

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
BASEBALL IN PENNSYLVANIA

1. Student's Name Peter Bergen
2. Subject's Name Jeff Messer
3. Subject's Background Coached for 10 years, here two other years before year
 - a. date and place of birth PITTSFIELD MASS (PITTSFIELD MASS)
 - b. Present address _____
 - c. Present Occupation S.R.U (Slippery Rock Baseball Coach)
4. Date of Interview NOV 15, 1994

5. General Comments: Jeff knew his stuff, he sounds very energetic about coaching still, even after 12 years of doing it.

He realizes what students abilities, talents, goals, dreams, desires are and it seems like he tries to fulfill them, with what he is given. It was very enjoyable to sit there and listen to another coach, seeing I coached high school ball last year in Michigan. And to here hear the pros and cons coming from someone else and at a different level of players and competition.

It sounds like he has no regrets about what he's doing with his life, and that he's going to continue doing this for the immediate future.

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

Dr. Dixon

Oral History
September 22, 1993

Suggestions for doing Oral History

Steps to take before the Interview

- (1) Familiarize yourself with the background of your subject, having some knowledge of the area and time period in which he or she lived.
- (2) Study all available records such as diaries, photographs, and heirlooms.
- (3) When doing family histories, interview all available family members.
- (4) Prepare your questions beforehand, making sure that they will establish the basic information you wish to gain from the interview.

During the Interview

- (1) Tape-record your interview for future reference. Do not rely solely on written notes. Videotaping your interview is helpful because facial expressions will aid you in gaining a sense of the person's feelings.
- (2) Ask very broad questions. When you get to an answer that seems to lead in the direction of important material, ignore your prepared questions temporarily and probe further.
- (3) Never interrupt an answer, even when the response seems unimportant.

After the Interview

- (1) Try to get interviews from more than one person on your topic. More than one interview will help you to gauge the different opinions people hold, and help you to determine the veracity of the information that you obtain.
- (2) Collect from your tapes the information which, on the one hand, best reflects your informants' testimony about their lives and, on the other, enables you to say something of importance about those lives and the times in which they lived.

Information taken from A Student's Guide to History, by Jules R. Benjamin

Baseball In Pennsylvania

Interview with

Jeff Messer

Head Baseball Coach

Slippery Rock University

For

Dr. David Dixon

History Department

By

Peter J. Bergen

November 22, 1994

Q1) Jeff do you have any brothers or sisters?

A1) Yes, I have two sisters.

Q2) Did they play softball?

A2) They were more of the equestrian type. they were more into horse riding, and stuff like that.

Q3) When did you first become interested in baseball?

A3) Young, maybe four or five years old.

Q4) Was your dad into baseball, or did he play it?

A4) He was into all sports, he played professional basketball, that was his favorite sport.

Q5) When you first started to play, at the age of four you started in the pee-wee league, and did you continue straight up? Or did you take time off?

A5) From five years up, I played competitively through all levels and the last year I guess I played in was 1983.

Q6) What college did you go to? And did you play there?

A6) I went to Springfield college, in Massachuets and I played there for four years, and then I played for one year over in Holland.

Q7) How was it over there? How do they look, and view baseball?

A7) They have a nice competitive league over there. I mean its not as professional as it is over here, but there are some players that play over there that could play here in this professional league.

Q8) Do they get paid the same rate over there?

A8) No, not by any stretch of the imagination do they get the same salary, I mean they get paid better than our minor league players but not nearly the same amount.

Q9) Do the fans appreciate the sport as much over there, as here.

A9) No, Europe is soccer orientated I mean it's coming along its not just Holland and Italy, but other countries are getting into full force.

Q10) Who influenced you to stay with baseball? I mean with you dad playing basketball, he didn't influence you to play basketball at all?

A11) He influenced me to play basketball, but all three sports as well. I went to college to play all three sports, but when I got there I decided to stick with baseball. Now with coaching defiantly my father. I was fortunate enough to have a outstanding, outstanding array of high school coaches. I feel that it was the high school coaches more, high school coaches I looked at and listened to, not that I didn't listen to my college coach but was the high school coaches.

