


ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
BASEBALL IN PENNSYLVANIA

1. Student's Name Anjanette Wilkey
2. Subject's Name <sup>Mr.</sup> Robert McClay
3. Subject's Background ~~Truck driver~~ - Coach American Legion <sup>Baseball</sup>
  - a. date and place of birth 2/9/37 New Castle
  - b. Present address 
  - c. Present Occupation Truck driver
4. Date of Interview November 17
5. General Comments:

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. ROBERT McCLAY  
FOR WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BASEBALL ASSIGNMENT

We are talking to today to Mr. McClay about his days in baseball.

Q: "Mr. McClay how long have you been playing baseball and been involved in it?"

A: "Ever since I was a kid."

Q: "About how long is that?"

A: "That would be about forty-six years."

Q: "You played when you were younger?"

A: "Yes. When we were kids, we would get some the kids together and we would pick our teams and just play like that for summer and play ball."

Q: "So you didn't have an organized league it was just..."

A: "Yeah, not at that time. No back in 'fifty-two it was something for us to do. That's what we did. But in High School we played in a league."

Q: "So you played for New Wilmington in High School?"

A: "New Wilmington High School, right."

Q: "How did you do there?"

A: "Oh New Wilmington, we always had a good teams at New Wilmington. Cause, we were a farm town and we had nothing else to do but play baseball when we didn't work on the farm during the summer months."

Q: "Now you're involved in baseball now. You coach a team?"

A: "Mercer Post 159 American Legion sixteen leagues of kids approximately sixteen to eight-teen years old."

Q: "Who do you play against, locally or.."

A: "Local teams o.k. you got uh, you got Hickory, West Middlesex, Greenville, Grove City, Farrel, we played against Quad A New Castle. They came into our league last year as one of the larger ones of Mercer County and I think Shenango was picked up. There

were also four teams from Lawrence County picked up in the league. That's most of the teams in the league last year."

Q: "You mentioned that, you had mentioned to me over the phone when I called you that your son (Scott) was involved with coaching with you helping you?"

A: "Yes, he uh, he helped, he started last year along with Bill Campbell he works at George Junior Republic, he helps me with baseball over the last few years. They've all been a big help. One person can't handle eight-teen kids 16 to 18 years old. You got to as a coach have lots of help."

Q: "How old is your son?"

A: "Twenty-three."

Q: "He's not much older than the kids you coach."

A: "No, uh just approximately about five years older the kids that we have on the ball team."

Q: "Do they have an easier or tougher time following his directions?"

A: "Well it was tougher for them to listen to him when he told them something to do or pop off at the mouth because they felt he wasn't much older than them, but Scott did have four years of College over them in football and baseball, so he did have a lot more experience and it was hard for them to take just because of his age difference. There wasn't that much age difference."

Q: "How is your team doing?"

A: "Well, last year we were Sixteen and two. We were figured to win the League but we didn't do it. This year we came back with everyone and won the Lawrence/Mercer county championship this year." "Wow," I said. "Oh we had a real good year. That's we all worked hard to win the championship and so did the kids. It took us three years to win this. Cause these teams are rough, there's Quad A schools and Double A schools and we don't even have a high school team at Mercer. That's the clincher. We don't have a high school team they're just kids that want to play baseball."

Q: "How do you go about getting the kids involved?"

A: "Well the beginning of ball in summer baseball, I involve Mercer area and Lakeview area which I have and the legion has an area to pick kids from we had one kid from Greenville that could make the other teams cause their roster was full so he'd come over and play on Mercer County and Mercer legion team. We just go to up to the kids when they're start playing high school ball. I went to

Lakeview, I'm allowed so many ball players from certain areas I can pick for the Mercer sponsored team, and we just go over and pick five kids from Lakeview each year. They come over and play. They're allowed to play three years, sixteen to eighteen, depending if they're fifteen, but I don't usually, I'd rather stay in the senior division that's how we play ball in the summer months."

Q: "How many hours do you put in?"

A: "Well during the week O.K. you have your spring baseball, we have to wait till high school's over cause the high school kids can not come out and practice with the legions because of playoffs and it's against the rules. So our season starts approximately, our season starts depending what teams, like if Lakeview was in the playoffs, I can't have them kids practice, but we start practicing around about March. We get ready for our June first games and such it takes too much to get the kids round up for practice any later."

