


ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
BASEBALL IN PENNSYLVANIA

1. Student's Name Jason Kwiat
2. Subject's Name Walter Evenoski
3. Subject's Background Player, Umpire, coach
- a. date and place of birth May 17, 1918
- b. Present address 
- c. Present Occupation Retired
4. Date of Interview 11/20/94
5. General Comments:

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

JASON KWIAT

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH WALTER EVENOSKI

DR. DIXON

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

NOVEMBER 22, 1994

Q: If you could start with the beginning, what did you do and then move along to when you first started to play ball, how old were you?

A: I was sixteen years old and I played with, well, people that were in their thirties and maybe twenties and thirties and some of them were in their fifties. I was sixteen when I started playing in the regular baseball. And this is one thing I have got to tell you, when we were kids we had no equipment whatsoever, all the equipment we got we had to steal. I mean we used to get balls that they would hit over the railroad tracks and we would wait there for the new balls to come, brand new ones, so someone would get them. The first guy to get them would throw it to a guy down the road about fifty feet down the road or one hundred yards, as far as you could throw the ball to another guy. He got it and he threw it to someone else. So when those guys come over to see where the balls were, they knew we were going to steal it, so we threw that ball three times and the third guy, he had to take off just like a streaker. Down the side of the railroad tracks there was a steel mill, a tin mill there, and we would run around the fences as far as we could go and then the guy would see that, he would run from him and he would be about two hundred yards ahead of him, so he could never catch him. So he would say the hell with them, they stole that ball from us. So then we would wait for another fly ball to come over and get there, and then three passes and we would go. This one time I was the one that was supposed to be running because we always had the fastest guy on the last so he could go really outrun everybody. This time they threw the ball to me and I was running down the street and he was gaining on me and I knew I had around the fence there and when I round the fence there was a factory there and it had this clay, this loose clay that was wet, so I knew that he was going to catch me so I just took the ball and threw it in the clay. The guy came around the corner and I said "I don't have the ball" he said "where is the ball?" I said "the other guy took it." He said where did I have it? So I pretended that nothing happened so the guy said after the game where did the ball go, I said well I went round the corner and I saw the clay and I threw it in the soft clay. So we all went down and started digging for that ball but you could see where the ball went in and we started digging and that's how we used to get balls. Bats was a different thing. When I was a kid, teams used to come and they would want a bat boy, someone to take care of the equipment. So we would line the bats up and sort of be the boss of the bats and sometimes they would give you a quarter or fifty cents or whatever they would give you for watching the bats. So before the game and we used to go and someone would say well your going to volunteer for bats today and you know what you got to do. What we would do is we would take a bat and there would be a little bit of grass there, so we would take a bat and lay it on the grass and then we would cut the shape of the bat there so there would be a sod. We would take the sod, we knew it was there and when they got a rally going and everybody got excited we would take the bat that we liked and we would take

that sod off and put the bat down, cover the sod up and somebody would say where is that bat I had, that thirty six inch bat? I would say its over there and They would come over and I had all the bats lined up except the one they were looking for, that was under the sod so they would say where the hell did that bat go? I would say I dont know, mabye the other team got it, so they would go over to the other team and check the bats, but no bat. So the bat was under the sod. So after they left we would go down there, take the sod and lift it up, and a brand new bat! So otherwise we used to take nails and tape them up, tape balls up, and then when I got about fifteen or sixteen years old I started playing with them and they would give you a suit and put you in sparingly in the game.

Q:How were the leagues organized?

A:They had a city league and it was mostly a league of the neighborhoods. Like our team down where I lived we had a team and we might get a couple of guys from Sheep Hill, or some guy over here who was a pretty good ballplayer that wanted to play with us so we would take him in . Chris's grandfather, Rudy Harvatine, he was from Bessemer and he played with us. But the only way we could raise money, after all we had a dance you know out at Mount Jackson, down at the dance hall with beer, so the money we made with beer would go in our kitty. Otherwise we would just have to toss the hat around and whoever put in a quarter or a nickel and make mabye ten bucks or fifteen bucks, back in those days you would be lucky to make five and then we would have a big dance and we would sell beer. That was illegal, so I knew a state man and he know everybody down there too, his name was Mike Sarco and he was a state liquor inspector and I new him real well. And we would come to him and say look Mike we are going to raise some money over there for a couple bucks for our ball team, don't raid us, because a state liquor inspector would come in and pinch the whole bunch of them and whoever was behind the bar would get pinched and they would take them to court. So he did not bother us. Because all the money we raised, you know new suits, how we got new suits, we would go to Blue Danube, a beer joint, walk in there and say were going to have a ball team and do you want to buy us a suit, and the guy would go over to the cash register and he would pull out thirty or forty dollars and say o.k. I remember George that use to run the town pump down there he would give us forty bucks everytime we would go in there. One time he told me to make sure that we did not have a number but we had Delux Cafe on the back. Delux Cafe or Coney Island, whatever we could get money off of. So that's the only way we had suits, but you had to buy your own ball shoes. We played independently, like we played Ryantown, that was out at Samson Street where Waldmans meetpacking is, that was Ryantown. We played West Side, that was up on the west side and we played out at Croton, I think the Moose had a team one year and we would go for different sections. When we were younger we had a team that was called the Two Town Tigers and the only thing we had were t-shirts. We could only afford to buy t-shirts with Tigers printed on it, and

the name Tigers was more expensive than the t-shirts, and we were younger than the guys they wanted to play on the bigger teams and West Pittsburg had a team right where the power plant is. That's where there used to be ballfields and they used to have some kind of knitting plant called the West Pittsburg Garlands where the field were. The field is not there now, but that is where they used to play, but the first one was down where the power plant was, in the thirties, we knew everyone, all over town .

