. He said, "Boy, I'll tell you. Another guy and I stopped in some little ol' bar down there, and we was sitting there, and three or four smart kids-- young people--you know, twenty-five or thirty years old--were

mouthed off." Of course, this is just right down Mac's line. He got into a jawing match, and he says, "Hell, let's just fight." He said that guy beat him to death. He said he had knots on his face and his head and his back. He said he had knots all over his damn face. He couldn't believe it. He whipped the hell out of him (laughter). But he laughed about it. He is a good guy, and was tough. He was a good football player--very tough football player.

Cummings: Well, he was older, wasn't he. Wasn't he a sophomore or junior when Abner came?

McCain: Well, Mac would have been...yes, he was a junior.

Marcello: What sort of special qualities would Odus Mitchell have had to handle this situation, that is, the integration of North Texas athletics?

McCain: Just his normal make-up. Mitchell doesn't get totally excited. He's always in control of things. He might show emotions, but it's probably a put-on because I think he controls himself tremendously well. I said earlier that I handled all our disciplinary things, and you put the black hat on whenever you're going to send the kid home. We'd have an incident--something would happen--and we would discuss it: "How do you want to do it?" He'd say, "Well, let's do it this way." I'd say, "Hey, Coach, I don't mind, but I don't think that's the proper way to do it." I said, "I want to learn why you do it this way." He said, "I don't know, Fred." He said, "I remember one time out in Pampa that

this same thing occurred, and I believe we'll do it this way." I'd say, "Okay, but I don't think it will work." Well, of course, it would work just exactly like he said it would do--just totally. I wasn't questioning his judgement. I just wanted to know why, because if you're going to be in this thing you better have some reasons. If there was a case where it might be pretty tough, I wanted to be able to handle it--if I was ever presented with that thing.

But he just had an innate ability, I think, to see things and see the overall picture much faster than other people would see it. A better example of it would be Ken Bahnsen, who has a great talent for scouting football teams. He has a great talent. He can go to a ball game and see it and come back and tell you offensively their strength and defensively their strength. He's very good, excellent.

Cummings: While we're on the subject here of evaluating key people in this whole transition, let's talk about President Matthews. First, evaluate him as you remember him as a student, and then later as you got to know him as a coach.

McCain: Well Dr. McConnell was the president when I was in school here. I came here under McConnell.

Cummings: Okay.

McCain: McConnell was the president then.

Marcello: What kind of a person was J. C. Matthews?

McCain: A dictator. He bought everything. He bought the toilet paper. But we were a very small school, and I don't fault him for it at all. I really don't. I've heard some of my coaches say I'm a dictator.

Marcello: He knew everything that was going on at this school.

McCain: Absolutely. Everything. He knew what the custodians were talking about; he knew what the faculty was talking about. He knew everything, yes.

Marcello: Did he run the school by a series of committees or by a committee of one?

McCain: By a total committee of one. He does it just like I do-- the democratic way, which is the way I want to do it. We were a small school then, and I know he told us one time in a meeting, "We do not want outside help. We don't want outside funds helping us. We are funded by the state, and we don't need any other money."

Cummings: What were his views on intercollegiate athletics?

McCain: Just as a necessary evil. He knew as much about football as I do about chemistry, which is nothing.

Marcello: How did he dress back in those days?

McCain: Like a deacon (chuckle).

Marcello: Same as now--a three-piece suit, hat?

McCain: Yes. Of course, I think a lot of presidents don't know much about athletics. He did not know anything about athletics. I don't think he ever tried to kid himself that he did. It was a necessary evil for him.

Marcello: But he did have complete control of the school?

McCain: No doubt about it. Total. Yes.

Marcello: Now somewhere along the line--this may be jumping ahead, but, again, I don't want to forget this--somewhere along the line, is it not true that word comes down that you have a quota in terms of recruiting?

McCain: Sure.

Marcello: Does that come down from Matthews?

McCain: Sure.

Marcello: Of course, this is...

McCain: Not on paper.

Marcello: ...by word-of-mouth, yes.

McCain: It's not on paper. Sure, we could have two.

Cummings: Did it come down that first year when Abner and Leon showed up?

McCain: Yes.

Marcello: And how long did that continue to your knowledge?

McCain: Up until 1958, and then we got three.

Marcello: You have a good memory on that because we went back and checked the annuals, and that's exactly the way it takes place.

McCain: We got Billy Joe Christle and Art Perkins, so that gave us three.

