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Interview with

LEON KING

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Interviewer: Randy Cummings

Ronald E. Marcello

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Leon King

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Oral History Collection

Leon King

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: July 21, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello and Randy Cummings interviewing Leon King for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 21, 1982, in Dallas, Texas. We are interviewing Mr. King in order to get his experiences and reminiscences concerning the integration of North Texas State University in general and North Texas athletics in particular.

Mr. King, to begin this interview, why don't you very briefly give us a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell us when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. King: I was born here in Dallas in 1938, November 12. I attended N. W. Harilee Elementary School, Lincoln High School, and then went to North Texas State Teachers College. That's basically my background as far as education and schooling was concerned.

Mr. Cummings: Tell me a little bit about your athletic background--when you got interested in football specifically and sports in general. Was it a thing from the time you started walking that you got

interested in sports?

King: Yes, it was. I have an older brother who was an athlete, and I worshipped him. He was about three or four years older than I am. Everywhere he went to play, I sort of tagged along, and I wanted to grow up and be like him. He was an end, so I decided that's what I wanted to do: "I want to play end." He didn't attend public school. He attended Saint Peter's Academy, I had to go to public school, but it was because of his influence on me that I wanted to pursue athletics.

Cummings: What kind of organized football background did you have in your early career?

King: Nothing more than the Hi-Y touch football. We didn't have Little League in those days. It was basically YMCA Hi-Y football--touch--that we had in the elementary schools, and then we had a little flag football in the park during the winter months. Then in the high school, of course, we had organized interscholastic football leagues.

Cummings: In your earlier years in elementary school and junior high, are there any football games, football seasons, that stand out in your memory as being enjoyable, exciting?

King: I guess it would have to be my senior year in high school back in 1955. That was the year that Lincoln played Port Arthur Lincoln for the state championship. We lost that game by two points, and, of course, the losers always find a way to find out how they lost the ballgame, and we felt like they got to us. But

I would have to say the 1955 football season was probably the most rewarding football year that I had in high school.

The day games were always a jinx. As a matter of fact, we were playing Wichita Falls, a day game, out at P. C. Cobb Stadium, and it was in that ballgame that Abner got the cracked ankle that he sort of suffered with throughout his professional career. He was injured, and they had to take him off the field. I asked him what was wrong and who did it. He told me and I went out to try to get even with the ol' boy that did it, and I ended up getting the worst end of it. So I sort of shied away from big football games.

Cummings: Relate your background as a friend of Abner. You two guys apparently were running buddies early in your lives.

King: It goes back to our sophomore year in high school. We were both on the football team, and we both participated in track. We both lived on the same street. I lived on one end, and he lived on the other. I was in the 2200 block, and he was in the 1700 block, so we just got to know each other. I guess the thing that brought us so closely together was the fact that if we had a football game or track meet out of town, "Ab" for some reason could not wake up to get there on time. So I sort of took it upon myself...having thrown the morning newspaper, I could sort of automatically wake up about five o'clock or five-thirty with no problems, so I would spend the night with him the day before our football games so that we could get him up and there on time. I guess it was from this

that our friendship grew and grew, and we were just bosom buddies all the way through. It was because of our relationship that his brother met my sister, and they are husband and wife now for about twenty-six years. So it's sort of family-like.

Cummings: So you've been close for a long time.

King: Very close.

Marcello: What kind of a personality did Abner have at that time?

King: Carefree, happy-go-lucky. He has always been the kind of person that would help you do anything you wanted to do. I was a sprinter; he was a hurdler. He tried his best to make a hurdler out of me, but I guess I was a little bit too stiff, I just couldn't get over the hurdles. But he didn't look at it from the standpoint that "if I teach you or show you how to do it, you might develop and be better than I and take my place." He wasn't that kind of person. It was, "If I can help you in any way, then I'll do it." I guess he took this attitude with me even more so because we were just more like brothers than we were friends. What I had was his; what he had was mine. And if he needed money and I had it, he got it. There was no pay-back time: "If I've got it, you've got it." It was more of a brotherly love kind of thing. But he was-- still is--a warm-hearted kind of guy.

Cummings: Were your personalities alike then or what?

Marcello: Or on the other hand, did your personalities simply just compliment one another?

King: I think they complimented each other. I guess you could say I'm

a warm, giving person also, but for some reason it's just like some marriages--God just made certain people for each other, and we were just two of those kind of people that hit it off.

Marcello: In terms of being an introvert or an extrovert, how would you classify you and Abner?

King: Oh, let's see, I would say at times we were a little of both-- a little of both, I would say we were more introverted, but there were times when both sides would show.

Cummings: I know that you grew up in the part of Dallas that is predominantly black, and you went to Lincoln High School, which is predominantly black. In your earlier years in elementary school and junior high primarily, what kind of relationship did you have with any white kids? Did you play sports with them out on the streets? Did you compete against them in organized YMCA sports or junior high sports?

King: No, the only contact that that I had with any white guys my age was probably out at Cedar Crest Golf Course on Saturday mornings. I would go out there and caddy, and there were quite a few guys that I knew out there. Occasionally, we would go around outside and swing a golf club or something, but that was it. In high school we didn't compete. There were occasions when Lincoln and Sunset High School would practice track out at Cobb Stadium, and occasionally we would sprint against their relay team, or we would run a hundred or a 220 or something. But other than that, I really didn't have any relationship athletically with anyone except blacks.

Cummings: At that point in your life, when you were fifteen or sixteen years

old, did you ever question in your own mind or with somebody else why that situation existed and why things were so segregated?

King:

No, it never really occurred to me that Lincoln and Booker Washington played football on Wednesday nights out at Cobb Stadium and the other schools played whenever they played. I didn't keep up with their league that much. It was basically Lincoln, Booker Washington, Waco Moore, Austin, and Wichita Falls because these were the teams that were in our district. It never really dawned on me that there were white high schools in Dallas competing in athletics until I went to college. It never really dawned on me. Basically, there was one race, and that was it.

The only time I really knew that there was a difference in race was if you would go in a certain store like H. L. Green, where my mom worked. There were two water fountains side-by-side. One said "White," one would say "Colored." Or if you would get on a streetcar, you would have the little signs that you could move from one seat to another, and one side would say "White," and the other would say "Colored." You noticed differences there, but other than that I really didn't notice anything. I really didn't.

When we ran track out at P.C. Cobb against Sunset, it was real friendly. If you got beat, you shook the guy's hand afterwards; if you beat him, it was likewise. There was no difference. We would laugh and joke and talk, and because Sunset was purple and white and Lincoln was purple and white, we sort of felt good about the ol' purple and white. But I never questioned it. I never really

paid it any attention to it. I really didn't.

Cummings: It doesn't seem to have bothered you, the way you are talking about it. It doesn't seem like it ever really bothered you that that's the way life was.

King: It didn't bother me. I grew up in a Christian home. I had to go to church. That was a necessity. To stay in my household, you do go to church. But we were never taught any differently. You see people, and you like people for who they are. You don't notice the color of a person. If you like a person, you like them because of what that person means to you.

So color never really came into play until I got to college, and then I began to notice that there is a difference in people. Even though there were some whites at North Texas that readily accepted me, there were those that did not readily. But eventually they did. So it never really dawned on me until I got to college.

Cummings: What about friends that you grew up with in high school and junior high that you ran around with, maybe college friends of yours and Abner's? What were their feelings toward the segregation that was evident? Were they basically like yourselves in their thinking, that that's just the way it was and it doesn't bother them?

King: Right. I think that was basically it. We knew nothing else, and we were content with what we had. I lived on Pine Street in South Dallas, and I didn't know that there was a Forrest Avenue High School until a year after I had graduated from high school, because Forrest Avenue was then changed over to James Madison High School.

I had gone to the Fair Park, and in going to the fair from my house, occasionally you could go down old Forrest Avenue, but it never really dawned on me that "that's a high school, and it's a white high school." So I think that all of my classmates and playmates were content with playing with who we played with because we just didn't know anything else.

Cummings: You mentioned a minute ago your family and being raised in a Christian household. Were your parents a big influence, do you feel like, on you and your eventual personality?

King: Definitely! My dad worked two jobs, He was gone in the morning before I got up, and I was in the bed when he got home, even in my high school days. So really, the only time I really saw my dad was on Sunday, and the one thing that really struck out in my mind about it was when he would take his bath. The one thing that I said I always wanted to do was to use Mennen shaving lotion because he used it and it had a very good fragrance to it. So I would say, "I want to grow up and be like my dad and use that Mennen shaving lotion." As a matter of fact, I put the first razor to my face when I was about fourteen just to use Mennen.

But my mom, who really was the head of the household, she ramrodded everything around there. She didn't get a high school education. She wanted all of her kids--and there were five of us--to get a high school and a college degree. Because of her, the first year or two that I was in college, I was just there. I really didn't apply myself. I managed to pass, but I really didn't apply

myself until my junior year. The day that I was to enroll was the day that we eulogized my mom. I had gotten married, which, I felt, kind of broke her heart a little bit, but I made a vow to her then that I was going to go back and get that degree because this is the one thing that she wanted us to do, and I would do everything in my power to see to it that the two brothers under me got their degree. So, yes, I would say that even after she had passed, that influence was still there.

Marcello: Now Abner's father was a preacher, isn't that correct?

King: Right.

Marcello: Did you go to the same church?

King: Occasionally, I would go to his church. He never came to my church. I'm Baptist, and he was a member of the Church of God in Christ. When I was much smaller, we would call them the "roly-polies" because they played the guitar and the tamborines and beat the drums and danced, as they say. I would go occasionally just to watch people get up and dance. Even though I wasn't a member of his church, I did go up in the choir stand and sing with him, and I'd clap my hands and occasionally get me a tamborine and bruise my hand real good. But he never attended my church, but I occasionally went to his,

Cummings: I'd like to touch briefly on your playing career over at Lincoln. Do any games stand out? You mentioned the state championship game. Do you remember the district championship against Washington? Any statistics, personal statistics? Any outstanding plays that stand

out in your mind?

King: Yes, there are several plays in that particular game against Booker Washington. We had to beat Booker Washington to represent our district, which was something Lincoln had not done since 1949. We had tied Booker Washington the previous year 7-7, but we had to beat them. We scored first on Booker Washington, and Lincoln was the type of team that they say, "if they get out front, they're hard to beat; but if they ever get behind, they can't come from behind and win a ballgame."

So I kicked off in that ballgame after the touchdown, and they had a razzle-dazzle play where the back got the ball and ran down the right side of the line with his interference, and just before he got tackled, he threw the ball laterally across the field to a trailing back. And one of our defensive guys, Billy Wedgeworth, made a fantastic tackle on the guy, Jimmy Toleston, to keep him from scoring.

We held them, and that sort of boosted us up. We had an opportunity to score another touchdown...Lincoln was not a passing team. We never passed the ball. If we threw three passes in a ballgame, that was a record. We just believed in running, and we felt that we would run on Booker Washinton the first half and come back with a trick fake run and throw the ball. We had one with Abner throwing the ball on a "tail back around." I should have know--and everybody in the stands probably knew--he was going

to throw the ball to me. But he was looking at the other end and threw the ball directly to me, and I guess he led me a couple or three yards. It hit my fingertips, but everybody said I should have caught the ball. I missed it, and I blamed it on him.

But the deciding thing in that ballgame was a field goal kick by a guy named Earl Riggs that we grew up with. I was the kickoff guy, and Earl was the place kicker because he was more consistent. I had a habit of keeping my head up when I got ready to kick the ball, and that's why Ken Bahnsen changed my style of kicking, when I went to college, from a ten-pace step to two paces, because I could never keep my head down. But Earl kicked one for about twenty-eight yards or so for a field goal that won that ballgame for us. That sort of stands out. It was the first time Lincoln had beaten Booker Washington in quite a number of years.

Cummings: You said Lincoln was primarily a running team. Was that because of the talent of Abner as a runner?

King: Yes, We had Abner Haynes, Leon White, Hubert Johnson, Earl Riggs, Jessie Johnson. We had a corral of tailbacks... James Grey, who we converted from a tailback to a quarterback. He was only about 5' 4", but we used him because he was mobile and could use the option; whereas, our main quarterback was sort of immobile and couldn't move around. We had a corral of backs, and the philosophy of the coach was just to run the ball: "If we control it, they can't score." So we very seldom passed the football.

Cummings: What kind of a position did that put you in? You are a receiver.