Q12) What position did you play throughout your baseball career?

A12) Shortstop. I played a little pitcher but mainly shortstop.

Q13) Now how long have you been coaching here? And have you coached anywhere else?

A13) This is my tenth year, and I coached Westfield State College, and I coached one year out at Oklahoma State.

Q14) Now what motivates you to coach and to continue coaching?

A14) I think the change in the nucleus. You've got a change in different players, different personalities and different abilities. Every coach thinks of that dream season, not that it will ever happen. Being undefeated and pushing to get to the world series. We went to the world series in 1989, and it makes you more hungry to get back to where you were. That and seeing the younger players coming in and maturing or not maturing. I just enjoy working with the college age baseball players.

Q15) Now you didn't coach high school baseball at all did you?

A15) I coached summer league or summer legion ball. Which is for high school age kids. I coached in two places, one in Massachusetts, where the level of play was very low and two, in Oklahoma where the level of play was, where every player on my legion team went onto college on a full athletic scholarship. I had experience at the high school level in both coaching and teaching. I taught at high school for two years as well.

Q16) What do you think motivates ball players to keep playing and striving to go forward.

A16) I think that at this level every players has aspirations and goals to being playing somewhere like Three Rivers or some stadium and I feel that this motivates their hunger or signing a pro contract or possible winning A championship pushes them. But we try to open that door or possibility to them, but they have to realize that is their second priority here.

Q17) What Image do you think that baseball has played on our society, Past and recent?

A17) I think that society looks up to baseball and if one its on sport it's baseball that people have looked up to. I mean its been around forever and people thrive on that, and I don't think that with the strike going on right now its not going to tarnish the history or the reputation of baseball. If anything its going to make it stronger for the future and that down the line the players are going to be more level headed. Its' going to make baseball stronger, and you can see that with the increase in attendance in all levels of the sport, in professional, triple, double and even single A.

Q18) In coaching any sport there are the positive and the negatives, what do you think are the positive to coaching baseball?

A18) The positive are seeing the player mature physically and mentally, I mean some do mature and some don't. Also at this level, at the college level its also rewarding to see them graduate. I mean in the ten years that I have been here our graduation rate is somewhere around 90%. I have only had five players that didn't graduate and I know ever one of them. Its nice to that some players that defiantly wouldn't have graduated if it had not been for baseball. They would not have set the discipline or academic discipline so well if they had not known that they had baseball holding over them were they knew that thy had to do so well to be academically to be eligible for the sport. The most rewarding thing is to see them grow up and come together and work together as a team, but at the same time to be able to go out and make a living for themselves. that's basically my mission not to see them go to the pros but for them to graduate and to make a living for themselves, where's their going to have a good experience, and to make sure that the last time that they step foot onto the Slippery Rock baseball field that they have a positive experience. that their going to enjoy and to have them enjoy their four years at Slippery Rock that's why we do other things besides the games here. I mean we go to Florida every year on a spring trip and we just came back from Europe this past summer were we took twenty-four players and we even took players that had already

graduated. We try to have a good experience.

Q19) Without question what would be the biggest drawback to baseball and this sport?

A19) The biggest drawback at this level, college level?

Q19) College, Pro if you have a outlook on the pros but mainly college? Seeing that's what you've coached.

A19) "The biggest drawback on the game itself?" Oh boy, Uh I think that college baseball has come along so quickly that many times as with other sports players are putting their heart and soul into baseball along with academics that they usually do not get any kind of special treatment when it comes to academic scheduling when it comes to , I'm not looking for them to get paid or anything, but their going out on a limb and their representing the university and public relations wise and they have to represent the university when their traveling and I'm using Slippery Rock on a small scale, but you look at the larger schools that are bringing in millions of dollars and the schools don't give them extra help academically or they don't give them extra help in tutors or whatever and you don't want to separate the general student body from the athletic body of students, yet at the same time these people are helping the university out in the hope that they would be helped by the university in return.