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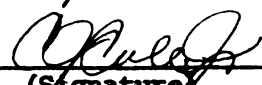
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

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Oral History Collection

Charlie Cole

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: March 5, 1985

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Charlie Cole for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 5, 1985, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Cole in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was at North Texas State University during the integration of athletics. More specifically, he was there when the first two blacks, Abner Haynes and Leon King, came on campus.

Mr. Cole, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born--things of that nature.

Mr. Cole: I was born on November 17, 1931, five miles south of Pilot Point, Texas. I lived there my entire life until I left to come to school. I graduated from Pilot Point High School, and I came from there to North Texas. I had four brothers who were involved in athletics along with me, and

we sort of had a tradition going, I guess you'd say, at Pilot Point in football especially, but we played basketball, football, and baseball. My younger brother ran track. But then after that, I came to North Texas on a football scholarship.

Marcello: Now where do you rank among your other brothers and sisters relative to age?

Cole: Well, I am the fifth of seven children. I have two sisters. The older child is a sister, and the next youngest child is a sister. I am the fourth of five boys.

Marcello: You mentioned that you were born at approximately five miles outside Pilot Point. Am I to assume that you were born on a farm?

Cole: I was born on a farm at home, actually in the Blue community, which is between Pilot Point and Aubrey.

Marcello: What kind of a farm was this?

Cole: It was an operating farm. We not only depended on crops for cash, but we also had a dairy. We ran the whole operation. During the war years, my older brother and I ran it while my father worked in the defense plant.

Marcello: So it was literally a family farm, that is, everybody in the family pitched in when they were available and when they were there.

Cole: Absolutely! And you were always available, and you were there when you needed to be (chuckle).

Marcello: What would have been the principal cash crop?

Cole: Peanuts and the dairy.

Marcello: How about cotton?

Cole: We were on a sandy farm. Cotton doesn't do well...we did grow cotton. Fortunately, I was allergic to it and couldn't get in the field.

Marcello: Would there ever be any occasions when you would have to hire extra help at various times during the growing season, such as black labor and things of that nature?

Cole: No. It was, like I said, a family farm. The only time other people came in to participate was at peanut harvest, and that was the crew that always followed the thrasher.

Marcello: During that period when you were still living at home on the farm, and before you were going to North Texas, what would you say was the attitude of your parents and your brothers and sister toward blacks? Again, given the context of the time.

Cole: Well, our parents taught us to respect all people. They felt that the black had his place, but they taught us to respect them and to show the courtesies of respect to them.

Marcello: In that rural situation, did you ever have occasion to play with black youngsters when you were growing up?

Cole: Only on occasion. As a matter of fact, I had two people that were black that I felt were good friends. We associated together on a very infrequent basis, but we worked up a

good relationship.

Marcello: So it was a comfortable relationship?

Cole: Yes.

Marcello: Approximately how long did that relationship continue?

Cole: I still see them.

Marcello: I would assume that at a certain age, however, you parted ways, so to speak, as you got older?

Cole: Well, when I left to go to school and when I was in the service, I didn't see them much.

Marcello: Well, one of the reasons I ask that question is because on several occasions we have been told that at a certain age most of the black playmates would have quit school and gone to get a job right away, while many of the white playmates would have continued on in school.

Cole: Well, in this situation we weren't in school together because when I was in school...there was a black school in Pilot Point. When they got to the eighth grade, they came to Denton. As a matter of fact, one of the black persons... his family was a friend to my dad and mom, you know, and I got to know him through them. Of course, though we never met socially, we did get together occasionally, and you might say there were some sort of semi-social things as far as the times would allow.

Marcello: Can you give me some examples?

Cole: Well, they would come out to the house occasionally. The

father was excellent at barbecuing. He and Dad would get together and barbecue for some function or something that was going on--bring the kids with them--and that's the way, more or less, we got to know them. Dad would go up and help him barbecue, and I could go with him, and we'd get together that way.

Marcello: You mentioned that upon graduation from high school, you entered North Texas State College, I guess it was called then.

Cole: NTSC, yes.

Marcello: How did that decision come about?

Cole: Well, crop failure (chuckle). I had been approached by three schools to come and try for a scholarship. I hadn't gotten no scholarship out of high school. But I had planned to be a farmer, and that year--the prior harvest--I completely lost the crop on account of freeze. Peanuts that were frozen had no market that time. I had my entire crop out of the ground, and it froze, so I decided then I better take advantage of the offer to come and participate for a scholarship. North Texas was close to home, so that's where I came.

Marcello: So upon graduation you didn't go directly to North Texas but rather went right into farming?

Cole: No, no. The crop failure was my last year in high school.

Marcello: I see, So this was the family...

Cole: No, this was on my own. I had gone out on my own, rented property, and put in my own crops, and that was more or less my...I guess you'd call it short-range goals now, but that was my goal at that time, was to be a farmer.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you did ultimately get a scholarship to North Texas?

Cole: Yes.

Marcello: Describe how this came about.

Cole: Well, I came down here...through Ira DeFoor. I'd met the coaches, and they invited me to come down and participate and see if I'd been good enough to make their team. Well, I'd been a fullback in high school--a 200-hundred-pound-plus fullback--and, of course, I came down here, and I learned a new trade. I learned how to play in the line. They gave me a half-scholarship. Well, that was my freshman year.

The Thursday before our first game, I came down with appendicitis. I had an appendicitis operation, and the coaches "red-shirted" me. The following year was the first year, I guess, that they had a freshman team at North Texas, so I was put in with the freshmen, and played freshman football. That was the year Herb and Fred came to North Texas as freshman coaches. That would be the season of 1950.

Marcello: Now sometime along in there, between 1950 and 1956, did they drop freshman football? I was under the impression that when Abner and Leon came in 1956, they had to have a

freshman team when they entered the Missouri Valley Conference.