- King: I was more of a tackle in high school than I was a receiver because it was just basically blocking, blocking, blocking. But it didn't bother me. The thing that would get you is, you would go out and practice your warm-up drills, and you would run pass patterns. And I mean you would run them! Then you'd get to the ballgame, and you would never throw the football. It kind of got to you: "Why have me practice catching the football if they're never going to throw it to me?" But he was a fantastic coach, and I guess one of the biggest thrills I've ever received in my coaching career was to have had Coach Lewis as my coach and then to go back to my alma mater and coach with him one year. It was quite an experience, and he was one fantastic coach--fantastic.
- Cummings: How long was he there at Lincoln?
- King: Coach was there from 1953...he took over the head coaching job in 1954, and he was dismissed in 1960. He came back, I believe, in 1965 and coached one year and then went into administration.
- Cummings: Did you receive any individual honors during your high school career? I know that Abner was All-State.
- King: He was All-State, and I was All-District. I was one of the tri-captains my senior year. That was basically it. I was probably selected All-District because of the defense and not offense because you can't make All-District if you don't catch the football (chuckle)! But I played offensive end and defensive outside cornerback--linebackers, we called them in those days--and "Ab" was the halfback behind me,

Marcello: We know that Abner had at least one scholarship offer, and that was at the University of Colorado. How about yourself?

King: We both had one to the same college. Dallas Ward, who was the coach or a scout or something at the University of Colorado, came down and talked to us, and we were to go up to Boulder to look at the campus. For some reason, we didn't go. We also had a scholarship to Prairie View, and I've often wondered why we would turn down a scholarship to a college to go to a college where we were not offered scholarship.

Marcello: How do you explain it?

King: I guess it was just meant to be. He and I were talking one day, and Denton is his home, and we went up, and we talked to Coach Mitchell. He told us, "You can come up and try out for the team. I don't have any scholarships, and if you make the team, we'll try to do something for you." So we said, "Okay." I guess this was during the month of June, and, sure enough, later on, there we were--no scholarship. But I don't regret it.

Marcello: Were there any fears or trepidations about, in essence, integrating the North Texas athletic program? You were pioneers of a sort, but did you consider yourselves as such?

King: It really didn't dawn on me that we were pioneers until about eight years ago. It came up in a discussion, and the impact really hit me. But when we went up, if there were any fears, it had to have been on their part because we didn't know any. All I wanted to do was just go up and play football. I think there were some

fears among the coaches, and I think they were primarily how would we be accepted because I think Coach Mitchell did say something about having to go to the board of regents to see if it was okay. They knew integration was coming and all.

I guess the thing that stands out more in my mind about the situation was the fact that through the years North Texas had always played Ole Miss the first football game, and they always played them in Mississippi; and Abner and I just happened to have gone by in the coaches' office when Coach Mitchell was talking to the coach at Ole Miss, and he explained to them, "Next year I will have two on my varsity." The coach evidently told him, "Either you leave them there, or we don't play anymore," because Coach Mitchell told him, "We just won't play you guys anymore." From that day since, I don't think North Texas has ever played Ole Miss. But that was quite gratifying to hear him say that.

Marcello: Did you ever discuss your decision to go to North Texas with Coach Lewis?

King: Never. We never did. It was just something that Abner and I did together. We did talk to his brother Sam about it, and Sam, who was an outstanding football player at Prairie View, sort of encouraged us to go to North Texas. But, no, we never consulted Coach Lewis about going to North Texas, Colorado, or Prairie View.

Cummings: I know from talking to several of the coaches that they said that Abner's father influenced Abner's going up there because he wanted him to stay close to home so that he could drive thirty miles up the

highway and watch him play on Saturday. So his dad was pretty much of an influence in pointing him toward Denton. Did any of your family members help you out in your decision?

King: The only thing my parents told me is the same things that I tell my kids, I did ask my mom and dad what college did they think I should go to, and they said, "The one where you can get a degree." They really didn't tell me where to go; they just put it there for me to try to figure out myself. It was good advice. I tell my sons that right now: "Go where you think you can get a degree." But, no, Mom just wanted me to get an education.

During the three-and-a-half years that I played football at North Texas, I managed to get her there one time to see me play. She felt that football was just a real rough game, and she didn't want to see her little boy get hurt, and she wouldn't come. So we finally talked her into it my sophomore year--to coming up and looking at a football game. I still don't think she knew what she was looking at. She didn't know anything about football.

One thing about her, she knew her son, I said, "Hey, that's no problem. You shouldn't have no problem trying to pick out which one I am out there." Even without the color, she knew us from anybody else. She would tell you all the time, if it was night and we were walking home, she could look down the street, and if she couldn't make out the face, she could watch the swing of our arms and tell, "That's my boy coming down the street." She would often tell us, "You guys try to get in by twelve or one o'clock because

I can't go to sleep until you come home," She would often say, "When your foot hits the porch, I immediately go to sleep." She couldn't sleep with us out in the streets somewhere. It was pretty rough in those days, too, so I can sympathize with her on that.

Cummings: So football really did not play that big of a role in your decision and Abner's decision to go to college somewhere,

King: No, I was going to go to college whether I played football or not, but I don't believe I could have made it financially, had I not played football. There were five of us, and it was pretty rough on the folks; and had it not been for football, my chances of going to North Texas wouldn't have been as great as if I had been on my own.

Marcello: Describe how you went about contacting the people at North Texas in terms of deciding to enroll there and meeting the football staff and so on. How did that all come about?

King: "Ab" and I were talking about it one day and decided that we would ride up to Denton, and so we did and went by the coaches' office. They had a big two-story...it looked like one of the old "frat" houses up there. We went up and introduced ourselves to Coach and told him we would like to come up and try out for the football team. He said, "Fine. I can't offer you a scholarship because we don't have any."

Marcello: He didn't seem flabbergasted or anything of that nature?

King: No, not really. I never saw...Coach Mitchell, to me, kept the same

facial expression. He was not an excitable person. Nothing bothered him. No, it didn't bother him. He asked Abner what position he played, and "Ab" said, "I'm a halfback." "How much you weigh?" I think at the time "Ab" weighed about 130 pounds, "Aren't you a little light for a tailback?" He says, "I may be, but I can run the ball." He asked me what position I played, and I said, "End." I was weighing about 175 pounds. He said, "Tackles up here weigh about 230." We said, "We'll try to block 'em some kind of way." We told him that we would check back with him later on in August.

We went back, and they said, "Hey, it's fine for you guys to come on up." I believe he had to go to the board of regents to see if it was okay for us to come up, and he gave us the green light, and we went up.

I can recall getting out of the taxi, and they were on the field practicing. The first person I met was an ol' home boy in Denton, Garland Warren. I think Garland was born in Denton. I think he attended the high school in Denton. Garland walked over, shook my hand, introduced himself, and said, "We're glad to have you." I went to the coach, and he told one of the managers to take me in and fit me out. So I did and went out, and that was it.

Cummings: You don't recall any discussions between yourself and Abner about the anxieties about going to a college that was solely white up until that year?

King: (Chuckle) We talked about the pros and cons, but we did some

devilish things, mischievous things, when we were in high school, so we said, "Hey, what the devil. Let's try something else,"

I remember we went to Houston for a football game, and we lived on the campus of Texas Southern in a section where they were adding to the dormitory. So we decided about twelve-thirty or one o'clock that night to go over on the other side and wake the guys up. As we were going over, there was all this sand and concrete and water and buckets, and it looked very inviting. So we put us together a mixture of concrete and went over and opened the door and--"PHEEEW"--splashed it on somebody. We had one of the most devilish water fights that night you ever want to see. As a matter of fact, the president of Texas Southern wrote the principal of Lincoln and said they will never house another Dallas school because we really messed the place up. It was all in fun.

But we did some devilish things, and we didn't think anything about it. So when we decided to go to North Texas, yes, we talked about the pros and the cons and what we should expect and all, but we were willing to do it. So we just went on up there.

Marcello: Did anybody in the black community ever say, "Hey, you're making a mistake," Were you ever discouraged by anybody in the black community?

King: No one in the black community really knew we were going to North Texas until once we got there, and the Denton Record-Chronicle came out and interviewed us, and there was this big, huge article in the newspaper about "Ab" and I being there. The Dallas papers then

picked up on it and played it up. No, I think there was more encouragement: "Guys, look, you're representing all of blacks, not just Abner Haynes and Leon King. Everybody will be looking at you guys, so whatever you do you are going to have to do it well." William Blair, who wrote for the old...oh, I believe it was the Dallas Times Herald...no, it wasn't the Dallas Times Herald, I can't think of the name of the black paper...Dallas Express. He was very, very encouraging in telling us to go up and excell and do well. We never received any discouragement whatsoever.

Even the black community in Denton, especially the guys that were in high school over in Fred Moore, they were just appalled to hear two blacks going out for the team at North Texas. They all knew Abner, but they didn't know me. There was an insuranceman, Kimball...I can't think of Kimball's first name, but he wrote insurance for the City of Denton, and I guess he was one of the biggest boosters we had in Denton in encouraging us to go on out there: "Hey, play some ball,"

Marcello: This was a black insuranceman?

King: Right.

Cummings: If we could maybe step back just a small step, having researched the whole project a little bit, in 1955 there was a court order that basically opened the doors to black undergraduate students at North Texas. Up until that time, I believe only graduate students who were black were allowed in. Anyway, the court order was a result of a suit filed by a Dallas native,

King: Joe Atkins,

Cummings: Yes, his father on behalf of Joe Atkins. Did you know Joe--very much about him?

King: A little bit. He's a Lincoln graduate, and if I'm not mistaken, Joe graduated a year before I did. I knew of him on campus. He was a bookworm, a very studious young man. I don't know where Joe eventually went to college and got his degree, but he did teach in the Dallas system for quite awhile. I don't know that much about Joe other than seeing him around campus and knowing him when I saw him.

Cummings: Were you aware at all of that trial, that eventual court order?

King: I had no idea that there was a court order pending at North Texas. I had known and seen some blacks working on their master's degrees at North Texas, but the only thing that was real to me at the time was just high school. I wasn't much on reading the newspaper. If it was in the sports page, I would read it, but I really wasn't off into reading editorials and things then like I do now. So I had no idea. Once I got to North Texas, I found out about Joe going up and then deciding to leave and all, but I had no idea before we got up there.

Cummings: What part of your life did football play?

King: Probably the biggest part of my life. I love the game. As we say, you eat football, you sleep football, you talk football. "Ab" and I used to sit down and play a game. He would call out a college, and I would give the mascot; I would call out a college, and he

would give the mascot. I would call out an athlete's name, and he would have to tell what team the guy played on. That was just it--football, athletics as a whole. Neither one of us tried to play basketball, but we both got into track. He was a much better athlete track-wise--well, football, too--than I was, but he was always working with me and trying to develop me. When I first went out for track, I was so slow they couldn't find anything for me to run. I was too slow to run the mile and definitely couldn't run a sprint, but the coach gave me some drills to work on because I was the kind of runner that ran on his heels. They worked and developed me, and I eventually picked up a little speed. But, yes, football and athletics as a whole has been a major part of my life. I love it.

Cummings: Was it a big part of your life in your transition to North Texas?

King: Definitely. It was then that I realized that we were no longer in high school, that we could not participate in more than one sport and make it. My first year, I tried to run freshman track, and I couldn't do it and keep up in my subjects, so I had to give up track and stay strictly to football. But football and track are my favorite sports. I was never much into baseball. I played a little softball, but I was not much of a baseball fan--just football and track. I couldn't see very well, so I didn't try to play basketball. So I just stayed with football and track.

Cummings: Okay, so you and Abner were the only two black players out there in the fall of 1956.

King: Right.

Cummings: I know that's a long time ago, but do you recall ever maybe just stopping and looking around and seeing yourself isolated-- you and Abner isolated--from all these white players? Were there instances that caused you to stop and say, "Gosh, what am I doing here? I'm not in comfortable surroundings."

King: The only time I was really uncomfortable at North Texas was my first year. We went to Navarro Junior College in Corsicana. I have never in my life been more uncomfortable or frightened than I was when we went there. The team as a whole...we were small-- that freshman team. I think we had only about eighteen or nineteen guys on the whole football team. Three of us were ends. So we were small, and we were definitely a team. I think the two people that made it that way were Ken Bahnsen...I was a little skeptical of him when I went there, especially when I found out that..I believe Ken is from Louisiana, and I had always heard that people from Louisiana hate blacks. You know, they're prejudiced. In no way was he like that. But Ken Bahnsen did a lot to bring that team together, and I think that the late Vernon Cole, who was our quarterback, really solidified that football team. Vernon was the kind of guy that would go to the huddle and would call a play and would look at you in such a way that if you didn't block, you wouldn't go back to the huddle, and if you didn't run that ball, you wouldn't go back to the huddle. He was just that kind of guy.