Marcello: This must have created some kinds of problems, albeit good problems, on the coaching staff. You can recruit two of them, but now which two do you take?



McCain: Well, I'll give you an example. In 1960, we had Bobby Smith, who was playing for Corpus Christi Miller High School, and it was an integrated school. They were one of the integrated high schools, and Miller High School had really a super football team. He's playing, and they fly out to play at Midland High School, and they put on a hell of a show out there. Bobby put on a show by himself--the best football player they'd ever seen. He goes up to Wichita Falls and plays against Joe Golden. Joe told me, "Dadgum, I even told our players, they'd best get rid of him the first play. He can't stand the heat." He said, "Hell, he only made 270 yards that night rushing against them."

Marcello: And who was this guy?

McCain: Joe Golden. He was the head football coach. Yes, he won the state championship several years in a row and was a good friend of ours--a good friend of mine. Of course, both of them thought he was an absolute, super football player. Then we had Charley Taylor over at Grand Prairie, and Mitchell and I went over to see Grand Prairie, and at that time Boston "Pete" Grant, who's now the track coach at South Oak Cliff...Boston was there, and we talked to him, and Charley hadn't run the ball any. And so we talked to Boston at the halftime, and we said, "Hey, when's he going to run the ball?" He said, "We're going to let him run the

second half." Well, you've got to realize that the high school...what did they call it at Grand Prairie? It's a district over there in Grand Prairie. I don't remember, but that's where he went to school. It was a little ol' black school, you know, and here's a guy that's playing Class AAAA football, and Bobby had never been defeated in a high school 100-yard dash in integrated schools. So we chose Bobby Smith, and obviously, as it turned out, Bobby was a good football player, but you know Charley Taylor was obviously one of the greats.

Marcello: He was all-everything.

McCain: Oh, yes. But, again, you had to make a decision. Bobby played ball for us and played ball for the Buffalo Bills. In fact, Bobby and I are very, very close. Bobby Smith is probably a millionaire now. He owns half-interest in a 124-unit apartment house; he has a catering service that he services two companies that sells...he runs 500 meals at breakfast and the noon meal, and, of course, he makes a profit off of that. He has a washateria. He's an administrator for the Corpus Christi Public Schools. He's done a great job. I'm in love with him.

Marcello: What other problems did the integration of the football team create for you? That was kind of a nice problem, I guess.

McCain: Housing.

Marcello: Okay, talk about housing.

McCain: The only place that we were ever separate was in Memphis, Tennessee. I don't remember the year. It would have been Bobby Smith and A.D. Whitfield. It would have been somewhere around 1962--I think it was 1962--or it could have been 1963. We were playing Memphis, State, but we couldn't stay together. At that time we would negotiate the hotel for a room for \$2.50. Well, we can't pay \$2.25 a person. They've got to have \$2.50. I'm talking about \$2.50, you know. We were probably staying at a hotel there in Memphis for probably \$2.25 or \$2.50. We paid \$8 for the blacks to stay over in a motel. Of course, they knew it, and we knew it. We didn't have a choice. That's the only place we were ever separated, roomwise.

Marcello: I've heard it said that Memphis was perhaps one of the scariest cities to play in relative to this integration.

McCain: They hated your ass. They hated you. They hated blacks, and the population of Memphis is very big. West Memphis is totally black. Yes, at the ball games they'd holler things at you. Oh, geez!.

Marcello: Evidently, it was a more nasty sort of thing than, let's say, when you played at some country school or something.

McCain: It was blue collar workers, and they hollered, and they... oh, damn right. Oh, yes, vicious. Yes, we played at old Crump Stadium, and they had sort of a dugout there, and you

could walk underneath and go into the dressing room. Of course, they had it roped off, supposedly, for us, but those guys had a lot of "hooch" in them. They had some choice words for you. They didn't mind telling you.

In Houston we couldn't stay together there, but we'd eat together. So we solved that by going down on a pullman car. We stayed on pullman cars in the railroad station.

Marcello: So you could eat in the hotels in Houston, but you couldn't stay in the hotels.

McCain: Yes, at that particular time. This would be about 1958 or 1959. It would have had to be one of those two years.

Marcello: And Abner was on the team at that time.

McCain: Abner was with us, yes. It was probably 1958. I don't really remember. Either 1958 or 1959.

Marcello: Do things like that bring a team together?