Cole: Right. They did. I think they only had a freshman team for two years, 1950 and 1951. Then they dropped it. Herb and Fred went up to varsity, and everybody competed to play. Then when they went in the Valley, they had to have a freshman team.

Marcello: While you were playing football at Pilot Point...well, let me give you a chance to brag on yourself. What particular honors did you perhaps gain while there?

Cole: Well, I was all-district three years. I was an honorable mention all-district guard my freshman year, and then I was an all-district blocking back my junior year and all-district fullback or tailback or running back--whatever they called it--my junior and senior years.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you got to North Texas through Ira DeFoor. How did that come about?

Cole: Roy Turpin was coaching at Pilot Point...he and I are still good friends. As a matter of fact, I see Roy at North Texas games every year now. Roy was coach. I still had had a ankle problem since high school, and Ira came up and taped my ankle. He got to liking me, so he came up and watched several games, and I think that finally got some of the coaches to come up and watch some of the games. I was then more or less invited to come down and try out for a scholarship.

Marcello: Now did you say you also had a couple other scholarship offers besides North Texas?

Cole: Well, more or less the same approach. TCU...I had talked to them. I talked to Southwest Texas, and I talked to NTAC (North Texas Agricultural College) at Arlington, which is Arlington State now.

Marcello: And why did you decide to come to North Texas?

Cole: I think because it's close to home. I felt I could make any team, and North Texas was actually...Denton is eighteen miles from my house.

Marcello: Now, of course, the head coach at North Texas State was Odus Mitchell.

Cole: Yes.

Marcello: What were your impressions of Odus Mitchell at that time?

Cole: I guess initially I was in awe of him. Here was a great college coach. I felt like he was one of the nicest, firmest men, I'd ever met. He could be firm, and he could be tough on you, but he was nice about it. I've never heard Coach Mitchell use profanity or, as a matter of fact, expletives. His biggest expletive is, "Golly, Charlie, why didn't you do this!"

Marcello: So in one sense, he was perhaps a role model?

Cole: Definitely, definitely. He's a person that I today consider one of the outstanding people I have ever known and ever expect to meet.

Marcello: Let me ask you this. Based upon your experience, how does a football team reflect the character of the coach?

Cole: I think they reflect it directly. I think that a coach is going to tell the team through his own personal conduct what he's going to allow them to do or not to do, and I think that his personality, let's say, is going to be reflected in his team.

Marcello: You perhaps know why I am asking you this, because, come 1956, there are going to be two blacks on that team.

Cole: That's true.

Marcello: What I'm assuming is that if you have a coach who is a real rank racist, given the times, that could have easily been reflected in the team itself.

Cole: That's true. That's absolutely true. I think Coach Mitchell handled it just marvelously. To back up just a little bit more on my background, after my freshman season, I went into the Air Force. I was in four years, and, of course, the Air Force at that time was integrated. So I learned what integration was, and I learned to accept people as people, I think, in the Air Force. Color of skin doesn't make that much difference if you look inside. I think if we started branding people by the way they look, I would have probably been outlawed (chuckle).

Marcello: I assume that you went in the Air Force as a result of of the Korean War?

Cole: Yes. Yes, I did. I went in when it was hot and heavy. As a matter of fact, I served some time in Korea. When I came back Coach Walker--I had talked to him prior to the time I came back--said, "I've got a scholarship waiting for you." Well, in the meantime he went to Amarillo as athletic director, and Coach Mitchell said, "You're gonna have to make it again." So I came back, and the first fall I was on half-scholarship again. Of course, being on the G.I. Bill, I could afford that; and I wanted to play ball. I enjoyed playing football, and wanted to play football.

Marcello: What year was this?

Cole: That was 1955. At the end of that semester, Coach Mitchell called me in and said--he put me on half-scholarship coming in--"You'll have to earn a full scholarship, or I'll cut you." At the end of the term, he said, "You earned your scholarship." I lettered that year, so I was real happy about all of it.

Marcello: Let's go back and talk a little more about your contact with blacks while you were in the Air Force. That's a very important point, and I am glad you mentioned it earlier. How closely were you working with blacks when you were in the Air Force?

Cole: Side-by-side with them and living with them in the barracks. At that time the Air Force didn't...I don't think the Air

Force has ever graded a man by the color of his skin. They were just another airman, along with me being just another airman, you know. You work side-by-side with them, and, as a matter of fact, I had a black on my crew in Korea. I was crew chief on a B-26, and I had a black on my crew, and we caroused around together and had a good time.

Marcello: Was it somewhat shocking, for want of a better word, at first when you had to live in the barracks with them, eat in the mess hall with blacks, and things of this nature?

Cole: In basic training it was. But it didn't take them long to convince you that "we're airmen, and we're in here for the same mission." Everything you do in the Air Force is for a mission, you know (chuckle). We were in there for the same mission, and we would be working together. By the time we were through with basic training, it was basically accepted, I think, by everyone.

Marcello: So the Air Force was important to you relative to the integration of North Texas in that it perhaps gave you an opportunity to grow up, so to speak.

Cole: I think it did. I think it did. And I think it gave me an opportunity to function daily with black people.

Marcello: Okay, so you come back to North Texas State College in 1955, try out for the team again, and you do okay. At least you get a full scholarship. Let me back up and ask you this. It was in 1955 that North Texas accepted its

first black undergraduates. Do you have any memories concerning that event?

Cole: The only thing I remember about it is that we were integrated. I don't remember any negative talk or any negative gatherings or groups or anything that got up to oppose the integration. I think it was just accepted: "Well, we're integrated." I remember it, but that's all I remember, is that we were integrated.

Marcello: It did not make an impression on you one way or the other? Negatively or positively?