In my sophomore year, there was a racial slur made because

I made an unusual catch of the football. Someone made the statement, "That nigger don't miss nothing!" Well, he didn't mean anything by it, but the next day he was sent to a junior college because the coaches said, "We're a team, and we're not going to have anything like that here,"

But when we went to play Navarro Junior College, we went to dine at the hotel. We got there a little early, so Coach said, "Why don't y'all just go walk around the town." So we did. And I always ran around with the big tackle I played next to, Joe Mack Pryor. "Ab" would run around with some of the backs.

So when we went back to the hotel to eat, I was sitting down, and the waiter came and said, "We have made accommodations for you and your buddy in the back." Well, I got up to go to the back, and Joe Pryor said, "Now wait a minute! We're not going to have this!" And he went and told Coach Bahnsen. Bahnsen said, "Hold it, everybody! Stop right now!" And he just told the guy, "If we all can't eat here as a team, you prepared all this food for nothing." The guy said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you wanted them back there." He said, "If I had, I would've taken them back there." So we sat down and ate.

I'm nervous already. So we got to the stadium, and the stadium in Corsicana at the time reminded me a whole lot of the one we have out here in Pleasant Grove. You've got a little four-foot fence separating you from the grandstand, and you've got a little biddy hut at either end of the field for your dressing room.

So we go out to take our calisthenics and warm up, and people are beginning to come in.

"Ab" and I picked up a little chant that they had going in the stands. It sounded good, but scared the daylights out of me. It was, "Get them niggers off the field! Get them niggers off the field!" It began to get louder and louder. We ignored it. When Coach told us to go back in, to get ready to come out, "Ab" and I were walking, and he said, "Did you hear that chant?" I said, "Yeah, I heard it." He said, "Well, I tell you what. Before we get through here tonight, they're gonna wish they had us off the field." I said, "Okay."

We went in and got our instructions. The first play Coach Bahnsen called was "fifty-eight, quick," which is quick pitch to "Ab," going around the right side. My job is, if the end is playing head-on, and I feel that "Ab" can get by him without me blocking him, then I pick up the linebacker; but if he's playing too far out, then I've got to hook him. So this joker was playing too far out, so I had to block him. And on the first play, "Ab" and the halfback collided. Both had concussions. The only thing I could think of was, "Get the niggers off the field," and "what's going to happen to me after this ballgame," because here he is, laying out over here--cold--and I'm by myself. So they took them both to the sideline. "Ab" eventually recovered and came back, out on the field. But that is probably the most frightened I've ever been. I was very uncomfortable.

But one thing about it, if anyone ever played dirty football with us, somebody on that team would find out about it, and they would say, "Hey, let's get him," even if we would have to design a play in the huddle to get whoever it was. I've been bitten; I've had them to spit on me; they'd call me names in the line. And the more they'd call me, the madder Joe Pryor would get. If you want to see a big guy,..I believe Joe was from Diamond Hill, in Fort Worth. Oh, they'd call me a name, and Joe would get mad. We had a double team block that he would call--"sixty-six." He would say, "High sixty-six," which means, he's going to get him high, and you get him low. And I'd set him up, and Joe would come across with his elbow and almost kill the guy. So we really never had to defend ourselves. They always did it for us. I was never uncomfortable on that team, once I got there and felt the atmosphere of the team. Everybody would come up to you and want to know your name. It looked to me like they went out of their way to know your name. It looked to me like they went out of their way to make you comfortable.

Then, we had a situation,..I was a member of the Baptist Student Union, and I would go over for Bible lessons and all, and integration came up one day. One of the guys got up and said, "Well, I used to be prejudiced. I used to hate all blacks, whether they did anything to me or not. And the thing that made me realize that blacks just want to be like everybody else is that when I was in the service, we were in the shower. And a black guy came by and

popped me with a towel, and it made me mad, and I wanted to fight him. It looked like something hit me and told me why he hit me with that towel. And he and I became good friends." So, really, there was no uncomfortable feeling whatsoever,

Marcello: What role did Vernon Cole play? We hear his name coming up time and time again. You mentioned him awhile ago yourself. What was it about Vernon Cole? Talk a little bit about Vernon Cole.

King: Vernon Cole was a little blond-headed quarterback out of Pilot Point. He wore eyeglasses. If you looked at him, you didn't think he could do anything. I believe we had two quarterbacks. One of the quarterbacks was a guy that had attended the high school in Denton. I can't recall his name now. He eventually joined the police force. But Vernon...I don't know. It was just something about his personality, something that he could say in that huddle that just made you believe in him and yourself. If you didn't hold up to what he wanted you to do, it just made you feel bad. He would go to the huddle and say, "Okay, Big Leon, we need seven yards. Now we're going to try a 'seventy-six!' Get in there." And he could look at you, and something would just go all through you. And you'd go up..."seventy-six" was a "buttonhook" on this guy to the inside or whether I'm going to have to turn to the outside. But some kind of way, I'm going to get down there and "buttonhook" because if I don't, Vernon's going to kill me.

I don't know...he was just a guy that built confidence, not only in you but in him. He had a brother, Charlie, who played

guard. Charlie was nothing like Vernon, Charlie was more of a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, but Vernon Cole was all business. He was the kind of guy that made you believe in yourself.

He went to Waco and taught in Waco, and he died of leukemia, I believe. I believe he died of leukemia. But Vernon Cole was just an outstanding young man,

Marcello: Evidently, he had a lot of influence over the rest of the members of that team, also.

King: He did,

Marcello: In other words, if Vernon Cole accepted these two blacks, then they must be okay.

King: They're okay, right, He was just that kind of guy. I don't know how many guys on that freshman team knew each other prior to getting there, but a lot of people in Denton wanted to see that freshman team stay together all the way through. That didn't happen. I think in our sophomore year, "Ab" started, and he was the only one that started, Vernon played a lot of quarterback, and I went in periodically as an end. But that was a good team, and Vernon was just a fantastic guy to know. He was really a swell guy.

Marcello: What kind of a reception did you get from the players who were on the varsity, maybe the juniors or the seniors? In other words, you hadn't come in with those guys and grown with those guys athletically.

King: The only time you got a bad feeling or a negative feeling was when occasionally Bahnsen would let us go down and scrimmage them, and we would show them up. They'd get mad because "a freshman is

making me look bad, and here I am, a junior or a sophomore."

All the guys on the varsity team were good guys.

Now there were two that did everything they possibly could to hide their prejudices, but it just stuck out like a sore thumb. One of the guys just happened to have been from Corsicana. He played tackle--darn good football player. Before he graduated, though, I believe he became more and more genuine.

We had another one that played quarterback that we felt was a little prejudiced. There were occasions where I was wide-open, and the ball was never thrown my way. A guy may have double coverage, and he'd try to "thread the needle" in there, so to speak. But there were times when we felt these two guys held it against us. As a matter of fact, there was a guy who kind of lost his starting position as quarterback because of that.

Vernon believed in me, and I believed in him. He knew my moves, and he knew exactly where I was going to be and when. If I'm going down and running a post pattern across the middle, Vernon knows about when I'm going to make my cut, and the ball might be on the way before I ever cut. But when I cut, I know to look because he was that kind of guy.

But the guys on the varsity...oh, what's Mack's name? I can't think of Mack's name. He played end in front of me, and he taught me a lot on how to size up a guy and influence him to make him play the way you want him to play. If you want to open up the sixth hole between you and the tackle, then you kind of cheat out. If

he doesn't go with you, come back and do it again. If he still doesn't go with you, go tell the quarterback you can run the end sweeps. But he did a lot to help me with my blocking.

Jim Braymer was another end that helped a whole lot. But I feel that they all went out of their way to make us feel comfortable and welcome, not only on the football field but in class. Because most of us majored in physical education or science, we took a lot of classes together. Even in the Student Union Building, the guys would wave. So we were readily accepted. We couldn't get in the dormitory,

Marcello: Describe the living arrangements and how that came about. I think that's interesting and important,

King: Well, Abner, that being his birthplace, had a sister living in Denton, and the first year, or the first half-year, we lived with her. We had a big fire that destroyed her home, and we split because there weren't too many places there that could accommodate the two of us at the time.

Our sophomore year...we didn't even eat on the campus our freshman year, and in our sophomore year, when we went to fall camp, they did let us live on campus in the athletic dormitory until registration started. We kind of grumbled a little bit because it was a hardship on us to have to go to the scout meeting on one night, and then the next night you have to review the game film. We had to walk-- oh, my God--about eight or ten miles or so to where we lived,

So it was either you walk, or you "thumb." A lot of the guys

would take us home after football practice because we didn't have any transportation, But we kind of grumbled about it, and one of the coaches knew one of the guys out there that had a vacant house, So they set that house up, and "Ab" and I rented it, along with Billy Christle and Art Perkins, who had come up at the time. But it was kind of tough, going to and from, at the time. The busses, I think, at the time ran about two hours a day. When people go to work, they stop; and then when people got off from work, they would start running again,

But it wasn't too bad. The rent was where we could handle it. I think we were paying about \$60 a month. We all chipped in because at that time we were on a scholarship. So we would pool our money and pay the rent. We had the noon and the evening meal on campus, and very seldom would we eat breakfast. But once we got some transportation...after I went through about three or four cars, and "Ab" went through a car or two, we managed to get some transportation to the campus.

Marcello: Now this whole business concerning living arrangements was a decision that was made within the administration, I gather.

King: We were told it was made by the board of regents. We sort of surmised that it wasn't so much that they didn't want us in the athletic dorm, as much as we felt like they didn't want us that close to the girls. I had some friend girls up there. As a matter of fact, one of my good buddies was my science lab partner, who is the professional golfer, Sandra Palmer. Sandra Palmer and G. A.

Moore and I were lab partners in Dr. Lott's science class. We always said Sandra was built like a fullback. But we felt that that was the primary reason for us not being allowed to live on the campus, because of the closeness of us being to the girls in the dormitory. And we really didn't push it after the coaches did all they could to try to get us on campus. We didn't pursue it anymore.

Marcello: Recollect the house fire. I've talked a little bit with some of the coaches about that, and that was a unique situation. Apparently, the house burned totally to the ground, and you and Abner lost all your clothes and all your possessions. Apparently, from what I gather, the university and some of your buddies and the townspeople really rallied behind you two.

King: I'm trying to think of the month. I want to say it was February 16, 1957. I believe it was a Wednesday. I do know it was cold because I had two pair of pants, two shirts, a sweater, and my overcoat. I was sitting in Mrs. Crawford's zoology class at the time, and someone came through the door and beckoned for me. I was a little hesitant to go out, but they insisted. I went out, and I was told that the house where we were living was on fire. So I tiptoed in and told Mrs. Crawford that I had to leave because of that, and she said, "Okay. Let me know if there's anything I can do to help."

I went out, and when I got there, it was gone. We went into our bedroom that we shared. You could see a portion of this or a

burnt shoe or a shirt with maybe the sleeves burned off and the rest of it still intact, It was kind of tough, being that cold and everything you have is gone, So I called home, and my wife and her mom came up and got me, "Ab" had an aunt that lived next door, so he went over there until his dad could come and pick him up.

Between the church that I attended in Denton...and some of the people in the city sort of rallied and pooled their money and got us some clothes, It was tough to have lost all you had. Fortunately, I had a brother, I was a little bit thicker than he, but I did managed to squeeze into some of his clothes, "Ab" had no one his size at home, so it was a little tough. But they did rally and come to our rescue.

Marcello: So in terms of your overall living quarters, then, you mentioned awhile ago that it was a matter of inconvenience more than anything else,

King: Right,

Marcello: As far as living quarters themselves were concerned, I don't see there were any problems.

King: Very true; very good. The first year that we went there, living with his sister...she had five boys, so it was a little crowded, but it was nice, When you're sitting in your room trying to study, and they're ripping and running around the house--and she worked nights--it was kind of rough, and we'd have to holler at them to tone down. But it was more of an inconvenience than anything else.

