


**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
BASEBALL IN PENNSYLVANIA**

1. Student's Name: Robert D. Smith
2. Subject's Name: Tab Douglas
3. Subject's Background: Sportscaster for WWSW AM/FM Radio in Pittsburgh
  - a. Date and Place of Birth: 5/31/55 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
  - b. Present Address: 
  - c. Present Occupation: Sportscaster
4. Date of Interview: 11/2/94
5. General Comments: Tab Douglas has been a sportscaster for seventeen years. He was born and raised in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh, just a few blocks from Forbes Field. As a young man he used to walk to the Pirate games and sit in the Knot Hole (cheap) seats in right field. He played little league baseball and grew up with a love for the game that only a player could have.

1. Question: What was Professional Baseball like in Pennsylvania when you first became involved with it?

Answer: As a kid growing up in the sixties it was a much simpler life. Baseball players weren't paid a ton of money. They played the game because they loved the game, they played the game because it was something they grew up doing as kids. I don't think they thought of it as a career, as just a diversion, something that they wanted to do. They had the skills for, were able to do, and anything they could make monetarily was fine. Probably back in the sixties they felt that they should have been paid a little better, but they were just athletes that had a gift, realized it, played the game and played for the love of the game.

2. Question: What about fan support, and game attendance was it pretty high in those days as compared to now?

Answer: It was about the same here in Pittsburgh you know until recently the Pirates never drew over two million which is something they have accomplished in spite of the declining population base. So actually attendance is relative, attendance is always obviously based on the economics of the game. We need to have an attendance base that is going to support the team and back the obviously you didn't have to have as big of a crowds as you do now. Pittsburgh was a larger market back then, the crowds were nice, they were probably around, you know around twenty, eighteen on an average at Forbes Field. The Pirates, these days, are averaging twenty one or twenty two, they are averaging better a game you know but the economics of the game has changed so you have to draw more. Back then, I'd say it was good but it was not great, it was always steady all year and it hasn't changed much. If anything the Pirates have done a lot better job lately marketing, which is, what it has done is it has taken the fan base and allowed

people or encouraged people to come to games more often. Back then, because of the larger population, probably more people went to games but not as often. But it was still nicely attended, Pittsburgh has always been supportive of their teams. It was just not that much of a stress or emphasis was put on attendance, it just wasn't the focus.

3. Question: Who were some of the baseball heroes in Pennsylvania , either minor league, major league that you remember?

Answer: The Pirates are obviously a major league team, and I am sure there were some minor league stars around playing for some Legion teams and things like that, but I grew up watching the Pirates of the sixties. The Gene Allie, Bill Mazaroski infield combination were two of my favorites. Of course I grew up watching Clemente as well, obviously he was probably the greatest player I ever saw. But as far as being my hero and somebody I idealized as a kid, it would probably be Mazaroski and not because of the sixty, what he did in the sixty series, because in 1960 I was only five years old. So it wasn't until I started to play ball at seven and eight years of age, it was after the sixty series that I started to appreciate Maz's defensive abilities. He is probable the best second basemen that has ever turned a double play, his hands were so quick and smooth, he could turn a ball over at second base, and he and Gene Allie, who was an excellent smooth short stop, were my two favorites. Although Clemente obviously was the best ball player ever to wear a Pirate uniform.

4. Question: What were some of your most memorable moments that you witnessed in baseball?

Answer: Though I idealized Mazaroski, growing up as a kid, because I played second base and he did and he was so good defensively. The things I remember most



about those years and the days at Forbes Field, when I lived only five, six blocks away from it, was how Clemente used to play right field, I used to sit on the first baseline, where you couldn't see into the far reaches of the right field corner and several times you would just see Clemente, the ball hit down the line and Clemente would disappear in the corner and then like a shot you would just see the ball come flying out from the corner to the third basemen on a fly. I also saw Clemente, in Forbes Field throw out a runner at first base on a base hit, I'll never forget that, and just how players never would even threaten to score from second on a base hit or even from third on a fly ball if it was hit to Clemente in right. Just to show off Clemente would just gun it, he knew the guy wasn't going to run on him but just for the fun of it he'd throw it, it would be a strike to the catcher. It was just amazing to watch, Clemente's arm was just something I will never forget. And something else I always remembered too, and when I think of Clemente, I think of the impression that he made on me when he would run the bases. His body would fly in all kinds of different directions, when he would run, and his leg kick was so wide, you could see the imprint his spikes would make in the fresh smoothed over dirt of the infield at Forbes Field. And how wide his tracks were when he would round first and head into second, and his hard hat, you know his helmet, flying off as he would round first and be heading into second, trying to turn singles into doubles. You know that was probably the thing I remember most about those early days is the impact he had on the game.

5. Question: What were some of the biggest changes that you have witnessed in baseball in general, it could be anything?

Answer: Well obviously the athletes are bigger, the athletes are faster, you know back in the sixties and even early seventies it seemed like the ballplayers were smaller. Baseball players weren't built like athletes, like muscle on muscle, you look at a guy these days like Frank Thomas or even Berry Bonds, these guys are lean, mean, fighting

machines. Back then it didn't seem that the ballplayers looked much like athletes, and maybe that was the appeal of the game even back then some of them were small you had guys like Freddy Pawtec who was 5'5", you know guys that were the home run hitters in the old days, they weren't muscle bound, they were fat. They were Frank Thomas, you know, way, way back in the early days Babe Ruth he wasn't muscle he was fat. I think, the thing is, the athletes have changed, they have gotten better, they have gotten stronger, they have gotten faster, and obviously, it goes without saying, the game is different these days. It is a business now, it is not a game, these guys, you know, a lot of them play the game because they are in it for the money and can retire and will never have to work. A lot of the old ball players and even the ball players from the sixties and seventies, they had to go out and find work after they were done, because they never made a killing while they were playing. They are out like an average Joe now, trying to make money. The economics of the game has been the biggest change and obviously the improvement of the athletes, physically, is probably the second part of the answer.