Cole: I felt good about it. I really did. I felt, "Well, blacks have as good a right to have an education as I do. Why do we send them down to Houston or wherever else--down to Dallas --to go to school when these people in Denton could come to North Texas that probably wouldn't ever have the opportunity to go to school elsewhere?"

Marcello: Describe how you first received word or information that a black or a couple of blacks would be trying out for the football team. How did you receive the word?

Cole: I can't remember. I remember how it was said, but I can't remember who said it. And I can't remember who it was that said, "Hey, do you know there's two niggers comin' out for the team?"

Marcello: Now was this another teammate who had said this?

Cole: Yes. This is in fall camp, at Ramey Courts. Even though I

was married they kept us up at Ramey Courts during fall camp. I don't remember who said it, but they said, "Hey, do you know there's two niggers comin' to try out for the team?" And the conversation was kind of in that context: "Well, they'll never make it. We ain't gonna have no niggers on this team." I think that's what he said. "We'll run 'em off. We'll make it so hot out there that they can't stand it," and all those kind of things.

Marcello: But the coaches never got the varsity players together and gave you the word that there would be blacks coming out on the team?

Cole: I don't remember that happening at all, no.

Marcello: Now would the varsity team have been there before the incoming freshman football players, or would you have all out the same day?

Cole: We came together, yes. As I remember it, we came together.

Marcello: Describe your encounter with Abner and Leon, and the reason I say that is because Abner has a specific story involving you, which I will relate to you after you tell me what you remember about your first encounter.

Cole: Well, I'm trying to remember it. There's been so many times that we've...

Marcello: Well, after you heard the word that blacks were coming, what did you feel that you were going to do? What was going to be your attitude? What was going to be your reaction the

first time you encountered them--before you had even seen them?

Cole: Well, I was going to treat them like anybody else. I was going to knock his tail off if that was what I was supposed to do. I was going to hit him. If he was going to make the team, he was going to have to prove himself. He was going to have to be good enough to make it. I think we all decided there was going to be an acid test here, that if a black gets on our team, he's got to be good. I don't recall having any feelings at all of animosity toward it. As a matter of fact, I'd always been a great fan of Fred Moore School here in Denton, and I kept wondering why we didn't get some of the better athletes out of Fred Moore to North Texas.

Marcello: And Fred Moore produced quite a few good ones.

Cole: They certainly did.

Marcello: Now in the meantime, your brother Vernon would have been entering...

Cole: He was a freshman...

Marcello: ...school in 1956?

Cole: ...in that class.

Marcello: Did you and Vernon ever talk about the fact that...

Cole: Yes, we did.

Marcello: ...a black or some blacks were going to be coming on the football team?

Cole: Yes, we did.

Marcello: Can you recall the conversation?

Cole: Well, Vernon came to my room, and he was asking me what I thought about it. I sort of said, "Well, what do you want me to think about it?" You know, I was trying to get his feelings. He said, "Well, I really don't know. I never have played with a black person before." I said, "Well, except for being black, is there anything different in them?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I just don't know black people. I don't know what to expect."

Of course, he grew up in a rather bigoted town, really. Pilot Point was bigoted, but Pilot Point, I think, integrated his senior year, or there was heavy talk about it integrating his senior year in high school. But it didn't. I think it was a couple of years later, so he'd never had that association.

He said, "Well, what do you think I ought to do?" I said, "Son, you're here to get a scholarship; you're here to play football. You do your job, and you let them worry about doing their job." Then I asked him, "Is he good?" He said, "Well, I hear he is." I said, "Well, if he's good, it looks like to me you'd want him on your team. It's going to be a freshman team. It's a whole new thing here, and all you freshmen are going to be chucked together in the same group. It's whether or not you can accept him as

a teammate being black, or you can't accept him being black. That's the decision you're going to have to make."

He said, "Well, I talked to him, and I kind of like him." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, "Well, he's friendly; he's nice. He don't act like a nigger." I said, "Well, if you kind of like him, and he's kind of nice, maybe things will work out, if he's as good as he seems to be." He said, "Well, what if the other teammates start jumping on him about me having something to do with him?" I said, "You come and see me. That's their problem. They're out here for the same thing you are. They're trying to make the team. It's different. We've never done it before. But you know it's coming; it's going to be here. The school's already integrated, so it's happening. And who knows? It might be good for the school." That's more or less what I recall about that.

Marcello: I guess there are two things that strike me here. One of them is that he had obviously been giving quite a bit of thought about this, and, secondly, he was soliciting his big brother's advice. Just from what you've said, I'm kind of assuming that he would take your advice seriously.

Cole: Yes, that's true. We were close. I was six years older than Vernon, and we were close. As a matter of fact, we got closer after we was in school than we had been because, see, I never got to see Vernon play high school football

except one game. I was in the service. I was gone. I knew he was a good player, but I didn't get the pleasure of watching him play in high school. As a matter of fact, I didn't get the pleasure of watching him play freshman ball except one game.

Marcello: All their freshman games were on the road except one.

Cole: That's right. And we were on the road. We drove somewhere to see them play because we had a home game. We got special permission. I don't even remember where we went.

Marcello: Well, they played at Tishomingo.

Cole: It wasn't there.

Marcello: They played at Corsicanna.

Cole: It wasn't there.

Marcello: And they had a couple of games in Abilene, one against Hardin-Simmons and one against Abilene Christian.

Cole: We drove to Abilene and watched them play Hardin-Simmons. That's who it was.

Marcello: Let me relate to you the story we get from Abner, and he's told us this on several occasions within the course of the seven interviews we had with him. He remembers coming up to campus from the black section of town in a taxi--he and Leon. He remembers getting out of that taxi--this is the first day of practice--and over on the other side of the field there's already a cluster of players that gathered. He recalls three guys breaking off from that cluster of

players, coming toward him and Leon, and, in essence, welcoming them to the team. He remembers you and Vernon and Garland Warren.