We had a nice four-room house for next year, and "Ab" and I bunked together, and Billy and Art bunked together. We had a spare room and a big, huge kitchen. We'd all get in and burn our food occasionally, but it was nice. We kind of took pride in sprucing it up and making it look good. When guys like Oscar Robinson and Paul Hogue...oh, there's another one, but I can't think of his name. But when the basketball teams from Cincinnati and around would come in, we'd take them over to the house. One year we brought them to Dallas because there just wasn't that much in Denton to see. So we'd bring them to Dallas and try to show them a good time, in the hope that when we come through their fair city that they'd do the same. But we had a nice little swanky house that we fixed up.

Cummings: Did you ever get a feeling of being isolated from the rest of them? Here's a forty-man, fifty-man varsity team, and two of you have to live clear across town, while the rest of the team, you know, is chumping it up in the dormitories and living, you know, ten feet away from each other, all up and down the hall.

King: Not really isolated. Frustrated, maybe. After putting in a hard day on the football field, you're having to try to make it to the Union Building...see, once we left the practice field, we would probably go by the Union Building and pick up a Pepsi-Cola and a package of peanut butter crackers and munch on those until we got home. And here these guys are. Practically all of them have automobiles, and they pull into the dorm; and you pass by the dorm,

and we hear all the noise going on, laughing going on, and one of these hunger pangs run across you, and the old stomach grows. Yes, you began to get a little frustrated and say, "Man, is it all worth it?" But we never felt separated and not a part of the team.

Marcello: It's kind of ironic because in one of our interviews, the person said that later on, when they were recruiting blacks, one of the stipulations that the blacks insisted upon was that they don't have to live on campus (chuckle).

King: (Chuckle) Well, I'll tell you. We had to make our own fun. You see, the first year we were there, there were only twelve or fifteen of us, maybe. We would come to college, and then we would go home. We really didn't know what college life was like. I didn't, until my junior year, after my mom passed, and I decided, "I'm going back up here and get my work." I would leave the football field and go to the library. I would go in the stacks, and I would stay until I'd get those assignments. There were evenings at six-thirty and seven o'clock...and I had seen in the movies college campuses with the lights and the little pond and all, and although they were there at North Texas, I only saw it during the day.

But here I had an opportunity to see it at night. We attended some bonfires and pep rallies at night. I guess during my sophomore and junior year, college really became more of a college, and I think that because of the success we had our freshman year, we really felt like we were a part of this university. So it really

got good the sophomore year.

But we had a lot of fun because we had to make it up ourselves. The only thing we really had was a little...they had union center out there that the veterans had built, and they had dances, and we would go to that. Or a group of us would go over to someone's house, and we'd play cards. We'd play "Bid Whisk." If you don't make your bid, you'd have a pitcher of water, and you drank that water. It was a lot of fun,

We really didn't try to get into any of the fraternities, so we decided one year, "Let's have our own independent fraternity." We had one, but I don't remember what we called it. The group that got together and wrote the guidelines and bylaws and all initiated each other.

Marcello: This wasn't the Geezles, was it?

King: No, the Geezles was the athletic fraternity. Most of the athletes belonged to the Geezles. But this was strictly a black fraternity. We got together and drew up guidelines, and we decided we would initiate each other for a week. Well, the first one, and the one that hurt me more than anything, was the one that Arthur Perkins put on me. I couldn't drive my car to school for a week; I had to walk.

On Friday at twelve o'clock, the initiation was over, and we were to be brothers. Art went to bed. I was sitting in the kitchen, writing a theme, and it dawned on me, "That rascal got me, and I didn't get him back." There was a box of salt sitting on the table,

so I decided that I would get that box of salt and sprinkle it down the hall. I went and got his toothbrush and woke him up. I said, "Brother Perkins, someone has wasted salt all up and down this hall. Will you take this and sweep it up for me?" He had to take the toothbrush and go down the hall and sweep it up. But it was a lot of fun; we enjoyed it.

That spring we participated in the track meet, and we decided we'd all cut our hair off. Well, I knew how my wife was going to react to that. But I didn't want to be different from anyone else, so I had the barber to cut it off. At the time, I used to wear a beret all the time. So I came home that weekend, late, on purpose. She was in the bed, so I prepared myself for bed, and I kept my beret on. She woke up during the night and pulled it off. I woke up and put it on. She finally discovered that I had cut all of my hair off. She just went to slapping me all over my head. She was quite angry because I'd had it cut off, but once I told her why I did it and all, it helped a little bit--but not much (laughter). She had to accept it because all the hair was gone.

But we had a lot of good times that we made for ourselves out there...street softball...we made our own little golf course. As a matter of fact, I used to like to get in the back yard and hit golf balls. Billy Christle had never played golf in his life, and I was trying to teach him how to play golf. I would daresay right now that Bill can go out right now and probably shoot par golf. He's a very good golfer.

After our freshman year, and after we'd managed to get an automobile, I really didn't want to live on campus, not so much... I think it was because of the scholarship. I needed every penny I could rake up because I was married and had a son, and son number two was on the way. So I had to try to provide for me on the campus and send the milk money home for the wife and kids. So that was one reason I stayed off campus, because of the scholarship money.

Marcello: How would you say you were received in the black community of Denton? Did they consider you as heroes, that is, you and Abner?

King: Yes, I do believe they looked upon us as heroes, especially the high school kids. Now the principal at the high school didn't see it that way. Professor Redd was a fantastic administrator, but he did not want the college guys coming on the high school campus. So it was taboo. Oh, we got even with him, but it was taboo for us to go on the campus. I think, deep down inside, Professor Redd appreciated what we were doing and was glad for us, but he had a job to do, and he did not want any outsiders coming on his campus. Even today, I don't want any outsiders coming on this campus. I don't care who they are; they disrupt the learning process. So he restricted us from attending any of the high school activities there unless it was a paid affair--football or basketball or something. We could attend that, but other than that...but I would say that in the eyes of the community as a whole, yes, we were well-received.

One thing that I did, that I didn't realize what was going on...

I later found out. When I went to Denton, I had a lot of khaki pants and sort of denim, dress-looking pants. Most of the people wore blue jeans. So in some people's eyes, I looked like I was a sharp dresser or was trying to out-dress other people, and that wasn't the case at all. I was just wearing what I had. But once I realized this, I sort of switched in and got me two or three pairs of blue jeans and started wearing them, and everything was okay,

Marcello: Did you ever make any of the trips up to Pilot Point with Vernon Cole? I know that Abner did on occasions,

King: I never did. I went through Pilot Point one time, but I never went up to Pilot Point with Vernon,

Cummings: You know, in your talking of your freshman year at North Texas, you painted a pretty harmonious picture. You said that when you got out of the cab, you remember the players coming up and shaking your hand and welcoming you to North Texas and so forth. I would think there would have had to have been some earlier incidents that might have happened, when you consider the fact that, here you're getting eighteen your kids directly out of high school, from different areas of the state, and this is the mid-1950's when segregation was still strong. Do you recall, you know, in some of those first workouts, some of the first things, in the locker room, perhaps, where some incidents happened that later resolved themselves?

King: I don't recall a single incident. If there was, it was well-

concealed. I just didn't see it. Now there were times when we would have workouts. We would have sprint drills. I would blast out. You'd have one or two of the ends come down and say, "Hey, slow down. We're tired. You make us look bad." This kind of thing. But as far as anybody being negative or non-receptive, it wasn't there. They would talk around you or something; they may not hold a conversation with you directly. Here I am, in this pigeonhole, and here's a guy here and one here, and they may have a conversation; and here I am, standing right here between them. But I didn't pay it any attention because I guess one reason is that it really hadn't dawned on me at the time what was taking place and what was really going on. It really hadn't.

I guess my boys are getting more out of what I did at North Texas now than I because occasionally I will run into someone, and they will ask, "What's your name?" And I'll say, "I'm Leon King." "Did you go to Prairie View?" "No, I was at North Texas." "Oh, yeah, I can remember when you and Abner went up there." And it kind of makes my boys feel, "Hey, I'm kind of proud of ol' Pops."

But I don't recall any incidents where we were not well-received. If I was in the Union Building and I needed some money-- I was short--and there's old Sammy Stanger standing over there...and he probably got more of a rib than anybody because of the size of his head. They had this saying...he was from Van, Texas, a big redhead who played fullback, who was later converted to a center. His head was so large that they had to send back to Van to get his

helmet sent to North Texas, and they had to paint it because no one carried one his size. But we would walk up, "Hey, Sammy, let me have a dime until we get to practice this evening." He'd go into his pocket and get one. George Herrin was another one. George was a guard. We would borrow from each other.

Most of them's girlfriends were very, very receptive. The year that I didn't play football, I played with...we had this little independent league. They picked the...what do you call them... All-Stars. And I was chosen from our fraternity. Instead of me playing offense--and that's what I thought they were choosing me for--they put me in at linebacker on defense. I managed to intercept the football and run a touchdown. My God, I was swarmed! Scared the daylights out of me.

There was another time I was frightened, though. The North Texas freshman team was undefeated. We were playing Paris Junior College, the last football game of the year. We had a huge crowd at Fouts Field. We went in at halftime behind, and it was the first time I ever heard Coach Bahnsen raise his voice, get mad, and use profanity. But later found out he "psyched" us. He walked in, chewed us out, told us what he wanted to do, and said, "I thought I had some football players, and I have a bunch of babies!" Then he walked out. Well, "The Solidifier" got up and gave his little pep talk--ol' Vernon Cole. We pulled ourselves together, and we went out that second half; and Paris could do nothing right, and we could do nothing wrong, and we beat them.

There was a big reception committee waiting on us as we were getting ready to go back into the fieldhouse. Well, I had pulled my headgear off and was just jogging on in; and I had as many white girls hanging off of my neck as any of the other guys. It frightened me a little bit because I was concerned about how others might perceive this. Personally, it didn't bother me because I'm whittling my way on through here.

But there were a lot of people who didn't see color. They saw you as an individual: "Now here's a guy playing football for us, and he's done a fantastic job. Why not congratulate him?"

But, yes, I think, too, there were times that we were given little odd jobs. We had a little job to do during the varsity football game. Sometimes I think they were done to keep us out of the light. Some of the guys worked in the concession stand, some sold programs, "Ab" and I held the pass gate. So when the athletes' wives come up, they give us tickets, and they go through the pass gate. Now you can look at that and say, "They wanted them back out of the way. They didn't want those black guys over there in the concession area. They'd run all business away."

But I really don't think the citizens of Denton saw it that way--I really don't--because if there were two people in Denton who were well-known, and if any one guy wanted to run for mayor and win it by a landslide, I do believe Abner could have done it our freshman or sophomore years at North Texas. But they saw "Lil Abner," a razzle-dazzle football player that was just absolutely

fantastic, carry the football like a loaf of bread but never fumble it. People couldn't understand why, but he'd always carried that football right out in the palm of his hand and would never lose it. But, no, I can't recall any real bad incidents that happened on the team.

Marcello: Whenever you had any personal problems, whatever it might be, who among the coaches would you be more apt to go to?

King: Bahnsen, because of the relationship that we had on the freshman team. Now I felt comfortable with Coach Mitchell, but Coach Mitchell didn't talk much. He wasn't much of a talker. I felt comfortable around all of them, but I would always go to Coach Bahnsen.

I had car trouble on the campus one evening, and he was over on the tennis court. I went over and talked to him, and he came over and gave me a boost and I went on about my business. But, yes, I felt very, very comfortable with Bahnsen. Bahnsen would sort of tell us who to take subjects under, because this person was apt to be a little more lenient with an athlete than this one over here, because this one didn't care who you are or how many touchdowns you run, you're going to get that work; whereas some would say, "Well, he played last night and did a good job, so I'll give him credit for that." (chuckle)

Cummings: It still goes on today.

King: Oh, yes, it still goes on today. We need that, too. We need it (laughter)!

Cummings: Didn't you say you had to leave about three-thirty?

King: Yes, I need to leave about three-thirty.

Cummings: Okay, maybe we can wrap this up right now. We would like to get back with you and maybe go a little more into detail of some of your freshman games, some of your sophomore and junior games.

King: Sure. I'm enjoying it.

Marcello: Mr. King, it's been a great interview. You're really giving us the material that we want.

Cummings: We do appreciate it. It's very interesting.

King: I hope I don't say the wrong things to make someone angry later on. But it's the truth, and it needs to come out. But if there's any one institution that has made outstanding strides as far as integration and segregation are concerned, it's North Texas because to me it's something that happened overnight. People reacted very positively to it. They've done a fantastic job.

Oral History Collection

Leon King

Interviewers: Ronald E. Marcello
Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: September 20, 1982

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello and Randy Cummings interviewing Dr. Leon King for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 20, 1982, in Dallas, Texas. We are interviewing Dr. King in order to get his experiences and reminiscences during that period when he played a key role in the integration of North Texas athletics.