McCain: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I think they resent it. If you've never been around blacks, and then suddenly you're thrown in with a guy that is super, super, you forget the color angle. I think most of us realized that there was a lot of whites that we didn't want to be around the same as there are a lot of blacks that we didn't want to be around. But, hey, there's a lot of whites we want to be around, and there was a lot of blacks we wanted to be around. I think that was part of the thing then, too.

Cummings: Getting back to that quota thing, I think you said in 1958

is when they...1958 or 1959...

McCain: I think it was, but you might give me a chance.

Cummings: And then 1959 when they allowed a third to come on? How did that easing of the quota come about? I mean, was there another verbal grapevine thing?

McCain: Yes. We had these two guys, and I really can't...Mitchell might recall. I can't recall. I don't remember how this happened. We kept three kids up through 1964, and I think it was 1964 when we began to get more blacks. I know we had a couple of blacks come out of Orange that came by here--6'5" or 6'6" kids. Their coach wanted them to go to school here, but we couldn't take them. They went up to Tennessee State and played and were All-Americans and everything.

Cummings: Would you tell these blacks that came to you and wanted to play exactly why you couldn't take them?

McCain: No, I don't think so. You're not going to show somebody your bad spots, and I don't think we would ever do that. We would talk around it or not mention it.

Cummings: Just say you used up all your scholarships.

McCain: Yes, we just don't have any scholarships left. Sorry.

Marcello: You mentioned, also, the scheduling difficulties that this created, and we talked about Ole Miss and some of the other Mississippi schools. How did this come about? In other words, did the North Texas coaching staff initiate the word,

that is, did y'all call Ole Miss and say, "Hey, we've got a couple of blacks on the team. What's the deal?"

McCain: Yes. Let them know that we did have blacks, and they let us know that they couldn't play us. It's sort of like that now. Whenever you try to schedule a 1-A school... we're a 1-AA school football-wise, and if we try to schedule a 1-A school, they won't play us.

Cummings: You mentioned Memphis and Houston as being the two big problem areas where you...

McCain: Tampa was hell. They hated us.

Cummings: Really?

McCain: Oh, yes.

Cummings: But I guess all the Missouri Valley cities...

McCain: There wasn't any trouble. Tulsa was not any trouble; Wichita wasn't any trouble. Of course, wasn't Johnny Bright at Drake whenever he got his jaw broke when he was playing Oklahoma State in the Missouri Valley Conference? That was an openly flagrant violation where they hit him with an elbow and ruined him nearly. They were already integrated.

I remember we played Tampa. John Love and Burkley Harkless were playing for us. This would be, I suppose, 1964--pretty close to 1964. I had made arrangements to stay at the Oregon Hotel there in Tampa, which is sort of a second-rate hotel but a fairly good one. When we checked in, the clerk was a little bit of a smart-ass, and finally I said, "Is

there some problem with us having some blacks here?" He said, "No, goddamn it, you're here, aren't you?" I said, "Fellow, I've been talking with you on the phone, and I told you we had some blacks. You didn't object to it then." Well, he said, "Hell, we don't like it, but you're here." Of course, there were a lot of catcalls that night, which surprised me, you see, because they'd taken all those Cubans out there. But I guess that's why they didn't like the blacks.

Marcello: What was the reaction of the Denton townspeople to the integration of athletics? Obviously, you would hear some scuttlebutt and some comments from time to time when you went downtown or whatever. What kind of reaction did you discover?

McCain: Well, again, of course, Abner became "Li'l Abner," and it caught on fire. They couldn't wait to see him. They really could not wait to see him because all the word was, "Hey, he's super." It just lit a fire. The fire just flamed huge. They wanted to see him because everything that was said was positive.

Marcello: Fred, Denton was kind of a small town at that time. Did people in this town know of the Haynes family, for example, or Reverend Fred Haynes?

McCain: I think they were aware of that because they had been here several years. I think Abner may have been born here.

Cummings: He was.

McCain: I'm not sure, but I know his sisters were and his older brothers were born here.

Marcello: I guess what I'm saying, in effect, is that Abner wasn't in one sense an outsider.

McCain: I think that's true. I think that's true because people knew of him. And his father had a great name. He never had caused a ripple and...I guess that's a sign of a segregationist, whenever you say there was no ripple. But, you know, he was a very religious person and had done well. He had become in his category a bishop, had lot's of money, done well financially. His mother was a very lovely person. Abner had a brother named "Jitterbug," Samuel, that played ball at Prarie View A&M, and his other brothers...two of them were preachers. Then one sister lived here in Denton. She passed away a couple of years ago.