Cole: Well, I remember us doing that, but I think...it's been a long time ago. There's somebody else in there, and I was trying to think who it was.

Marcello: Could it possibly have been Joe Mac P~~ri~~or? Although he was on that freshman team, I believe, when those guys came in.

Cole: It's a possibility, but I don't really remember who it was. There were four of us. And we'd talked about it: "What are we gonna do?" I told them, "Well, I'm gonna tell them, 'Here we are. This is us. Come with us.'" I know during the course of that conversation, one of us--I think it was Garland--said, "You know it's gonna be tough out here." Abner said, "That's the kind of football I like--tough football." I remember that. I mean, that's impressed me through the years because he not only made the statement, but he proved it everytime he put a uniform on. He was tough and played tough, hard-nosed football.

Marcello: Well, if I may compliment the three of you who initiated that situation on the first day, in looking back that took a lot of courage. Now maybe you didn't think of it that way, but it would have been very easy for the three of you simply to blend in with the rest of the white players and

to just not do anything or take some of the attitudes that some of those guys had.

Cole: I think that you'll find--if you check out Garland, and you check out me, and you check out Vernon--that it wasn't our makeup to blend in with people. I was at the point, I felt, that I had, for several reasons, a leadership capacity on the team. Of course, I was older than anyone else on the team.

Marcello: You had been around the block a few times, having been in the service and Korea.

Cole: Yes, yes. I had been in a war, a shooting war, and Garland was a leader, and I think Vernon proved to be a leader. But we got together and talked about it, and we said, "Hey, let's make it go. Let's set an example, let's make this go as smoothly as possible." We made a good decision, I think.

Marcello: What was the reaction of Leon and Abner when you did come across, and you extended your hands and welcomed them to the team? How do you recall their attitude or reaction?

Cole: Well, you could tell there was...I don't want to call it fear. I don't think there was an ounce of fear in either one of them. They were concerned because you could see the whites of their eyes when we broke off and started over there. I think they probably felt, "Uh-oh, here comes the welcoming committee." You could just see them melt,

literally. You could see the apprehension; you could see the fear. You could see whatever it was just melt when we walked over smiling: "I'm Charlie." "I'm Garland."
"I'm Vernon."

Marcello: Abner said he could've kissed you (laughter).

Cole: I would've let him (laughter).

Marcello: In the meantime, since the word has gotten around that two blacks are going to be trying out for the team, did you get any kind of instructions or warnings or orders from the coaches about how you were to treat these guys?

Cole: Not really. I think the only...and this is Coach Mitchell again. He introduced them to the team: "These are your teammates." He did this for most of the freshmen. I guess he introduced all the freshmen, and he sort of let it go at that. Well, then the freshmen go over, and they work out together, and the varsity works out together. Then I guess Coach Mitchell felt, "Well, it's time for the big test." So he brought the freshman team in to scrimmage the varsity.

Marcello: Was this day one...

Cole: Oh, no, no. No, this was...

Marcello: ...or was this later on?

Cole: ...later on. I don't know what Ken's instructions to the freshmen were. You know, Kenneth is pretty forceful when he wants to be. I don't know what his instructions were to the freshmen. But we just went on with our business of

getting ready for season.

Then the freshmen come over to scrimmage, and we're going to test them. We're going to find out what these two black guys made out of. And I never will forget it. Like I said, you need to interview Jimmy Wilson. I played middle guard, and Jimmy played middle linebacker.

We had a play called "fifty-two"--right halfback straight ahead through the two hole. Abner was the right halfback. They ran "fifty-two." Well someway or another, I had him dead-to-right before he evaporated. Jimmy did, too, and Jimmy missed him (chuckle). Abner was running down the field with Jimmy chasing after him losing ground every step and hollering, "Stop that coon! Stop that coon!" (chuckle) That's when Coach Mitchell called us over and said, "Fellows, we won't be using ethnic names in referring to our teammates." I think that was the end of it. But he just told us, "We don't call people coons or niggers or things like that. We call em' by their name. If we can't call them by their name, we don't call 'em." Just more or less in that essence is the way that we were instructed: "Okay, they had made the team. Now we're going to treat them like teammates." That's the way it went from then on.

Marcello: In the meantime, do you recall any of the talk about what they were going to do once they got on the field against this freshman team...

Cole: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Marcello: ...including these two blacks?

Cole: I mean, that was what I was mentioning before. We were going to check them out. We was going to run them off. If they could be run off, we was going to run them off. And the varsity felt like we could run them off. That was more or less the consensus of the team. But it didn't take but one dive play to change that--that "fifty-two."

Marcello: You mentioned something awhile ago that I would like to comment upon, and then you may comment on my comments if you wish. First of all, you said that the coaches never really asked you if you wanted blacks on the team. In other words, they simply presented you with an accomplished fact--there were going to be blacks coming out on the team. Do you think it would have been safe to say that if the coaches had said, "Hey, guys, do you want some blacks on the team," the immediate, gut reaction would have been, "No, we don't."

Cole: I think that would have been absolutely what would have happened, I really do.

Marcello: And the second thing is this: the coaches never forced you to enter into any kind of relationship with these blacks. In other words, any relationships that formed formed spontaneously or voluntarily.

Cole: That's right. No, they never forced anything like that on us.

Marcello: And that could've backfired, I think, had they done that.

Cole: Absolutely. Like I say, Odus Mitchell is one of the greatest people in my book that I've ever met. I admire him. He is a person that can meet a situation and analyze the situation and react positively and cause positive reactions to it. But we weren't prepared for it, nor were we told how to handle it except, "We don't call 'em ethnic names."