Mr. Cummings: We went over the first portion of the interview and wanted to kind of pick up where it ended and kind of continue on, primarily recapping and recalling some of your actual game experiences. In the first interview, you briefly recapped some of your recollections from your freshman year, and that's where I'd like to start today, if we could.

The first game that you played at North Texas on that freshman team was against Hardin-Simmons. I'm sure a lot of those games run together, and team names and locations and stadiums and scores all mush together, but do you recall anything about that initial collegiate football game you played in?

Dr. King: The one thing that I recall about that game, more than anything, is the fact that I scored the first touchdown. Being the first

freshman to score a touchdown in that ballgame, along with being the first black to score one in the ballgame, sort of stands out very vividly in my mind. But I would say that is probably the one thing in that particular ballgame that I remember more than the others. There were some things that happened in the other ballgames that stand out more so than that.

Cummings: How did that touchdown come about?

King: It was a pass. I don't recall how long the pass was, but Vernon Cole, the quarterback, threw a pass, and I was on the receiving end of it. And that's how we accounted for it.

Cummings: Do you remember what kind of reception you got from your teammates?

King: Oh, just the usual pat on the rump, a thump on the head gear, and shoves on the shoulders and all. Just everybody was happy. The fact that I was the first one to score a touchdown, or the first black, really had no meaning at the time. It was not until well afterwards, when we started reading the write-ups in the newspaper and it was brought out that this occurred, that it dawned on me what had happened. But it was more or less a team effort, and you're just doing the best you can for the team.

Cummings: What kind of differences between the type of football that you played in high school and that game, your first collegiate game, did you see?

King: In high school, I would say, in that particular ball game where we played against Hardin-Simmons, we threw more passes in that one ball game than we threw in the whole three years I played high

school football. We were a basic running football team in high school; very seldom did we throw a pass. And if we threw a pass, everybody in the stadium knew we were going to throw it because it was third and long, so everybody knew it. Whereas in college, we mixed it up pretty well--a pass with a run. Although we had some very, very good runners on that freshman team, it was a good mixture of throwing and running. Whereas in high school, you run and you punt the ball and try to keep them against the boards and hope that you get a break out of it. But basically we had a running team in high school and more of a mixture of running and passing in college.

Cummings: Didn't you tell us before that you never scored a touchdown in high school?

King: No, I scored one touchdown as a receiver in high school, and it was in a district ballgame. It was a cold, chilly night. We had just ran the ball the whole first half, and when we went in at half-time, Coach said, "We're going to throw it a little bit because they're playing against the run." It was a little sideline pattern that we called "pass fifty-four," where I go and break out about eight or ten yards down and break to the sideline. We had off of that same play, the tailback trail, I had the option of pitching it to him or keeping it. The first time we threw it, I could feel the back coming on me, so I pitched it back to the tailback, and he made a sizable gain. The next time we did it, I faked a pitch. The defensive back went to the trailing tailback,

and I just spun off and scored the touchdown. I was so excited I didn't know what to do at first. As a matter of fact, I was probably the first receiver to score a touchdown in some two or three years in high school because we just didn't throw the football--we just ran it.

Cummings: How much were you personally and Abner used in that first game? Were you starters?

King: Definitely. On that particular freshman ball club, I think we only had about seventeen or eighteen members of that team. We had one end that was a reserve and maybe two or three backs that were reserves. But we played the whole ballgame all the time.

Cummings: What position on defense did you play?

King: I played end on defense, and Abner was a back. There was no relief. You had to get your relief in between plays. Coach Bahnsen did a beautiful job in conditioning us because we just didn't have anybody to sub for us. So we were in top shape.

Cummings: Were there any instances of racism in that game? Any of the players on their team?

King: No, none whatsoever. It was a real good, clean football game-- a very clean football game. None whatsoever.

Marcello: Where was that game played?

Cummings: I believe it was played in Abilene.

King: It was played in Abilene. I remember now, yes; and I remember the long drive. It was sort of dusty out that way, very prairie-like, and I had never been anyplace like that. I guess Wichita

Falls was the farthest I had been in high school. And, yes, I can remember it being very prairie-like out in that area,

We dined on the campus, and, I believe, immediately after the game we headed toward Denton, so we didn't spend the night. But it was a real good, clean-cut ballgame.

Marcello: Did you dine with the rest of the players on the campus?

King: Yes. It was in the athletic cafeteria.

Cummings: Okay, the second game of that year was against Navarro Junior College. From my discussions with Coach Bahnsen and Coach McCain, they said a lot of things happened--extracurricular things happened--at that game. One, which I'd like you to recall, was arriving at the stadium...the team bus arriving at the stadium. You had some problems getting through the gate, and some of the stadium personnel there apparently gave Coach Bahnsen some problems because, primarily, you and Abner were on the bus and on that team.

King: I guess it all started when we arrived. We were to dine at a cafeteria; I believe it was a hotel. The food wasn't quite ready when we got there, so Coach told us to walk around the city and stretch our legs a little bit. Joe Pryor, George Heacker, and I just walked around, and Abner and Vernon were walking around--two separate groups. We caught quite a few eyes just from that. When we got back to eat, we were told that accommodations had been made for us in the back.

Cummings: For you and Abner.

King: Right. So I started to push my chair back to get up, and Joe

caught my hand and said, "Wait a minute!" And he told Coach Bahnsen. Coach Bahnsen told the owner, "If they can't eat with us out front, then no one eats. We're a team." The gentleman readily agreed. He said, "I thought maybe you wanted them in the back." He said, "Oh, no. We are a team, and we'll all sit out here and eat." And we did.

We then went to the stadium. We got there a little early, and Coach just had us to lay down and relax a little bit. Well, when it was time for us to suit out, we just put on our pants and jerseys, and we came out and started warming up.

Oh, I'd say about thirty minutes before game time, we began to hear a little chant in the stands: "Get those niggers off the field!" Beautiful little chant; nice little rhythm. So "Ab" said, "Hey, do you hear what I hear?" I said, "We're hearing the same thing--I do!" He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Before this ball game is over tonight, let's make them wish they had." I said, "Okay, I'm with you."

We go back in and come out after Coach gave us the little pep talk. We received on that particular night, and on the first play of the ballgame, Coach Bahnsen called "fifty-eight, quick." That's Abner--give the quick pitch around my side. I have an option. If the defensive end is playing where I can hook around him and pick up the linebacker without him interfering with the play, then that's what I do. If he's playing outside of my shoulder, then I have to block him. Sure enough, he was playing

about a yard or so out, so I had to block him. The linebacker smelled the play. I hooked the end, the linebacker came up, and he and "Ab" hit head-on, both laying semi-conscious. We get "Ab" over to the sidelines. They had to bring the stretcher over to take the other young man off the field. They rushed him to the hospital. You could have bought me right then for about a penny, I was just scared to death.

Marcello: How did the crowd react at that moment?

King: I really don't know. I really don't know how the crowd reacted. I do know that as we continued the ballgame, I was constantly being communicated to from the defensive players: "You're going to have to pay for that one." I just hung in and did the best I could,

Well, during the contest, I received a few bites and constant name-calling, and I even got spat on a time or two. Big Joe got tired of it and got back in the huddle and just got mad and called for a play to our side, where we would do a double-team block. If Joe wanted me to block with him, he would call a "sixty-six." That would mean double-team. In coming out of the huddle, Joe said, "You hit him low. I'm going to come across high." I said, "Okay." So I made the lead block and hit him just below the knee. Joe came across him with a forearm shuffle and kind of laid him out a little while. That tended to have eased things up a little bit. But I was still scared.

We won the ballgame. I scored a touchdown, but it was called

back because they said I stepped out of bounds. After the ballgame, "Ab" and I sort of got in the middle of our team because they had about a four-foot fence, and the dressing room was just off to the side--a little bitty barn-like building off to the side. We had to go through maybe 200, 250 fans. Coach had "Ab" and I to get right in the middle of the team. Everybody had his headgear in his hand, holding his face mask, just in case he had to use it. We went through, and we had some name calling, both black and white--"nigger-lovers," and this kind of thing--but we just nonchalantly walked on in, undressed, and by the time we came out after the ballgame, the crowd had dissipated, and that was it.

It was a frightening thing for me to go through, and I guess as long as I live, I'll never forget it. But one thing it did, I feel it brought our team closer together. It was gratifying to know that everybody didn't feel the same way about blacks. Joe Pryor stuck up for me all the way through. He wasn't the only one. George Heacker was another one. It was just a real good group of guys to be associated with. But it was a frightening night.

I was told later that my high school coaches came down from Dallas Lincoln, and they were not allowed to attend the ballgame. So I guess "Ab" and I were the only two blacks in the whole stadium. But it was a frightening night for us.

Marcello: Let's go back and fill in a couple of things on this experience over at Navarro Junior College. You mentioned that when the two

groups were walking down the street prior to eating there, you could sense or feel a certain amount of hostility. Describe what you mean by that.

King: You get the impression that "here's a color that we have never seen before." You know, "Here's a black in Corsicana, and we have never seen a black before in our lives." And everybody was just staring and watching and just looking. It was a funny feeling--a very funny feeling.

Marcello: Or also a black walking with a white on seeming terms of equality.

King: Right. And we were laughing and talking and looking in windows and pointing at things. I would imagine that the ones that were watching felt the same way about my two teammates as they did about me because, "Here's a black, and here's two whites walking with a black. They couldn't be one of us." So you could just feel the tension of people watching you as you walked around the mall.

Marcello: Also, you mentioned that the hotel personnel had set up special eating accommodations for you and Abner. What were the reactions of the hotel personnel when they were informed by Coach Bahnsen and others that "those guys are not going to eat separately." Was there any protests or threats or anything of that nature being made by the hotel personnel?

King: No protest. For one thing, there were no people in the cafeteria at the time, and Coach Bahnsen put it on the line that "either they eat out here with us, or you've prepared a lot of food for nothing."

So he had a choice: allow us to eat there or take this loss of some eighteen to twenty dinners that he had prepared and that would not be paid for. But no protest was made at all. After Bahnsen told him that we were to team and we ate together, he readily said, "Okay, I thought that you wanted them to eat back in the back." But afterwards we ate and left--no problems.

Marcello: So you mentioned that it was a cafeteria, which meant that no white waitress and so on had to serve you.

King: Yes, someone brought out dinner to us at the table, but I don't remember if it was the hotel manager or if they had waitresses.

Marcello: Getting up to the game itself, you mentioned that at one point you had been spat on by...or at least at one point, you had been spat on. What was your reaction when that happened? I mean, to me, that has to be one of the ultimate humiliations.

King: Well, you're mad; you hate it happened. But you know that you're in strange territory, and the best thing for you to do is just wipe it off and keep going. I had never gone through anything like that before. This was the first encounter, so to speak, of anything like this because I had known in the past that you don't play games like this.

Now in high school, we used to play interracial football. We would occasionally meet, say, at Exline Park and play football, but it never got to that point. You'd play your heart out, and after the ballgame, people would shake hands and leave.

But here, you're being spat on, you're being cursed,

you're being talked about, and slugged and everything else; and the only thing you can do is take it because I knew, had I done anything, we would have been penalized. And there's really no telling what might would have happened--fan reaction or what. So I just took it and went on with it.

Cummings: After that first game had gone so smoothly and this game just the opposite, really, had Coach Bahnsen warned the team or warned you and Abner in particular that some of these things might occur, such as the spitting and biting, the dirty playing, the name-calling.

King: We knew when we went and talked to Coach Mitchell about coming to North Texas. In his counseling with us, he told us that things like this might occur. But we had no prior knowledge before the game with Navarro that it would be that particular ballgame. We had looked a year in advance. We thought it might be the Ole Miss game because it's traditional that North Texas had always played Ole Miss the first fall game. We felt like that would be the game where we would really be tested. But Ole Miss was always the hometeam, I believe, for financial reasons. Coach Mitchell had called and told them that he had two blacks--this was our sophomore year--on the varsity, and they canceled that game, so we had to get another ballgame for that one. Yes, he did counsel us when we went up to attend the college, but we had no prior knowledge before the Navarro game that something like this would happen.

Marcello: In that counseling, did he tell you or advise you how to react when things such as this would occur?

King: No, he just told us to expect it. He stressed sportsmanship, but as far as us tucking our tails and running back to the huddle and all of this, no, he didn't go into it.