6. Question: What would you change in Professional Baseball, here in Pittsburgh, if you could?

Answer: Obviously the economics have to change here and that is something that baseball has to do on not just locally. The economics of the game has to change in order for a franchise like the Pirates to survive. So, having said that, if it does change, the Pirates will survive. Now, how that impacts the Pirates, they have got to get a baseball only stadium, they have got to put it in downtown, like some of the other cities have done, and create more revenue with-in town here. Create a better atmosphere, I think what they ought do too is bring back more afternoon games, the ought to move up the start time for a lot of these late night games. What is wrong with starting games at six thirty or a quarter to seven or even seven o'clock rather than seven thirty? Kids can't go to games

until they are out of school, the games last too long, so it is prohibitive for them to go if they do decide they want to go. So by moving the start time up maybe to 6:45, you know seven o'clock, you get home at a more reasonable time. The game itself has to be speeded up, the game just drags on too much. You get pitchers stepping off, pitchers throwing to first base a dozen times, you have got a guy stepping out of the batters box, going back to the on deck circle to put more pine tar on their bats, you know they are scratching and spitting instead of just getting in there and playing the game. I think the strike zone has been shrunk to the point where pitchers really have to target a small area. The strike zone ought to be enlarged to where it used to be when I was a kid growing up, which is just under the arm pits to the knees. Now it is the belt to the knees, and anything above that, it is ridiculous when you get a pitch between the chest and the belt and it is called a ball. It should be a strike because a hitter is going to hit that, that is his power zone anyway. If he doesn't swing at it should be a strike. So the strike zone should be enlarged, the game should be speeded up, Pittsburgh needs a revitalization in the baseball community by way of a new owner, which they have now, hopefully they'll have a baseball only stadium. This, in turn will help the other franchises in town, especially the Steelers, because now the Steelers can turn Three Rivers Stadium into a football only stadium, they can add maybe ten to fifteen thousand more seats, put down a grass field if they want. So a new Baseball stadium will benefit the Pirates and the Steelers and benefit the community in creating revenue and making it a more viable franchise. The economics of the game obviously has to change too and they are working on that or there might not be baseball for another year.

7. Question: Putting myself in danger of maybe putting you on the spot a little bit here, the salary cap, is that part of what you think the economics of baseball must change?



Answer: Salary cap or a tax it really doesn't matter, something has to be done, players are making plenty enough money, there is enough money to go around. I don't think owners should be losing money. Owners are in it to make a little bit of money too. Why should they not be allowed to make money? Yes, the players are the game, but the bottom line is the players aren't running the franchise. They don't have the daily, (day to day), operational problems that the owners have to go through, negotiations with parking concessions, leases, and stadium rental, city taxes, and amusement taxes. The owner have a right, just like any other business, to make money. And when the owners can't make money there is a problem. The players just can't pocket millions and millions of dollars and walk away from the game. The owners are subsidizing the game they ought to get something back. The pendulum has swung way too far, the players are making more than enough. It is the owners fault, I mean everybody agrees with the fact they let the game get away from them, now it is time they regained control, they are in the process of that. There is enough money to go around for everybody but when you have six of eight or ten teams making money and everybody else losing money there is something wrong here. The owners deserve to make money because they are owners, because it is their business. Every business, weather it is a Mom and Pop store, to a corporation like Westinghouse, it might not be named, it might not be public knowledge but everybody has a salary cap. They are not going to pay anything more than they can afford to pay, it is just not as public as it is in baseball. Everybody is only going to pay what they can afford and that is it, if not, you have got to go look for work. The baseball players ought to realize this. If a half dozen or so of these franchises don't make it, they are losing jobs. If they go under what are they going to do. Eventually they are going to be down to eight to ten franchises, where are all those players going to go for jobs and make the kind of money they are making? They have just got to realize that and finally come to some sort of agreement, it could be a salary cap, it could be a tax, there has to be revenue sharing ,

there has to be some subsidizing of the smaller franchises and there has to be some control of the game won back by the owners.

8. Question: One last question, awards, for example the Cy Young Award, do you have any particular or personal feelings about the way they select these people, for or against the process? Because it seems to be somewhat one sided from a lot of people point of view.

Answer: The baseball writers, their the beat writers, they are with the ball clubs every day. Granted they don't see as much of one player, but who does? I really don't have a problem with that. I probably have less of a problem with that than I do with the fans selecting the All Star Teams. It becomes a personality thing, and fans sit there and punch out names. It is not real scientific, the awards are fine if we are talking about the MVP and Cy Young, I think they are done properly. You can agree or disagree all you want over who is deserving and who isn't, there are always going to be some conflicts and some people who think they are slighted. But, as long as it is the baseball writers and not the fans making that decision it is ok. They do the All Star Game because the All Star Game basically is for the fans and they allow the fans to vote for that. A lot of times there are probably more injustices in the All Star Game, as far as players being overlooked than anything else. Some guys that should be there aren't, and some guys are only there because of what they have done in previous years, they might be having a horrible year but they make it because the fans voted them in. Another thing you have, is you have big markets, like New York, LA, and Chicago stuffing ballot boxes. So as far as awards, I don't have any problem with that, I think there may be a better way of choosing an All Star Team. The fans aren't going to loose either way because they are going to get to see the talent they should be seeing at an all star game anyway. It gets to be more of a popularity contest when it comes to the all star game than anything else. So that is



something I think they could adjust a little better but as far as the other awards, they are doing fine.