Marcello: Describe what Abner looked like from a physical standpoint at that time, that is, during that freshman year when you saw him.

Cole: Well, looking at him physically, you'd have thought there was no chance under the sun that he'd be able to play college football. He was sort of a tall, rangy, skinny-looking kid. He didn't look like he was really heavy enough to play. Just to see him walking around or jogging around, you'd think he was too awkward to play. He just didn't impress you as being a football player.

Marcello: What kind of a personality did he have?

Cole: Terrific. He could blend into any conversation. He could initiate a conversation. He was a happy guy--he really was --and it beamed all over him. He was a confident person. He was confident in his own abilities. He wasn't cocky. In no way was he cocky or egotistical about it, but he was confident in his abilities. And he had the drive to go out and prove himself. He had the desire...he had that

thing it takes inside to make yourself accomplish those things that you feel like your're capable of doing.

Marcello: Did he ever force himself upon...

Cole: No.

Marcello: ...any whites?

Cole: No, no. He didn't have to after a period of time. I mean, a short period of time, he probably had as many fans on the varsity as he did anywhere else, maybe more. Percentage-wise, much more.

Marcello: Describe what Leon looked like from a physical standpoint.

Cole: Beanpole (chuckle). Tall kid. The thing about both of them is that they didn't look muscularly developed because we hadn't been used to looking at a black person who was in good physical condition. He was too skinny; his muscles are not that prominent; he had those toothpick legs--you know, those kind of things that you just kind of noticed. Leon looked a lot more frightened than Abner did. I don't think Leon had the personal self-confidence that Abner possessed, and I think if it hadn't been for Abner, Leon would have left a long time ago. Of course, Leon was not nearly the athlete that Abner was.

Marcello: This is a feeling that I have, also, after having done all these interviews, that is, that it would have been a whole different had Leon come alone up to North Texas to play football. In other words, Abner Haynes could have

probably handled it without Leon, but I'm not sure Leon could've handled it without Abner.

Cole: Abner could have come and made it. Leon, no. I don't think Leon could've made it. I think Leon was probably more sensitive to the ethnic things than Abner was. Abner's sensitivity was...oh, it was like leather. He could take criticism, and he had the knack of taking criticism and turning it into something good. He could take an ethnic slur and turn it around. He could accept it without anger or anything like that. He handled it beautifully. You'd think he was a person that was blueprinted and designed to come into a situation like that.

Marcello: There are a lot of fortuitous circumstances that seemed to come together that year.

Cole: That's right.

Marcello: Near the end of this interview, we'll probably kind of summarize those things. What kind of a personality did Leon have? I think you kind of mentioned it somewhat. He was more introverted, was he not?

Cole: Yes, he was. Leon didn't talk much, and when he talked, he was very quiet, very soft-spoken. He had good ability, but I wouldn't say he had outstanding ability. He could run like the wind. Of course, he had a good kicking leg. He could catch a pass pretty good (chuckle). But his personality was more or less introverted. He wasn't outgoing.

He wasn't the mixer that Abner was, I mean, among black or white. Leon just wasn't the mixer that Abner was.

Marcello: One of the things I think we have to keep in mind, too, is that Leon had never really been around whites. Abner, as you know, had lived in Denton until seventh grade and then moved off to Dallas, so at least he had some familiarity with the white person's world, I guess you could say.

Cole: Right, he had. And, of course, Abner's dad was well-respected in Denton by the black and the white communities. Abner wasn't really a stranger to the culture, let's say. He was a stranger to us, but he had had doses of the culture. He understood. I think he had a good ~~momma~~ and daddy that really were sort of the same as my mom and dad were, that you accept people as people. I think that that happened with him.

Marcello: He has always remarked that he felt--and still feels--comfortable in Denton. That is the term he uses--comfortable.

Cole: Yes, I think that's true. I know he comes by and sees me occasionally. It's been quite a while since I've seen him, but Abner's just another old friend, you know. He's another old...good friend. I think he's comfortable.

Marcello: All his boyhood memories of Denton--at least those he related to us--were good memories. Okay, so you encountered him on the football field that first time. What was your reaction after he showed what he could do?

Cole: "He is good!" (laughter) "He does like it tough." "He can handle it. He's a trooper." That's the way I felt. I really, really felt, "Here's the guy that's going to make it. As far as I'm concerned, he's got it made."

Marcello: What was the talk going around after that scrimmage among you and the rest of the varsity players?

Cole: I guess you would best describe it as amazement. Here comes this skinny, bony kid, and he makes all of us look like a fool. "He is good." "Where'd he get them moves?" "Go^d, did you see that black dude run?" Did you see that nigger fly out there?" "Did you see ol' Wilson miss him?" (laughter) It was quite a funny locker room afterwards.

Marcello: What role does athletic ability play in breaking down racial barriers?

Cole: I think athletic ability--we'll say in the United States--is one of the most scrutinized things that there is, more than success in business or success in the scientific world or anything like that. Athletic ability is scrutinized every week of the year by everybody more or less. I think that athletic ability is a thing that we more or less have made a commodity out of that is to be admired. If a guy is good at athletics...you know, Walter Payton...Boston College...

Marcello: Doug Flutie.

Cole: ...Doug Flutie. These people are admired because of their

athletic ability. We don't look at their intellect or anything else, just their athletic ability, and I think that people have a tendency to accept a person for what he can do physically. I really think that that is one of the things that has had a great deal to do with erasing the color barrier.

Marcello: Assuming that every member of a team wants to win, then ability does become that much more important.

Cole: That's true. That's true.

Marcello: In other words, would it be safe to say that the biggest racist on that team, regardless of how he felt, realized very quickly that this guy could help win ball games.