Cummings: I know from talking to Coach Bahnsen that he told me that in this game, prior to the conclusion of it, he was afraid something might happen to the team. He called the team together and had them actually go directly to the bus rather than back to the dressing room to change. He said that you ended up driving back to Denton. Do you recall that as being this game or another game where that happened?

King: It may have been that game because that is the only game we had, that I can recall, that we had any kind of real serious problems of that nature. The thing that I remember most is going through that small, little gate with a four-foot fence and a crowd of people; and here I am, in the middle of them with my head ducked and my helmet in my hand, ready to use if I have to use it.

In my sophomore year, we did get into fistcuffs, but that was in San Jose. Knowing that California had been integrated for years, it didn't bother me so much out there.

But we may have gotten on the bus. We may have gone...I do know that the team as a whole was afraid for themselves as much as I was afraid for myself, because we were a team and here's a white college with blacks on the team. There just weren't

very many schools in the South with blacks on the football team, so they just weren't ready for it,

Marcello: In our previous interview, we talked about the special role that Vernon Cole played. How about Joe Pryor? You mentioned him several times concerning this incident at Navarro Junior College.

King: Big Joe was my salvation. Joe, I believe, was from Diamond Hill--a big, husky guy, just as nice, mannerable, and gentle as he could be, until you made him mad. When he got mad, he was just a hard guy to handle. But Joe played right tackle, and I was on the right end, and we just did everything together. So every opportunity I could get to pat Joe on the back, I took advantage of that opportunity. But he was just a nice, likable, friendly guy that was a good, mean, tough football player.

Marcello: Was he one of those people, though, like Vernon Cole, who more or less went out of his way to welcome you and Abner?

King: No, no. Once we were there on the team, Vernon Cole was very friendly, but I guess the one person that stands out more than anybody on that is Garland Warren, who was a local guy from Denton High School. When I got out of the taxi and walked up toward the field, he broke away from what the team was doing and came and introduced himself and just made me welcome. Once we got there, everybody gradually became friendly and all.

There were some that really didn't accept us, but eventually... there was one young man in particular, from Corsicana, that it took about two-and-a-half or three years for him to really accept

us as members of the team. We played together and all, but he just wasn't ready to accept us.

Cummings: Getting back to that Navarro game, in going back through the microfilmed newspaper stories of that game, I noticed that this was the first game where the nickname "Lil' Abner" was picked up and used in the newspapers. Do you know how that came about? Obviously, it's in reference to the comic strip character, but was that a lifelong nickname that he carried?

King: No, his nickname in high school was "Butch." We would call him "Butch." Believe it or not, when he'd put his helmet on and run, he looked like a bulldog, and occasionally we would call him "Bulldog." Very seldom would you hear the name "Abner" called while he was in high school. He was always referred to as "Butch," and...I don't know...most blacks call people by their last names, so we'd call him "Haynes." But "Abner" was never used until we got to college, and I guess they picked up on the comic strip and called him "Lil' Abner." I found myself, once we got into college, calling him Abner, and it was pretty hard for me to do because I was so accustomed to calling him "Butch." But I eventually learned to call him "Lil' Abner" or just call him plain ol' Abner.

Cummings: How'd he pick up the name "Butch"?

King: I don't recall. I believe that was from his real early, early childhood days.

Cummings: Coach Bahnsen told me that following those first two games--the

last three games that the freshman team played that year--that he invited Judge Gray to go along with the team. He told me he also said that he told Judge Gray, "I would just like you to come along and be a part of the traveling team." In actuality, he knew that Judge Gray had a lot of connections, a lot of friends, in the various cities that might be able to help protect...in other words, when the team came in there, they might be able to calm down any potential racial happenings that might happen. Do you recall Judge Gray joining with the team on some of the bus trips and how he was introduced to the team and why he was there and so forth?

King: I never really knew why Judge Gray was there. I knew he was there. I recall him being introduced to the team, but we had so many people that were interested in football that was associated with the team...I forget the names, but I believe there was Dr. Miller that came and watched our practices all the time, and there were two guys that announced the ballgames in the stadium that were constantly at our practices. You'd just look over to the sidelines, and you'd see people, and you'd get to know them. I just thought it was a part of the plans for Judge Gray to go, so I never questioned why he was there, other than, "Well, here's a loyal Eagle that's just going to follow the ball club."

Cummings: At the conclusion of the Navarro game, when you got back on the bus and you had time to catch your breath, do you remember what went through your head? Did you and Abner get together and look

out the window and talk about it--what had just happened and what you guys had just been through?

King: No, we really didn't. "Ab" sort of had a seat to himself. I checked on him to see if he was okay--he was--because of the slight concussion that he'd had. After I found out that he was okay, I just sat down and tried to relax. I knew what had taken place, but it really didn't hit me until the wee hours of the morning. I can recall waking in my sleep with just cold chills, and I asked myself, "Is it really worth it? Is it really worth it?" I guess I was just scared to death. Here I am, an eighteen-year-old going through something like this, and I really didn't know what to expect. Had it not been for Coach Bahnsen and the members of that team, I really don't know what I would have done. But Joe was constantly patting me on the back as we broke the huddles, and Vernon would get you in a huddle and look at you in such a way that you'd keep calm.

For some reason, we were right-handed. I would say 85 to 90 percent of our plays were run to the right side, so I was constantly blocking someone or getting in someone's way on each one of the plays. We just didn't have the decoy plays where I'd try to fake somebody out.

But, no, as far as us getting together and talking about it afterwards, we didn't do that.

Cummings: You said you asked yourself, "Is it all worth it?" Did you ever come to the point of weighing the possibility of quitting?

King: Never. No, that's something my old high school track coach instilled in us: "If you ever start a race, you've got to finish it." He put me in a mile once, and I wanted to stop. But I thought about what he said, and I knew that, had I stopped, it wouldn't have been healthy for me because he would have got me. I was just too far gone to stop. So I said, "Well, heck, that's only one ballgame. Maybe the rest of them will be a whole lot better." And they were. They really were.

Cummings: What was that track coach's name?

King: A. W. Brashear,

Cummings: Well, after that one night you said you woke up in a cold sweat. Did you have any further nightmares or moments where you stopped and thought about what had happened in that game, or did you just put it in the back of your mind?

King: We put it in the back of our minds and moved on. We talked about it time and time again afterwards, and joked about it. It was sort of funny to us later on, but at the time it was so real. Even now, I think about it. I go through Corsicana periodically-- I have two sons at Prairieview, and I go through Corsicana and down and around Commerce way--and it brings back memories. But once that excitement was over, I'd say a day or two afterwards, it was forgotten. Bahnsen made us forget it. He said, "Hey, that particular game is history; let's get ready for the next ballgame."

I believe after that one, we went to Oklahoma. I'm not for

sure who the third opponant was. But we just removed it from our minds and went about our own business.

Cummings: You recall that incident pretty vividly. That whole situation must have made a tremendous impact, not only in your life then but even now, It must have been a major time in your life.

King: Well, it's one of the few experiences that I'm kind of glad I had but something that I hope I never have to go through again. I hope no one ever has to go through anything like that because it was horrible,

We've had situations right here in our city, oh, just a week or two ago out at the Cotton Bowl that was a lot similar to that situation in Navarro--a lot similar to that situation in Navarro. A person just shouldn't have to go through an ordeal like that.

Cummings: Okay, like you mentioned, that third game was at Oklahoma, against Murray A&M. Does that bring back memories? Tishomingo?

King: Yes, it does! How well does it bring back memories! The one thing that I recall about that ballgame is that just prior to going on the field, Coach Bahnsen called me over to the side to tell me that the tackle that I would be playing in front of weighed right at 300 pounds. He chose not to tell me until that time to keep me from thinking about it and getting nervous. But he told me, "You've got to beat him to the charge, and you've got to get him low, or I'll have to come get you out of the stands, because if he ever gets his hands on you, that's it." I thought

about it, but I knew...I had an ankle block on him all night, and if I hit his knees, I could control him because his first motion was straight up in the air. So he was a good target, but I had to hit him low; otherwise, I couldn't move him--and I only weighed about 180 pounds. So I had to beat him to the charge and hit those knees to move him. Oh, did we have fun that night! Oh! I would say it was fifty-fifty because I can remember him just taking me and just pushing me to the side a time or two. But there were occasions, in dire situations, where we had, say, a third-and-one or a third-and-two and they were coming my way, and I knew I had to move him. So I really dug in and got out of there. But in some situations he got me. I have to admit he got me. But that experience in Oklahoma was real nice, friendly. I don't recall any situations that were bad.

Cummings: I think it was Coach Bahnsen--possibly Coach McCain--who said that Abner knocked out one of their players early in the game primarily just from his running style. Can you recall that?

King: I was thinking it was the Corsicana game where Ab and one of the guys hit head-on, and they both had a concussion. I'm almost sure it was the Navarro game.

Cummings: You might be right. Twenty years ago has been a long time.

King: Now in one of the ballgames--I don't know if it was the Navarro game or which one it was--"Ab" had just had surgery for hemorrhoids. We weren't sure that he was going to play in that ballgame. We were on the old bus. They had packed him, and he had the whole

back seat by himself to just lay back there and relax. He played that ballgame, but I don't remember what ballgame that was. It may have been the Navarro ballgame. But everybody was a little uneasy because we didn't know if "Ab" was going to play or not, and we really needed him for that psychological lift. And, sure enough, he started. But he had had surgery a day or two prior to that ballgame for hemorrhoids and played an outstanding ballgame.

Cummings: Okay, the fourth game you played that year was against Abilene Christian. Both teams were undefeated at that time, and Coach Bahnsen said that one thing about that game that stands out in his mind was the team that had to eat its pre-game meal in a city park. He said they stopped by a drive-through chicken place for a bunch of boxes of chicken and ended up going to the city park because they couldn't find a restaurant that would serve the entire team. Do you recall that?

King: I vaguely recall that one. I'm getting that one confused with a track meet that we had my freshman year, when we were to run in Abilene and I was not allowed to run in that particular track meet. But, yes, I remember a little bit about having to stop at a park to eat, but I don't recall that much about it.

Marcello: Well, let's back up and talk about that track meet a little bit. I think that's kind of an interesting story, also. Describe the details of that track meet in Abilene when you were not allowed to run.

King: Well, I didn't get to make the trip.

Marcello: Oh, I see.

King: Boy, I'd worked hard, too, and was a member of the sprint-relay team--the 400-meter relay and the 880 relay, and was to run the 100-yard dash. One of the guys on the varsity track team was sort of coaching us. The day before we were to go, he called me off to the side and told me I wouldn't be able to make the trip because they didn't allow blacks to run in Abilene. So that was no problem; I could accept that a lot easier than what I had experienced in football. I was sort of glad that I didn't get to run in that track meet because when they came to Denton to run, they had Bill Woodhouse and Bobby Morrow and a little guy named Peterson. And there I was, running a 9.9 or a 10 flat hundred, and these guys running 9.4's and 9.5's. So I was glad I didn't get to run in that track meet down there. But that was no big thing.

Marcello: Interestingly, though, there seemed to be a different situation in track than there was in football. In other words, had this sort of incident occurred in football, I assume that perhaps the team wouldn't have played.

King: They wouldn't have. They wouldn't have, I recall Coach Mitchell talking to the coach at Ole Miss. He told him that he had two blacks on his football team that would make the traveling squad. They talked and Coach told us later that we would no longer play Ole Miss because we were on the team, and he was just not going

to leave us at home. Both of us were on the second unit our sophomore year. "Ab," with the shuckin' and jivin' that he had all, was sort of the sparkplug for everybody. Plus, we were the entertainers on the airplane trips. We did a lot of singing on the ol' microphone when the stewardess got through telling us everything, and it was a lot of fun. But, no, had it been a football game, I don't believe we would have played that ballgame.

Marcello: Do you think this was simply a matter of differences in the attitudes or philosophies of the two coaches, that is, the track coach versus the football coach? I assume it was, perhaps, a coaching decision.

King: It was. Plus, I was the only black on the track team. "Ab" was having scholastic problems, and he didn't get to run, and I was the only one out there. They could very easily fill my slot on the track team; whereas, had it been on the football team, it would have been different. Plus, you're talking about a student coach versus a professional or collegiate coach, so that may have had something to do with it.

Cummings: I imagine the team unity was a lot tighter on a football squad than on a track squad.

King: Than on a track squad, yes. Usually, the unification of the track team would be among the relay members instead of the team as a whole.

Cummings: Go into that fifth and final game in that freshman year.