Q: "So it takes a lot of time?"

A: "Well it takes...we only get the field three days a week there other teams who need the field. So we get the field Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. And we usually stay at practice on the first day out three to four hours."

Q: "When are the games usually set up?"

A: "We start our league in June that's our first game and we end around August first. Then we have the playoffs to see who goes to regionals as we made the regionals down in Allequippa this year."

Q: "That's great. You mentioned your son, how else is your family involved in helping you?"

A: "First to start with my wife, she gets the roster filled out, gets the kids height weight; what they got, left or right.., that has to be on there and it has to be filled out and turned in a certain time before the games start. My daughter is involved, after that's done and we get the season going, if our games could be called off either rain or something like that she takes the phone calls because we all work. I work, my wife works and Scott works and someone has to take the calls and give all the ball players the cancellations cause we have ball players who travel eighteen miles just to come to Mercer just to play ball. It involves my whole family really."

Q: "So it's like a home team."

A: "It's like a family team yes. Right, because everybody knows my wife, my daughter; they are he age now. And so it involves the family when you get into the legion. That's about the only thing

I'd say about any coach involved in sports, it would have to be the legion because their the only ones in the senior division where the family is involved with kids that age."

Q: "During your years in coaching is there any special event or occasion that you remember experiencing that you'll never forget."

A: "Yes it would be the playoff game this year. We had already one loss we were in our second game and we were losing by ten runs going into the last part of the seventh inning. And at the time, at the time we were down ten runs like I said and we had two outs and the game was tied and it was getting dark the umpires called timeout and said if this games ends in a tie we will have to play it again tomorrow. Well I had my pitcher Quinn Priester was playing at the time, and we had two outs like I said, and after we parted he said oh well the games going to be over after this because I'm going to hit this over the right field fence. The kids laughed and the umpires laughed and said well let's play ball. And he did, he put it out over the fence, and that wasn't the only game he did that in, there was another game where he called the shots. That has to be the, in all my years in coaching, when you have a kid that can call a shot like that and go on and help you pitch us into the championship game and win it for you that has to be it. That's something, and that kid I'll remember the rest of my life."

Q: "Good, who have been some of your baseball heroes past and present?"

A: "In the present it would be Barry Bonds, who plays for the Giants. Past would be Bill Maseroski when I was in the army I remember him hitting a home run in the ninth inning of the 1960 World Series Game to defeat the Yankees for the World Championship Title."

Q: "Barry Bonds played for the Pirates, didn't he?"

A: "Right, because there wasn't enough money there so he went where the money is and his Dad was in San Francisco so that where he went."

Q: "Speaking of money, what do you think of the players when you think of them striking this year?"

A: "I think they are getting enough money. Any player that can sit down and get ten and twelve million dollars and play baseball compared to what Larry Gogen and the old time players; Walt Carnie for pennies, I believe they're getting enough money I don't believe they need any more money."

Q: "How do you think it has effected the kids today? These are their heroes. This strike is it going to effect the way they look at them now?"

A: "I believe the kids are going to look at it this way now, you know Baseball, Football, Basketball and all those other sports you play, you have because you fun playing the sport. They get the idea now, they're not going to play this unless they get big bucks too. I think it's is going to ruin it for the kids who make it into the professionals, not a lot of kids around here do but they're going to look at it that I'm not going to play just cause I'm having fun and for the sport of it but because I want the money. Money is going to be the big thing, the dollar signs are going to be a big change in the young kids getting involved. I think, that's my opinion."

Q: "So, you said it's going to ruin the game?"

A: "I think it gives the young kids a poor image of the professionals. Like I said kids think guys like Barry Bonds plays the game because he likes baseball, no I think they just play because they just want the money. That's my opinion."

Q: "How do you think personally, baseball has effected your life?"