Q: Did you ever travel to other cities like Youngstown?

A: Well, we used to get in a tournament every once in a while, they would get the best ballplayers from New Castle over to Youngstown to play. They used to call it the NBC, The National Baseball Congress, and they used to play people from all over the United States. And we went over there and the teams that used to come up from Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky and that, they used to get the best hotels and when we went over to play they boarded us up in hotels but we were in a cheaper hotel. Like the Todd Hotel over in Youngstown, and most of the people from out of town used to get that because you couldn't put a guy from Kentucky someplace that they would say look at this chicken shit hotel. So they gave us one of the worse hotels, the Youngstown Ohio Hotel. But those guys knew that when we were there they gave us good meals because in the Todd Hotel you had your individual bathrooms and in the Youngstown Ohio you had a central bathroom that we went to, and we had ten or fifteen guys.

Q: As you got older did you play in the same leagues?

A: Well, we played in the same league but every team got better and they started getting better ballplayers. And then they made Flaherty Field and we played up there and they took the all stars from New Castle and they played the Indianapolis Clowns, an all black team, that was during the black teams had the Homestead Grays and the Crawfords and that. So this team was named the Indianapolis Clowns. And they would come into town and they would play you and we played up at Flaherty Field and it was the biggest crowd we ever had. And they would take sixty-percent, they would give us sixty and they would take forty percent whatever they split. So we said o.k we would play you up here and that was an all star game. We played them one time and we beat them. I remember Goose Tatum, he played baseball for the Clowns and he played first base, he was a black player, Goose Tatum. There was other guys there that I can't remember their names, but I remember Goose Tatum. He was a good basketball player, Tatum, and that time we played up there I never seen a bigger crowd up there in my life. Just in that one game we made in donations, they put a hat in front of you and you could walk right by and never put nothing in there but some people would put dollars or two dollars in the hat to see a ballgame, so that one day I remember we made 8000 dollars , so we gave them forty percent and we took sixty percent out of 8000 dollars. And then we went up and had a big banquet up at the Cathedral. We had it all cooking

and everything, we had a guy that took care of that, and who came there was the guy Bill Veck of the Cleveland Indians, he came and talked. This is something that very few people know, who was in the baseball hall of fame and the football hall of fame? He went to Geneva College, Cal Hubbard was his name, I bet that no one can answer that question. He was also an American League umpire. So he was in the hall of fame for baseball, and he also played football down at Geneva College and he was in the hall of fame for football. Not to many people can answer that question. He and Bill Veck came down and he had his little talk. And Then I got a tryout with the Cleveland Indians. And I was supposed to go there in September of 1941, so I went up there in September for the tryout and I got a draft notice for the army for October. So they watch you play ball and watch how you catch and throw and that. One of the scouts come over to me and he said how are you fixed for the draft, I said I got my card already, he said "son I tell you, if you did not have a draft we would take you to play in the majors ,but this way we just can't take a chance, so your going to go into the army so we don't want to bother."So that was the last of my deal. When the all stars played in New Castle a lot of scouts would come and ask you questions, and I hit a ball in Oakland Park in Youngstown, in the lights at nighttime. We were playing a Cleveland team, I hit a ball so far out in center field, it did not have no fence though and the guy kept running and running and he stuck his hand up and caught it. So the scout came to me after the game and said how old are you son, this was after I came out of the service you see, I said that I was twenty one and he looked at me and said "yeah I wish you were twenty one, if you were a little younger o.k, but." Guys would come to me when I was twenty seven, twenty eight years old and they knew I was kidding them because they want kids that are young, because by the time they get through the farm system.

Q:Did you play when you were overseas at all during the war?

A:No, the only thing we played was softball against the Canadian teams, the Canadian Air Force. I was in charge of booking the games and that. we would book a team and all get in a six by six truck and we would take off and and they would say the losers pay for the beer. So they had spam sandwiches and we drank beer and we would come back in.

Q:How long did you play?

A:Then I got a job at Universal Rundle until I was thirty two and then taught some little league for New Castle. But years ago everything wasn't handed, you had to go out. My dad bought me a little old catching glove, about the size of a pancake. The ballgloves would not have cost so much, but when you played ball, if I played left field, and I had a glove and you did not throw your glove out onto the field, you took it with you because somebody would steal it. Say that I was playing left field and I had a glove and you were playing left field and you

would come out and say can I use your glove? I would say yeah but make sure you give it to me every inning, you bring it to me. A lot of times we would go play ball and something would come up, somebody would slide into second base and knock him over on his ass and there would be a fight. And nobody stopped the fight, you would get a few knocks on the head. A lot of times we won the ballgame playing in Mahoningtown and a fight started in the eighth or ninth inning, the game wouldn't finish, we were fighting going home. You would see somebody coming and they would say he's from the other team and you hall of and hit him and then ten other guys would come and you would run like hell up the road, up the track.

I umpired in the little league. I was coaching in the league and they said they needed umpires so I umpired with three or four guys together. Some of those guys did not know the rules. We used to make fifty cents, and when we threatened to quit they said o.k here's a dollar and we did a pretty good job.