King: Tyler Junior College, yes, I remember it.

Cummings: You were undefeated and had a chance to become the first team at North Texas State to ever go through a season undefeated. Talk about the pre-game talk among the players, as far as wanting to go through that season undefeated. Had the team become pretty unified by then?

King: Very much so. We almost blew that ballgame for two reasons. Coach Bahnsen and everybody knew that in order to get Abner to really run, he was the kind of player that played his best when he read about himself. On that particular week, they had all of the statistics. Going into that ballgame, I was the leading scorer. The guys sort of ribbed him about it, and he took it the wrong way. Fred Way, in particular, kind of ribbed him a little bit about me being the leading scorer going into that ballgame.

But Bahnsen kind of talked to the team prior to the ballgame and removed all of that. We knew Tyler was going to be a tough opposition. If I'm not mistaken, at halftime we were behind. We had gone into the dressing room, we had our Coke, and we had a quarter piece of orange. We were to drink our Coke, eat our piece of orange, lay on the floor, and elevate our feet. We were waiting for Coach Bahnsen to come in to tell us what we were doing wrong and what we had planned to do when we go back. I guess about five minutes after we were in and were settled, Coach walked in and just looked around the dressing room and said, "I thought I

had a bunch of football players, but I now see I have a bunch of babies. You're sickening!" And he walked out. He just literally walked out. Well, everybody started talking, so Vernon sort of took charge of everything and said, "Hey, let's go out and show 'em that we can play football!" We kind of sucked it up and went out there and played a pretty decent half of football. And we beat them, and it was a good feeling.

Now on that particular night, I had a big lump in my throat. After we were victorious, we had quite a few people to come out on the field to congratulate us. Everybody had their helmets off and were shaking hands and congratulating everybody, and, boy, here comes this cheerleader. She's just thrilled! And she jumps up on my neck and was just swinging, and I said, "Oh, my God, please hurry up and get through! Let me get away from here!" (Chuckle) And I'm the only person in the stands that'd seen it that way; I mean, everybody's just happy that we won. They didn't see a black-white situation; they saw a football player and a cheerleader, and one congratulating the other. But I still had in me the old fears that I had been taught as I grew up: "These things you don't do." And it just bothered me a little bit. But other than that, it was a real tough football game. As the guy said, "The game was won in the pits." Tyler had a fantastic football team,

We were ready to take on TCU's freshmen. They had a cracker-jack freshman that year. We wanted to play them so bad we didn't

know what to do, but that was out of the question. But I think the psychology that Bahnsen used on us at the half just sort of got to us, and we rallied and came back and won that ballgame--good ballgame.

Cummings: That scene with the cheerleaders...you say nobody ever mentioned it to you or said anything to you? It was just something that was in your mind...

King: Something in my mind.

Cummings: ...just a momentary flash of your thoughts,

King: Right. You know, I am a black, and here's an Anglo cheerleader that's swinging on my neck, and I'm thinking, "Well, here's a stadium full of people."

I had a similar situation to happen to me. Sandra Palmer, the professional golfer...G.A. Moore and I were lab partners in science. I believe we were in Dr. Crawford's zoology or botany class. We were looking through a microscope, and I was accustomed to closing one eye and looking in with the other. Dr. Crawford had taught us that you need to learn to look in the microscope with both eyes open, one looking at what you're looking at, and you have to draw what you see with the other eye. We were looking and looking, and we could not find what it was we were looking for. I finally found the thing, and I said, "Hey, I got it, group." And the next thing I know, Sandra Palmer has her cheek next to mine, trying to look into the microscope.

Well, when it dawned on me what she was doing, I immediately

moved to let her have it. No one in the classroom ever thought anything about it. I doubt if anybody in the classroom knew that had happened, But I did, and I moved. But during the four years I was there, Sandra Palmer and I were very, very good friends. She went on to make a name for herself in professional golf. I always look for her name, even now, to see how well she's doing. But she was a physical education major, and so was I, so we had a lot of classes together. But that old phobia, "You're black, she's white, and you're touching cheeks," was there, so I just got out of the way.

I don't know if I ever grew out of it before I left North Texas--I really don't. I still have some of that in me now. There are just some things that I do and some things that I don't do--even here. I can refer to some of my black teachers by their first names, but I find myself calling my white teachers "Mrs." or "Miss," I guess it's because of that old phobia that I have of "These are things you do and you don't do."

Cummings: By the end of the first season, had you become comfortable as a college football player?

King: Very much so. After the end of the first season, my concern then was trying to be on the second unit for the varsity the next year. Now there's one difference between college and high school. We had spring training in high school, but it was always in May. In college you were just barely out of football good before you were back in togs and out on the field. I believe it was started

around February, mid-February, somewhere in there. That took a little adjusting to. I liked it once it was over because we had the rest of the year.

But we lost heavily at the end that year, and I had a real good chance to be on the second unit, and it worked out real well. I recall Jim Braymer was one of the ends. Mac...what was Mac's last name? I can't think of Mac's name...and we had Jerry Russell, who was one of our ends. I see Jerry every now and then. Jerry's a well-known attorney in the city now, and every now and then, if I'm in the downtown area, I might see Jerry. But we lost heavily at the end.

For some reason--I don't know what happened--my field blocking and tackling was not as good as it was when I was a freshman. They played me a lot on offense, but not that much on defense. We had the two-platoon system, and we had enough players that they could shuttle them. So I played offense, but very seldom did I play a lot of defense. At one point, we lost heavily in the backfield, and they decided to make a back out of me, but that didn't work out very well. I just didn't have what it took to be a back,

Cummings: Did you ever play in a game as a running back?

King: Never. I played in spring training. I went through at tailback, and at the beginning of the fall, I was a tailback. Just prior to the week before the first football game, I was on defense playing safety, and we rotated the defense. Arthur Perkins led Billy

Christle around my end. I went up to make a tackle, pushed Art out of the way, and he came back and clipped me and hit that knee. It swelled up like I don't know what. I believe that had a lot to do with me not playing in that backfield. Had I not gotten hurt that night, I probably would have been in the backfield with Abner. But my knee really didn't respond. I ran the hill, I ran the stadium, ice packs, whirlpool, and everything, but it just really didn't respond. I was hoping that Coach would "red shirt" me that year and just let me heal completely, but they didn't. They kept putting me in, and I kept getting hit, and it really never healed.

Cummings: So after that injury, they moved you back to receiver.

King: Yes, I went back to receiver.

Cummings: You say it never healed comfortably?

King: No, Even now, I can bump something and get that old throbbing, but I guess anybody who bumped their knee would get a nice little throb. I can tell when the weather's going to change, like most football players that have those injuries. You begin to get that little tickling feeling in that ol' knee.

Cummings: How much did you get to play, then, your sophomore year, your first year on varsity?

King: My sophomore year, I played quite a bit. I played quite a bit. It was my junior year that I didn't play very much. I got a little disenchanted with it, and my second child was born that December, so I decided that I would drop out and try to make enough money to

pay the doctor bills for him and come back and try again. And I did.

I practiced on and off all year and came back. But I had lost so much--timing and everything was off so badly--that I felt that I was really humiliating myself. They had a nice group of young talent up there, so I decided, "Well, I'm just going to give it up altogether." So my senior year, I didn't play at all.

Marcello: There are a couple of things that came up in interviews that maybe you can talk to us a little bit about. Did you know anything about quota systems that had been established with regard to the number of blacks that could be recruited on the football team each year?

King: No, I knew nothing about a quota system. During my freshman year, the coaches did ask me to talk to some black athletes to try to get them to come to North Texas--the late Stone Johnson, who was a member of my football team at Lincoln. Stone and I played together but Stone had been transferred to Madison High School. They wanted Stone. We would have gotten Stone. Stone wanted to come to North Texas, but they wanted to give Stone a trial scholarship: "If you can make the team, we'll give you a full scholarship." Stone had a four-year scholarship to Grambling University, so his folks talked him into going to Grambling. Well, he was quite successful--went to the Olympics, played for the Dallas Texas, and was injured in a pre-season football game that paralyzed him and eventually led to his death. We had a big

tackle, Leon Simmons, that North Texas wanted. Same problem: "We'll give you a scholarship if you make it." He went to Grambling. Arthur Perkins and Billy Christle, I assisted in recruiting them. They were offered scholarships. But, no, I was not aware that there was a quota.

Marcello: Were the trial scholarships a common occurrence at that time?

King: Not to my knowledge. When "Ab" and I went up, Coach Mitchell told us that he didn't have any scholarships at all. He said that he had given them all out, and there were none available. He said, "But if you make the ballteam, we will try to do something for you." We made the ballteam, and they gave us a half scholarship. They paid our tuition and I believe they bought our books. That January, after the place where we were living was destroyed by fire, they put us on full scholarship, and they assisted us in replacing some of our clothes and all. But a trial scholarship, I had never heard of anything like that. You either had a full scholarship or a half scholarship.

Marcello: I was going to ask...just out of curiosity did you know of any of the white ballplayers on your team that were given a trial scholarship during that time when you were there?

King: No, I think everyone on the football team that year had a full scholarship except Abner, myself, and one or two other guys who lived locally there that just loved football and came out for football. I don't believe they stayed on campus.

That was something that caught my fancy. Most of the guys

did not want to live on campus, and I had always dreamed of living on campus because that's what college is all about. But I found out the guys were having more fun living off campus than they were having living on campus. We did. It was a hardship on us the first year to not live on campus, but we made some minor adjustments and bought some automobiles, and things worked out okay for us.

Marcello: We talked to Coach Mitchell about this, and one of the things that he mentioned, rather humorously, was the fact that when they recruited Joe Greene, one of the Greene's stipulations was that he wasn't going to live on campus,

King: (Chuckle) Well, by then, you see...in my freshman year, we had to live out in the black section of the city, and because the college was growing by leaps and bounds, people began building apartments in and around the campus. So a lot of people began moving off campus. That was the thing.

They would periodically go through the athletic dorm, checking on everybody, and if you didn't live in the athletic dorm, you could pretty well do like you wanted, which was, again, something new. When I was in high school, we were told by our coaches--Coach Farley Lewis--would tell you, "No sweets. No cake, no pie, no soda pops." We couldn't eat it. In college they almost forced you to eat pie at lunch, cake at lunch, honey...the same at dinner. And the reason is energy. You need that. With the workouts that we had, you needed all the energy you could get.

Coach McCain and his dummies up there--WHEW! He worked you to death. But it paid off. It paid off.

The coaching staff was so friendly, I'm accustomed to calling my coaches "Coach Lewis," "Coach Daniels," "Coach Devon." You go to college, and you refer to them as "Fred." Now I never recall anyone calling Coach Mitchell "Odus." Not to his face, anyway. But, yes, it was nothing to call Coach McCain, "Fred," Herb Ferrell, "Herb," or Coach Bahnsen, "Ken." That was a very common thing. That was unusual for me to hear, and, once again, I guess it's that old phobia, You address your adults as "Mr." And in this case, we referred to them as "Coach." And to go up here...I eventually found myself calling them by first names, just to see if I could do it and what the reaction would be, and, "Hey, well, what is it?" "No big thing."

We did some humorous things up there, which even had racial overtones. But it was all in fun, and you knew it. I can recall after a game on Saturday, Coach would always give the guys that played in the game sort of a day off. You had on your shorts and all, and we did a lot of running and exercising. We were playing touch while the guys that didn't play were really going through the drills. In most cases, the back became lineman, and the lineman became backs in these little ol' practices that we had. I recall that we had a goal that looked like a basketball goal with a hole in the little net that the quarterbacks would practice throwing. I was to go out on a pass, so I flanked

way out. In standing over here, I was in the shadows of the goal. The ball snapped, and I sneaked down the side, and no one saw me. They threw the ball to me, and we scored. They said, "No, that's illegal! Bring it back!" I said, "What's the infraction?" "Well, he was standing in the shadows, and we couldn't see him!" And we got a big laugh out of it. But it was all in fun and was a joke, and nothing was ever said about it.

With the exception of one or two incidents, we really didn't have any problems on the team as a whole. One team member referred to us a "nigger" in relationship to something that we had done, but other than that, everything was done in good faith, good humor, and we all got a big laugh out of it. But we never had any kind of incidents on the team as a whole.

Marcello: Getting back to those quotas that you were talking about awhile ago, how many blacks do come in per year after you and Abner were there? Did you notice, or can you remember?