A: "Well I raised two kids, I have a boy twenty-three. I never had any problems with him while he was in school, he's going to college playing football. Now you get kids who are, you get all kinds of kids. I mean when you pick a high school team, I mean a legion team. Like this they're eighteen and all different, some will listen, some won't. And it is hard to be a parent and know that your kids, are almost the same age and yet you tell them what to do and they look at you and deny you and just say well you can't do this you can't do that to me and I'm not going to do it. Well it's hard to adjust to tell some other kid to teach that other kid well you're just going to have to listen to me if you want to play ball for me. I have strict rules and you do have kids who fight on this and that's the hardest part of coaching. That age bracket sixteen to eighteen they're in that stage right now where they are in high school right now and they are ready to get out and they're real cocky and nobody's going to tell me what to do. But they listen, they listen and that's all there is to it."

Q: "You've run into some troubled kids, have you helped them out, do you think?"

A: "I think that my son, Bill Campbell, the other coaches the kids when we first had them when they first came out they didn't want to listen, I thought we were never ever going to have a ball team, but as you have them for one season they learned that when you set your rules you mean business. They looked up to us and we feel good that we never had any problems and none of our kids that I've ever coached in this legion I don't think has ever been in any trouble out of legion ball. I feel they learn to grown up fast throwing those balls and because we've played against better teams and kids their own age and we've traveled and they've learned to get along

and with other people and I teach them to be good sportsmen."

Q: "Do you think sports, like baseball a team sport help further in their lives, do you think that's a big help whenever they get out of school and go on to work do you think team play is better?"

A: " Well I think it helps anybody involved in sports you meet different people you play against different people, and if you're a good sports man, I think they got a jump on other kids that don't get to meet people and be competitive and learn to lose and it's nice to win but you gotta learn how to lose. And later in life when they go on to college and looking to make those big bucks and to get out of college like my boy for example, he didn't get a job, now he's working in a mill. They just have to look forward to the good parts and the bad parts. Sooner or later, I think they understand and I think they take it better, than persons who have never been in sports in the competitive jobs. After they get out of college.

Q: "To become good sports?"

A: "Well they meet a lot of people, they meet other kids, it's new all the time, they travel and meet other kids and learn what other kids are like and what and they learn about themselves. I feel that's a good thing to learn. My ball team were always good sports, when we lost we never wanted to fight, we shook hands and we learned to live with it cause that's the way it will be when you get out of college. You learn if you don't get the job you just can't go out and be down on yourself you gotta look at the good part. I have the education, somewhere down the line I'll be able to use it."

Q: "As a member of the tradition in Western Pennsylvania baseball, should if anything would you like to see happen locally or on the whole towards baseball?"

A: "Well it's hard to say. I'd like to see more teams in leagues. And I'd like to see more kids get involved here the biggest part of Mercer County, Lawrence County, and especially Mercer it hurts a lot of kids that want to come out but it's too hard because both parents are working and the kids have to get a job to get a car they gotta pay the insurance, when you have to pay your own insurance it makes a big difference in playing in the summer months rather than in high school. It cuts into working. They'll give up baseball before they give up their car. But still there's kids that manage to do it, and they come out for baseball and they get involved. Others come out for the summer from their high school team, but Mercer don't, those kids have more time to pay and it makes them better ball players. I just wish something could be done that more kids could be involved in sports so kids wouldn't have to get a job to pay for insurance or college. But I guess I'd like to see the kids still come out to play and have a job for college

anyway."

Q: "Do you feel there are enough teams, or rather sponsors for teams? Or should there be more involvement with the community?"

A: " I think the community itself we have the legion that sponsors us but they give the kids so much when we won the championship. We took and spent our own money to by the coaches tee's and I buy the plaques myself because the kids deserve to win it. Now we won a hundred dollars in the championship, that goes to buy the trophy and then we have a party. Now the coaches chip in and we have a small party take the money out of their own pockets. Now the sponsors we sell lottery tickets to keep the team going. It's expensive to run a team. It costs approximately a to keep a team on the field for the year to play ball in legion approximately \$2,500. Umpires, baseballs, now we just chipped in to buy the uniforms last year cause the legion wanted to have enough money for balls and bats to play with. So I would like to see more like in Mercer to see more of the business especially in small towns like here in Mercer, for the businesses to chip in and donate so much money to keep the team on the field and to help pay for insurance, cause you have to have insurance in all this before you can let the players play you have to have insurance.