Cole: He wants the best player in there. If he wants to win, if he has that innate desire to win, he's going to want the best player in there, and it doesn't make any difference what that player looks like.

Marcello: Now the barriers may never may be completely broken, but they're going to be broken to some extent.

Cole: That's true. You know, some of us are brought up with such strict, bigoted parents and background--community or whatever you want to call it--that actually the barrier will be broken on the athletic field with this bigot. But when you get off of it, the barrier comes back up. I mean, I saw it happen there. I saw it happen on many occasions--hugging, patting on the back, congratulations, cheering together. Then when we get off the field, they'll talk about that "nigger"

again. I saw that quite frequently out there.

Marcello: There were, of course, quite a few East Texas boys on that team, and I think it's safe to assume that racial bigotry was probably deepest in East Texas.

Cole: Yes.

Marcello: From what I gather, Tyler Junior College was almost a farm club of North Texas State during that time.

Cole: It was for a period of time. It sure was. We had a lot of people come here from Tyler--a lot of good athletes, a lot of good football players.

Marcello: But again, you know, this also says something about somebody or a group of people. The whole process went relatively smoothly despite the fact that there were all of these guys from East Texas on that football team.

Cole: We had a lot from Central Texas and West Texas, too. I think one of the things that had a great deal of effect on that is the previous year when the school integrated. I think it became an accepted fact, that it was coming to athletics. "But if it does come, when it comes, that dude is gonna have to be good if he makes our team because we're good." We were a winning football team at that time. North Texas was winning. I'd never played on a losing team at North Texas. We lost games, but we never had a losing season.

Marcello: Well, I guess they got out of the Gulf Coast Conference

because they were becoming too good for it. Isn't that part of the reason they got out of it?

Cole: Yes, that's part of it. They went to the Missouri Valley Conference. It was a good, growing program, and the amazing thing about it was that it was growing without being a big fund-raising institute, you know.

Marcello: Four coaches (chuckle).

Cole: Right, four coaches and a limited athletic budget. It was growing and I think a lot of it, again, reflects Odus Mitchell --his personality, his attitude toward winning, his attitude toward being a football player. I mean, actually being one, not talk about being one. "Don't tell me. Show me what you can do." I feel like that had a great deal to do with the constant improving of the football team. You can win better with better players; you can win more with better players. And I think that's one of the things that was realized on the team at the time we integrated, along with the attitude, "Well, the university is integrated, so now it's coming to us." It came sooner than we expected, but I think not trying to integrate the athletic program the same year they integrated the college might have set a frame of reference in our minds unconsciously: "Hey, it's coming. You might as well be ready and prepared for it."

Marcello: On the other hand, I think it goes without saying that if you look at integration across the South, which occurred

much later--much later--than it did at North Texas, almost the first aspect to integrate was athletics. In many ways athletics paved the way for academic integration.

Cole: That's true. But, you know, the attitude in this area... I don't know about the South, but the attitude toward blacks--it's really come to my attention on this area--is that people talk about "niggers," etc., and they talk about a race, but you see more and more and more individual relationships between black and white develop all the time. I think that the attitude is that you put a worth on an individual, but you still curse the race because that's what the Ku Klux Klan did, you know. I think, you know, you're supposed to, but you still see individual relationships develop between black people and white people that are good, healthy relationships.

Marcello: Well, you, of course, were not born and raised in Denton, but you did live close by, and you've lived and worked in Denton for quite a while. I don't think Denton's ever had a history of racial violence. Now, of course, it was a segregated society just like very other southern town was back then, but to my knowledge there was never any real violence between races.

Cole: I cannot recall ever an instant of violence between the races here or even in Pilot Point, where I grew up--any violence between the races. I don't remember a whole lot

of animosity between the races.

Marcello: And here in Denton, by necessity the two races would at least have to intermingle down around the business section.

Cole: That's true.

Marcello: It was the only business section, and the black area was right off the business section.

Cole: That's right. It's the same way here and in Pilot Point. You go downtown, and there's black and white. Then Pilot Point is black and white and brown. And we had another ethnic group--the Germans. The "flatheads," we had them. Of course, there was probably as much bigotry toward the Germans in Pilot Point as there was toward the blacks, maybe even more bigotry toward them. Of course, World War II came along, and animosities came out toward the German culture. I guess I'd seen ethnic problems that I hadn't considered before through that.

Marcello: What do you know about Abner and Leon having to live off-campus. If you recall, during that freshman year, they were required to live off-campus, and they lived down in the black section with Abner's sister. What was your reaction to that? What thoughts did you have at the time concerning that.

Cole: We talked about it some. We wondered why they had to live down there. I don't guess anyone ever went and forced the issues, or they might have moved them in the dorm. But

we wondered...I guess we accepted that this was the beginning or something. I don't know. There was concern about it, but nobody ever did anything about it.

Marcello: I do know that that freshman year they did not have cars. Do you recall how they got back and forth.

Cole: They walked, or somebody'd go and pick them up, or they'd catch a ride.

Marcello: They did not eat in the dormitories either.

Cole: Only in fall camp. Only in fall camp. When we went to Houston, they stayed on the train. I didn't go to Houston, but when Abner was on team, they was making arrangements to go to Houston, and they told them that everybody could stay in the hotel but the blacks. I think Fred McCain told them, "Well, there won't be any of us staying in your hotel," so they just chartered two cars and slept on the train in the depot.

Marcello: This is something that perhaps you were not aware of--or maybe you were--but that policy actually began during that freshman year, that is, the team would eat together and stay together wherever they went. In other words, there would be no separate accommodations for the black players and then other accommodations for the whites. That started that freshman year.

Cole: We broke it once--Mississippi. They wouldn't let Abner and Leon stay in the hotel at Mississippi.

Marcello: But now wasn't that game cancelled? I don't think you ever went to Mississippi.