Marcello: Do you recall when Abner's sister's house burned down when they were living there?

McCain: Yes.

Marcello: What do you recall about that incident?

McCain: We got a lot of clothes given to us to give him, and, of course, Abner had never been used to taking hand-me-downs. He had more money than we all had a month. He didn't have to wear hand-me-downs. Walt Parker sort of got that together. He was running a sporting goods store at the time, and, of



course, we were trying to find something for them to get along with. I don't think we all realized, actually, how rich the Haynes family really was. That doesn't mean Abner had the money, but the Haynes family had plenty. Of course, they got a bunch of clothes. They just came in from everywhere.

Marcello: I guess that was a violation of NCAA rules, wasn't it?

McCain: I don't remember (chuckle). At that time, I don't know. It might have been. They weren't real strict back then.

Cummings: Do you recall when Abner and Leon first came here, that freshmen year, the reaction from the black portion of Denton?

McCain: Happy. If I could take you over and let you listen to Pillie Miller give her little speech, it would tell you what their reaction was. As I said earlier, I would take the ball players--and let them go stay there with Pillie. She would always give them a little speech, a little pep speech, about how proud she was of blacks, how proud she was of what they were accomplishing, how proud she was that they were in school. I think the blacks liked it--most of them. I'm not talking about the lower class of them, but those who were "in the know" were very, very pleased and were very happy that it was going on.

Cummings: I wondered that because with the Haynes name being well-known in the black part of town, there were probably a lot of people who were watching him.

McCain: Oh, yes. They watched him very closely.

Marcello: What kind of feedback were you getting from the faculty relative to the coming of black athletes after they were here in classes and things of that nature?

McCain: Well, I'll try to give you an illustration. One year when Abner was playing, he had to pass biology under Tad Lott. Do you know Dr. Lott? Tad, of course, has always been very, very pro-athletics. Everybody knew Abner, and whenever he took a test...you couldn't fudge on the test--the teacher couldn't--because as soon as he took the test, everybody was helping him grade it to see that Abner was going to be eligible. Tad said, "Hey, if I wanted to cheat, I couldn't cheat. Everybody already knows what he's done. They've already read all the answers." But, of course, knowing Tad Lott, he wouldn't give a point to his wife. Abner had to pass, and he did pass. Abner had the mental ability to do what he wanted to do. But the faculty...I don't think there was any...I never heard of any resentment, but, again, most of the faculty that we were associated with loved athletics, and they loved what they were seeing, and they were just like we were. They knew, "Hell, this damn guy is great."

Marcello: And I guess in general North Texas, since it was a great deal smaller at that time, was much more close-knit than it is today.

McCain: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. What was our enrollment then? Maybe

5,000? I doubt if it was that much. We'd known the faculty for years, and obviously it wasn't like it is now. We've got 4,000 people working now. I don't know how many we had, but we knew most of them, and most of them were on our side. Most of them liked athletics, and most of them wanted us to succeed.

Marcello: Now do Abner and Leon ever live in the dormitories at all during their stay here?

McCain: No. No. They could have.

Marcello: They could have?

McCain: Yes, but they didn't want to. I think we moved them into the dorm in 1964 or 1965.

Marcello: And is this Burkley Harkless? Was he one of the first?

McCain: Yes, Burkley and John Love. I know those were in the first group.

Marcello: But now even before 1964 or 1965, blacks could have lived in the dorm if they had wanted to?

McCain: Yes, but they didn't want to. They did not want to. They had their own "dorm" and no dorm mothers (chuckle).

Cummings: But the first couple of years, they couldn't live on campus.

McCain: I don't think they could. I think there would have been a problem if they had have. Again, this is a situation that was sort of special. They just lived over across town, and then there was nothing over here on the campus for anybody to gripe about.

Cummings: Do you recall what year it was when they finally said, "Yes, we will allow them to live in the dorms?"

McCain: Oh, I think somewhere around the early 1960's or before. You know, if they want to live off-campus, we can't stop them. But, again, we didn't press anybody. They wanted that cash. They wanted that because in the dorm we did check on them, but over in the house, we didn't go in the house very much, you know. We'd go by there. You'd see that about six o'clock, there was another shift of girls coming in (chuckle).

Cummings: They were really separated from the whole program, then, other than the practices and games, weren't they?

McCain: Well, I don't know what you mean "separated."

Cummings: Well, they lived in a whole different area of town.