Cole: No, we played the game.

Marcello: You did?

Cole: And Abner was great. It was Mississippi Southern at Hattiesburg. We had a good time anyway. Abner and Leon and Garland and I and two or three others went over and watched the black Mississippi state championship game.

Marcello: Talk a little about the friendship between Abner and Vernon. How did that friendship develop?

Cole: It developed terrifically. I think it was a mutual admiration society. Their personalities were a lot alike. Both of them laughed a lot, cut up a lot. Both of them had good athletic abilities and were confident in their abilities, and both of them were tough as nails. They developed sort of a brotherhood, really. They got close.

Marcello: One of the things that Abner picked up on, as I guess any black would, was that Vernon acted the same way whether it was just he and Abner or whether it was he, Abner, and a group of other whites. You know, as Abner put it, a lot of times it was one thing to have a relationship one-on-one with another white guy, but that white person might act entirely differently when he was in a group of whites and Abner was there. But he detected Vernon acting the same way in either group, in either situation.

Cole: Well, I think that was a lot of Vernon's personality. If Vernon didn't like you, he'd tell you he didn't like you, and that is that, and he'd treat you the same anywhere. If he liked you, he'd let it be known that he liked you, and he would treat you the same anywhere. So many people had to practice their bigotry. Whether they were really still bigots or not, they had to practice their bigotry for their friends. A lot of that went on. It was obvious. It was very obvious.

Marcello: Well, one of the things that we have concluded relative to this process is that if Vernon Cole said these two blacks were okay, then they were okay. And it goes back to what you mentioned awhile ago about him being...well, the team leader of that bunch that came in. In other words, the fact that he accepted them and was among the first, if not the first, to accept them was very important. It was almost like Pee Wee Reese to accept Jackie Robinson because Pee Wee Reese was the leader on that Dodger team. That eased it for these two guys.

Cole: Right. I think that these people knew that Vernon wasn't going to do something strictly for show. If he did something, he was going to do it because he believed in it and was sincere in it, and that's the reason he did it. Vernon didn't practice being phony. What he was yesterday, you can depend on him being today. I think that's a trait

that can be read in a person pretty quickly.

Marcello: The word that we have is that Vernon would take Abner up to Pilot Point, and Abner would take Vernon into South Dallas. Do you recall that at all.

Cole: I've been to South Dallas with Abner, and I've been in our home at Pilot Point many times with Abner, yes.

Marcello: How did your folks receive Abner?

Cole: Great. No reaction. They was real happy to have Vernon's teammate and my teammate visit with them.

Marcello: As Abner put it, he put his feet under Vernon's table, and Vernon put his feet under Abner's table,

Cole: That's right. That's right. That's the truth, I'll never forget one time I went to South Dallas with Abner. His brother had a club, and he said, "Let's go down and see 'Jitterbug.'" So I said, "Okay, let's go." We got down there, and we were way down on Oakland Street, and I said, "Abner, do you think I ought to go in there?" It's this black club. He said, "You're with me, it's my brother's place, and it'll be all right." We walked in there, and all I could see was white eyes, and, I mean, they were all looking at me. Abner got in, walked up to the bar--I walked up there with him--and Abner turns around and says, "I want y'all to meet my good friend Charlie Cole." The ice broke. Everything was fine. But I did have apprehensions, especially after I got in there and saw all these white eyes watching

me, and, I mean, they watched me every step. But he just said, "I want you to meet my friend," and that was the end of it. I don't know if I could've had that influence if I'd taken Abner into an exclusive white club and turned around and said, "I want you to meet my friend, Abner Haynes." I don't think I'd have had the influence that Abner had when he did that with me, and that really impressed me. That he'd call me his friend in front of his peers impressed me.

Marcello: What role does Ken Bahnsen play during that first year? That may be an unfair question to ask you since you were on the varsity, but what might be your impressions as to the role of Ken Bahnsen?

Cole: I think that--and this is as reflected through Vernon--Ken's role was highly critical in that period of time because, you know, he had a bear by the tail. He really did. But he brought that group of freshmen together as a team, as a close-knit unit where each and every one supported the other. What was good for the goose was good for the gander, and there was no difference made, no separations made, no nothing made that would even hint at admitting or saying or whatever, "Well, two of us are black, and the rest of us are white, and you two blacks are gonna have to sit on the back of the bus and eat in the back of the cafe," and all that kind of stuff. "Whatever we do, we do it together. We're a team." I think that was very critical in that period of time.

Marcello: I'm sure the players would have had a certain amount of respect for Ken just because of the fact that he had played professional football.

Cole: I'm sure they did.

Marcello: And he wasn't that much older than them. In fact, you may have been older than Ken.

Cole: I probably was. We're about the same age. I didn't get to play with Ken, but I knew him. I went in the service. I was playing freshman ball when he was playing on the varsity, and then I went in the service. We're the same age.

I'm sure that had a great deal of influence. Ken was still, to me, a former teammate, but, you know, somebody that played pro ball got respect, as they should.

Marcello: I gather that he and Vernon clicked as a team, also.

Cole: They got along great. They really did. Vernon had a lot of respect for Kenneth, and Kenneth was very good and fair to Vernon. I think that there was mutual feeling of confidence in one another.

Marcello: Another person that we need to get your impression of during this period is Dr. Matthews. When a student at that time thought of Dr. Matthews, what was the impression?

Cole: Academia. See, I'd known Dr. Matthews for years. When I was in high school, I was on the student council at Pilot Point. He was principal at the North Texas Demonstration

School. Our student council and the Demonstration School student council had a lot of functions together, and I got to know him--not really personally, but I got to know him. I have a lot of respect for Dr. Matthews. His daughter and I were the same age and got to know each other pretty well during these functions. My impressions of Dr. Matthews in my varsity years is that his goal was to improve the School of Education. Although I don't guess he ever missed a football game, you could tell that he wasn't enthused at all about football or athletics. We felt like that if Dr. Matthews had his way, we wouldn't have football.