McCain: Well, yes, during Abner's first two or three years, but then they moved back up on the campus. They lived over near the campus in houses. You've got to remember that we didn't have but four dorms--the four quads. But you're talking about--what--600 people, 150 in each dorm, and we only got part of one dorm. But they could have lived in the dorm. They did not choose to. They had more fun where they were.

They had a pecking system, too, by the way. The blacks had a pecking system--seniority on down. The seniors loved to have the freshmen in the house to do errands for them. A.D. Whitfield--we got him out of Rosebud--and Bobby Smith was...I guess I got A.D. in 1962 or 1963. But A.D. always

called Bobby "Mr. Smythe" (his pronunciation for S-M-I-T-H), and he said "'Mr. Smythe' taught me a lot of things." He'd make him walk. Bobby had a car, but Bobby wouldn't let him ride with him from the stadium back up to the house. He'd make him walk.

**Marcello:** You mentioned the incident in Houston when the team stayed on the train. Describe that in as much detail as you can remember. How'd that all come about?

**McCain:** Well, in trying to make reservations for us to stay in Houston, and talking to the hotels, they just said, "We just can't keep a black." Of course, I'd always tell them, "You know, we do have a black. We are integrated, and I don't want any incidents. If it's going to be a problem let's settle it right now." They just said, "You can't stay in a room. You can eat in a room. We can put you in a room and feed you, but we can't let you stay here."

So now we're playing the University of Houston, and we've got to go to Houston. You know, the trains were still fairly popular then, and we were talking to the Santa Fe people, and they said, "Well, hey, it's not a through train station. You've got to back into it, so there's not through traffic going all the way through. We can put you on some pullman cars and let you stay down there on the side. They're air conditioned. You've got your restrooms. They're just as good."

It was a hell of a trip, and most of the kids had never ridden a train. They had never ridden trains before.

Marcello: Normally, how would you have gone to Houston to play that game?

McCain: On a bus.

Marcello: You'd go on the bus.

McCain: Oh, yes. We weren't flying much yet. We were flying some, too. I take it back. We were flying Convairs--forty-four passengers. We would have taken the bus probably because you're not talking about that many hours.

Cummings: Was it a pretty exciting trip for the kids?

McCain: The train? Oh, yes. Sure, it was. The kids had never ridden a train. Have you ever ridden a train?

Cummings: Once.

McCain: Hey, they were fun. They were fun to ride. They were pullman cars. I always enjoyed trains. Of course, during the war that's the only way you had to get to New York and California and wherever you went.

The kids enjoyed it. That was a nice trip for them. We used to take a trip to Wichita, Kansas. We'd go up on the day before, and then the students would come up. We would ride back in one train. We'd put all our cars together, and that was bad news. We got somebody to lock our doors so the kids couldn't go out of there because it was an all-night affair.

- Cummings: Did you ever have the opportunity to go to any of those freshman games during Abner's freshman year?
- McCain: Sure, yes. Oh, yes. We didn't go to the road trips, but the home games, sure.
- Cummings: Okay, you saw him in practice, and you knew that this guy is going to be good. Recall the first game that you saw him in--what you recall about that first game.
- McCain: I can't recall it. I can recall the first workout just whenever he run through us totally, and there was never even a doubt that he wasn't super. I don't remember the game, Randy. Abner had some physical problems his freshman year, but he was tougher than...you know, you get cut sometimes playing football, but that didn't bother him at all to get a gash over his eye or on his mouth. He could play with pain about as good as anybody. He had super strength in his legs. I think that's one of the reasons he was such a great ball carrier. He could run full speed front or sideways. It didn't make any difference.
- Marcello: Did you ever detect any changes in Abner's personality evolving as he continued here at North Texas through his senior year? Was he the same Abner that left as he was when he came?
- McCain: I think, yes. I didn't notice anything. I think he remained the same. I think he began to be a little bit different person when he went to the pros, which, you know, you're

having a different lifestyle, a much faster lifestyle. But not when he was with us. I don't recall him anywhere out of the ordinary at all. He was always very fair and honest and open, and if there was a problem, he always came, and we talked about it. If we could solve it, fine; and if we couldn't, fine.

Cummings: What kind of student was he?

McCain: So-so. He'd skim by, just barely get by. It was not because he couldn't; it was just because...like all of us, you know.

Cummings: He just never put the effort into it.

McCain: No, not really.

Cummings: Did he ever graduate?