Marcello: I really can't imagine Dr. Matthews getting too enthusiastic about anything--just from the nature of the man.

Cole: Well, that's true, too. He doesn't seem to be what you'd call a real outgoing, buoyant person. I know I could almost quote his speeches at homecoming, and, of course, the dryness came out. If we had a wet field to play on, by the time he finished his welcome, the field should be dry from his presentation that he made.

Marcello: Was there any question about who ran the school?

Cole: Not at all, none whatever. The "Spider" ran the school (chuckle).

Marcello: And I guess he even looked like an authoritarian figure with his three-piece suit and hat.

Cole: Three-piece black suit and his...well, I don't know what

kind of hat. He looked very authoritarian. You would have thought he would have stepped in out of the colonial days in the costume. But, yes, he dressed the part.

Marcello: What do you know about quotas being established by Dr. Matthews relative to the number of blacks who could be recruited for the football team?

Cole: I was not aware of it.

Marcello: This was, of course, not written down any place, as you can imagine, but we do have it that that was the case.

Cole: We knew that we couldn't have a large number. When Abner was a junior, I think they could get Billy Joe and some of those.

Marcello: Arthur Perkins came with Billy Joe.

Cole: Yes. We knew that it wasn't Coach Mitchell, but we knew there wouldn't be many. But as far as quotas, I wasn't aware of any, but we knew there was a higher authority that said this because...we talked to them in particular about one black kid here in Denton who was good, and he said, "Well, I can't get him. I'm getting this other boy who, I feel like, is better. I can't have 'em both." You know that's saying that somebody's saying, "We can't do that."

Marcello: Like you mentioned previously, the only freshman game that you saw was the Hardin-Simmons game. Do you remember any problems when the freshman team went out there to play Hardin-Simmons?

Cole: No, because we drove out there and got there right after the game started, and we had to hurry back. The fans didn't like that black guy out there playing. That was obvious. They didn't practice their Christian school's philosophies in rooting at that football game, I guess you'd say. But as far as any problems, I wasn't aware of any. I know that they'd had problems at Corsicana, and they'd had problems in Oklahoma and somewhere else, but I don't remember any evidence at the time we were out there. Like I say, it was a flash trip.

Marcello: Well, this is the impression that we get, that is, that there wasn't any trouble there. However, the second game of that season was against Navarro Junior College. Do you recall Vernon or anybody else talking about that game?

Cole: Oh, yes, they talked about it a lot.

Marcello: What were Vernon's impressions? Do you remember?

Cole: He thought that was probably the worst bunch of people that he'd ever encountered in his life and that they oughtn't to be allowed to even to come out to a football game. He said that they weren't interested in football. They was wanting to kill that nigger, and that's all they wanted, was to kill that nigger: "Get that nigger off the field," and this kind of thing and everything. He said, "But 'Butch' showed 'em." (chuckle) And I guess Abner did.

Marcello: Also, what we've heard is that that kind of adversity

actually helped bring the team closer together.

Cole: It brought the team together. I think there was an instance one time when they were going to eat at this place, and they got there, and they found there was blacks, and they wouldn't let them eat. They told them, "Well, we'll serve the whites, and we'll pack a lunch." They said, "To hell with you! We won't eat here at all!" I think they came back to Denton.

Marcello: I think it was during that Navarro game when they did that.

Cole: But I remember Vernon talking about that. He said that they'd already started to serve some of the kids, and they shoved it back and said, "We don't want your damn food," and left.

Marcello: And I believe that was more or less the beginning of that policy that the team was going to do everything together, regardless of black or white.

Cole: Yes. Well, that's the only way to have a team. You can't split it up and expect to accomplish something.

Marcello: You know, on reflecting, one of the things that Abner mentioned is that he and Leon were in essence putting a heck of a lot of pressure on those eighteen- and nineteen-year-old white kids on that team. In other words, they hadn't asked for this. They had come to North Texas to be educated and play a little football, and suddenly they were being thrust into the middle of this integration

business whether they wanted it or not.

Cole: What probably happened out of that, though, is that the best education they got at North Texas--I don't care what they majored in--was the experience of living those years. That was the best education they got, and the one they should profit from the most in life is living through those years.

Marcello: That's an interesting point, and I think it's well-taken.

Cole: Well, it's a unique...it's an opportunity that seldom ever comes along--to live under pressure like that and to live and to watch history change. You're a part of it. History's changing and I'm it, you know. They probably didn't realize it at that time, but I'm sure that's probably the best education they got at North Texas. It's going to carry them through all the adversities they'll ever meet in life if they just fall back on what they went through then.

Marcello: Well, Mr. Cole, that's about the extent of my questions concerning the integration of North Texas, and I think that's probably a pretty good place to end it. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and this is going to contribute to our knowledge of that period. To summarize, a bunch of things came together there.

Cole: That's true. I wouldn't take anything for my part in it. I look back at it with a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of gratitude of being able to have been involved in

that situation. I think it has helped me through these past years--having been a part of it and some of the relationships made at that time and some of the realizations that I came to by going through that. Then there was the pride of: "We did it in Denton, and we didn't have to fight about it." I take a great deal of pride in that, that we did it in Denton and there wasn't a fight. As a matter of fact, there wasn't even an uproar. In relation to that, but not connected to it...oh, three or four years ago, we had a Ku Klux Klan rally in Denton, and twelve people went. That's Denton (chuckle). I suppose most of them were outsiders (laughter).

Marcello: Well, again, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview, and I want to thank you very much.

Cole: My pleasure. Thank you.