McCain: No. But it wasn't a question of him not being able to do it. I could probably relate to it a little better. Before the war, when we grew up, we never thought about college. Hell, you're going to work for \$2 a day for the rest of your life anyway. It didn't make any difference. It was for a ten-hour day, and you just get used to it. So we had an opportunity to go to college and went to college for two years, and then probably, if the war hadn't come along, we probably would have quit school and gone to work someplace.

Cummings: Was he just one of the few out of that freshman class that didn't graduate?

McCain: Yes. Gordon Salsman didn't graduate, but Gordon quit later on, so he was one that we lost. Sammy Stanger was a center,



and Bobby Way and Ronny Rice...I can't...my mind won't work. Abner, Gordon Salsman...we had a kid out of Fort Worth that quit, too, and I don't remember his name right offhand. They were probably the only three that didn't do it. I don't remember anybody else who didn't.

Cummings: I guess with Abner's pro career he never had the opportunity to go back and finish.

McCain: Well, at the time he was trying to take advantage of all the opportunities that were offered him. He tried to be a singer for a while and went on the nightclub circuit. He just got caught up in himself and didn't want to get a degree. Abner had obviously enough brains to get a degree easy, but he just wasn't motivated enough to go ahead.

Cummings: In that area, yes. But on the other hand, Leon, I guess, did.

McCain: Yes, Leon's a principal over in the Dallas schools. He got his master's degree. I haven't talked with Leon. I saw Leon at Abner's father's funeral. That was the last time I saw him, and I've talked to him on the phone, but that's the last time I visited with him.

Cummings: When you look back at all this and you consider how smoothly it went in general terms...how do you look back on it? Do you feel proud that you were a part of it and take pride in the fact that you helped make it go so smoothly?

McCain: Well, I think the reason it went so smoothly was because

of Abner Haynes. Basically, I don't think any of us had anything to do with it. I think we might have had a little piece of it, but just Abner himself was the reason, I think, it was so very, very smooth. He was no problem, and he was a super, super football player, and was well-liked. People loved him, and he was a hot thing on the street, and he controlled himself. He was never out of line or anything. So it was just one of those situations where it was the right chemistry at the right time. I don't think any of us were super. I think we just handled it, and we tried to keep it as low key as possible, and, of course, it just worked out super for us.

Cummings: What was y'all's reaction when SMU drew all the publicity when they integrated nine or ten years later?

McCain: Well, not anymore than anything else. The Dallas papers were making an issue of it. We probably played against a black at Hardin-Simmons before anybody else. There was some doubt whether he was white. He said he was white, but there was some doubt that he was. They kept saying he was white, but I don't know. I can't remember his name. I remember he was a wide receiver or a receiver. What SMU were saying was he was the first black in the Southwest Conference, and then the papers, of course, just made a big to-do over it, that he was maybe the first black to do it, which he really wasn't because Abner was the first black.

Marcello: I think that probably exhausts our list of questions, Fred, and we want to thank you very much for having participated. I think you've said a lot of interesting and important things that are going to help both of us for our respective projects with regard to the integration at North Texas.

McCain: Well, I'll tell you, Abner might be catching flak now for some of the things that have transpired, but as a four-year person up here, you couldn't have drawn a person on a piece of paper and made it any nicer. He did all the right things; he said all the right things. He was an absolute outstanding --I'm telling you, he was an outstanding--football player. When he touched the ball, even in the pros, it was thrilling. I mean, you knew damn well he could score. All the boys that played for him--all of our other teammates here at North Texas--knew that whenever we called his play in the huddle, "Hey, just give a little bit extra because he can go all the way." Abner was the one that was absolutely a great defensive back.

Cummings: Wasn't that really his better position?

McCain: He probably could have played longer than he did. He had such quickness and such leaping ability. The good athletes know what's going to happen. They know what you're going to do before you do it, and he could anticipate this. I remember one time we was playing Hardin-Simmons, and Sammy Baugh was coaching them. They began to throw a little

down and out pass in front of Abner. I was in the press box, and I said, "Hey, do it one more time. Just one more time. He'll let them catch one more pass." They caught one more pass in front of him. Of course, now they've got an easy patsy over here. The next time they threw, he intercepted and scored a TD. They never even saw him. You could just see it; you could just see it. You know it's going to happen. He was letting them catch those little ol' things, playing off of them far enough. They're going down and out, down and out: "It was easy. Oh, it's routine." Hey, he let them "routine" up there one time, and then the next time that ended all that. But he could have been a great defensive back.

**Marcello:** Okay, well that's probably a good note on which to end this interview.