King: Let's see...now Abner and I were there the freshman year. Our sophomore year, one guy that was already there, James Bowdre, came out. James and I played football together. He was a guard in high school, but because he was so small, about 165 pounds, they made an end out of him. I believe Joe Bagby and Robert Hines came in the following year, and the next year Billy Christie and Art Perkins came in, somewhere in there. But we only had about two or three a year...about two or three a year.

Marcello: This quota, incidentally, that we heard about was not something

that was decided upon by the coaches. This was something that evidently came down from on high.

King: Oh, what do they call that committee?

Marcello: There's an Athletic Council at North Texas.

King: Okay, the Athletic Council made a lot of decisions. Because of the inconvenience that was placed on "Ab" and I our freshman year...no, our sophomore year, We had a problem our freshman year getting home. Our sophomore year, we had a problem of being able to attend the nightly skull practice and reviewing films of our game and our opponent's, and eating became a problem. That's when we decided, "Hey, if things can't get any better, we need to go where we can live on campus," When we went to Coach Mitchell and talked to him about it, he understood our problems, but he let us know that his hands were tied and that the faculty council group had to make that decision. They had decided that we would not live on campus. So to off-set that, they allowed us to eat our noon and evening meal in the athletic dorm, which was a tremendous help. That summer, I had bought an old Dodge, so we did have some transportation to get around,

But it worked out. What they did do, they found a house that "Ab" and I shared one room, and Art Perkins and Billy Christle shared the other room, so we had the house to ourselves. We split the rent among ourselves, and it was a lot better than living on campus--a whole lot better than living on campus.

Cummings: That first house that you and Abner lived in your freshman year...

if I remember correctly, I believe you said that it was Abner's sister's?

King: Yes, that was his sister's.

Cummings: Was that the house that burned down?

King: That's the house that burned down,

Cummings: That was in January of your freshman year?

King: Right.

Cummings: If you can remember back--I know it was a long time ago--could you kind of give us a tour of that house--what it was like, what it looked like inside, outside, what your living quarters and the like?

King: It was a basic three-bedroom, living room, dining room, kitchen. It was crowded because she had five kids--all boys. I guess you would call it a typical rural kind of house because it was about three-and-a-half feet off of the ground, and you could crawl under it very easily. "Ab" and I had the front bedroom. She and her husband had the back bedroom. I think the two younger kids were in the back bedroom with her, and the three older boys had to share the middle bedroom. So we were crowded. We were quite crowded, but it was no big thing because I came from a family of five--four boys and one girl--and we had a three-bedroom house, so I knew what it was like to have bunk beds and three or four of us in one bedroom, Mom and Dad up here, and my sister having a bedroom by herself. So it was bearable. It was bearable.

In those days, there was a lot of traffic, both black and white,

in and around the area where we were living. At the time, Denton was dry, and bootlegging was the thing for a lot of blacks. If you didn't work at the college or work on construction, you were bootlegging. People were coming all hours of the day and night. Occasionally, we would look and spot where somebody hid something, and after they'd leave, we would go get it and sell it ourselves to try to make a little money. It was a little tough.

It got extremely tough on me the following year because my first child was born. I think at the time, we were on a \$58-a-month scholarship. By the time I paid my rent and sent some money home to the wife...she was living with her mother. But by the time I sent money home to her to buy the milk...and that kid drank that formula like, "Hey, I own the factory!" It was tough. I was on a \$6-a-week allowance.

My freshman year, "Ab's" sister cooked for us, and that was included in--room and board was included in it. That wasn't so bad. You'd have maybe a dollar or two a week spending change. But when she cooked...and she cooked every day. She worked nights, so she really cooked a big, hardy meal. You got plenty to eat; you'd always get seconds, and thirds occasionally.

But after the house burned and we had to...we separated at the time. I went and lived with James Bowdre, who was living with the McDade family, and "Ab" lived with an aunt. That's when things began to get a little touchy, and \$58 a month just wasn't a heck of a lot of money to try to go to college and support a

family and try to put a dollar or two worth of gasoline in the automobile. So a lot of days, in order to get home on weekends to see my family, I would have to leave my car and hussle a ride or walk, just to make sure I had enough petrol that would get me to Dallas, and she would see to it that I got back to Denton. But we did that occasionally.

Cummings: When did you get married?

King: 1957.

Cummings: Did you get married prior to coming to North Texas, or were you single when you came here?

King: I was single when I came to North Texas, and...I guess it was the fad. A lot of guys on the football team were married, and I thought, "Hey, this is a big thing--for guys to talk about their wives." So we eloped. We eloped.

Cummings: What time period during that freshman year?

King: May of the next year.

Cummings: Spring of your freshman year.

King: Yes, spring. I don't know why! I came home one weekend, and we were just joy-riding. We got married! We went to Kauffman and got married. It was that way for a while. We didn't tell anyone that we were married. I did on campus because I thought it was a big thing to do--let people know you were married.

Then the kiddos started popping up, and I had to drop out for a little while because I just wasn't making enough to do what I wanted to do and go to school. And I'm here, trying to go and

worrying about that, knowing good and well that they are going to be provided for, but I felt that it was my responsibility to do it. So after my junior year, since it didn't pan out as well as I thought it could have or should have, I dropped out.

I think it was due to the death of my mother and the encouragement of my wife that made me come back to school.

Marcello: How long were you out of school before you came back?

King: A year. I was out a year. As a matter of fact, I was out a little better than a year because I dropped out that January, and I didn't return until the fall. I was making good money at the time--real good money.

Cummings: What were you doing?

King: Parking cars. I was parking cars. I had worked for Classified on and off ever since my senior year in high school, so I could always go back and get the same job every summer. Usually, in early August, I'd let all of my customers know that I was getting ready to go back to school, and they'd always wish me well.

When I dropped out, a lot of people were a little upset with me because I did so. I can't recall the gentleman's name--it stayed with me for years--but I pulled his car one day, and he asked me when was I going back to school. I said, "I'm going to enroll this fall." And he told me that if I would go up to North Texas and get a statement on what my tuition and books would cost me, he would pay for it. And I did, and he did. I said, "Hey, if I've got people interested in me like this, the least

I can do is go back and get this piece of paper.

Well, I had just about decided that I was really going back and get my degree. I was to enroll on a Wednesday. That was the day we eulogized my mother. She passed on a Sunday... had a stroke and passed, just out of a clear blue sky. She had never been sick a day in her life--just expired that quickly. I had promised her because she was quite upset when I got married... when she found out that I was married, she was so afraid that I wouldn't finish school. I promised her that I would. So after she passed, my wife said, "Hey, you told her what you were going to do, and that's what you're going to do, even if I have to get a job. You are going to get a degree,"

So with her being in my corner and with that old promise that I made my mother, I went back and really got serious. I never really applied myself the first two years I was up there. I went, I studied, and I did okay. But I really never got down and hustled. When I went back I decided, "This is what I'm going to do, and I'm going to do it as quickly as I possibly can and get my degree." And I did.

Cummings: I want to try to get the time frame correct in all this. You dropped out the January of your third year?

King: I dropped out in January, 1959.

Cummings: Okay, that would have been your senior year.

King: Yes.

Cummings: And you didn't come back until the fall of 1960?

King: I came back in the fall of...let's see,..fall of 1960. Yes, in the fall of 1960 I came back.

Cummings: Okay, then you did eventually graduate.

King: Right. I graduated in August, 1962. I had completed all of my work, but I had received an "F" in freshman English. At the time, you had to take the Student Use of English Test. It was too late for me to take it at the time, so I had to wait. Well, when I came home and started working, I fooled around and missed it in the spring of 1962. So I came back up and took it, and by the time I got my notice, they were getting ready for the summer commencement.

Cummings: You say your degree was in physical education?

King: Physical education.

Cummings: I just noticed up there on your wall your master's degree. What did you get that in?

King: I got my master's ten years later, in 1972. I decided that since I was in education and that's what I wanted to do, I might as well try to go as far as I possibly can in it. So I went back up and started working on my master's, took Saturday classes and evening classes. It took me ten years to decide it. I should have turned right around and gotten it while I was there, but I didn't, I waited and finally got it. Then about eight years after that, I got my doctorate through the Nova program. DISD sort of encouraged people at the time to work on their doctorate, and they had a program out of Nova University, and they were paying the

tuition, so I said, "I can't lose." So I went ahead and pursued that, and I got it in November of 1980. So I've gone about as high as I can go right now.

Cummings: Didn't you mention briefly that you coached for a while after you got out of North Texas?

King: Yes, I coached from 1962 to October of 1969. When I started coaching, the guy that had coached me one year in high school told me, "When you no longer enjoy it, it's time to get out of it." I was in the junior high program at Lincoln. We had the seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. I was with "Rabbit" Thomas, who had been at Roosevelt so many years, the first year. The next year, they opened Pearl Anderson Junior High. He went there, and I became the head coach at Lincoln, and I had the junior high program in 1963, 1964, and 1965. They dissolved the junior high program, and I went varsity, and I stayed there 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, and 1969.

I got to the point that I really didn't enjoy it. It was too time-consuming. Most of our games were on Saturday, and that's the only time that I could spend with my kids. By the time I got home from football practice, they would either be eating or taking a bath, so they saw very little of me. So I decided, "This is not what I want for my kids. I want to spend some time with them." So I resigned in the middle of the year from coaching. I was recommended for administration and got into the intern practice that they had in the system and eventually got into administration.

But I had some success in coaching. Two guys that probably everyone knows,..Duane Thomas was a member of my freshman team one year, and Ralph Anderson, who is probably not that well-known down this way, played, I believe, two or three years with the Pittsburgh Steelers as a defensive back. We were pretty successful.

I learned a lot working under "Rabbit" Thomas, and after he left, I had it all myself. I ran the same system in junior high that we had at North Texas--identical plays, identical hole numbers, our backs were named the same. I had some problems because our varsity ran an unbalanced line, and I convinced the coach that I felt that, since I'm teaching basic fundamentals, I better go with the standard split-T formation, pro set, and just teaching basic plays. And that's what we did. We were very successful with it, but the first three years that I was the head coach in the junior high program, I ran the North Texas offense--same, identical offense. With the varsity, then I had to do what they did,,but I did the same old "fifty-eight, quicks" and "twenty-threes" that we ran up there,

Cummings: Did they work good?

King: Very well, very well. I did add some traps to it. We did a lot of trap blocking. The first year we played four games. I won two, lost one, and tied one. The next year, I couldn't buy a ballgame. I lost every game I played. The following year, we beat everyone we played. But it was a highly successful offense.

Sometimes I regret that I got out of coaching, but then there

are days that I'm glad I did get out of coaching. I have my regrets. I enjoyed track about as much as I did football. I took a lot of interest in track and football. Even now, I find myself going out and looking at the team and kind of sticking my nose in it and suggesting this, that, and the other. I guess it's in my blood, and it'll never get out. I try my best to stay out of it, but I just can't do it...can't do it.

Cummings: Going back to your days at North Texas again, by your junior year, when you eventually left school, quite the team, did your relationship with Abner begin to separate a little bit, or did you remain close? You'd gone through high school together, and you'd gone to North Texas together.

King: We were still friends, but we were not as close then as we were at one time. I think it started even before then. I think it started when the house burned, and I went to live with James, and he went to live with an aunt. Later on, Garland Warren, who went into construction business, built two houses. I think we had above five rooms in those houses and two guys to a room. I lived in one of them, but "Ab" was living in another house with a couple of other guys. So I would say, because of the burning of the house, we tended to separate. Like I say, we were still friends, but we were not as close as we once were. At one time, we were closer than any two brothers you ever want to see.

And even now, I don't see "Ab" that much. I talk to his brother all the time, and I ask about him, but he's so busy doing

this, that, and the other that we very seldom see each other. But he knows that if he needs me, all he has to do is call, and I feel the same way. When he lost his dad, as soon as I heard the news, I went to the house. When they eulogized his dad, I was right there with him. The same way with his mom. I heard about it; I went to him. At the funeral, I was right there, and that's just something that we have with each other. Yes, we're still the best of friends, but we're not as close as we once were.

Cummings: How do you reflect back on your athletic careers--the paths they took? At one point you two, like you just mentioned, were very close, inseparable, and then over the course of the years, you say you became discouraged and left school for a year; whereas Abner continued up the successful athletic ladder, so to speak, and eventually went professional, became pretty well-known. Was it, you know, a joy to see a good friend like that reach that kind of success athletically.

King: Very much.

Cummings: How did you react?

King: I had mixed feelings. I had no jealousy or animosity towards him, but that was something I always wanted to do--go pro. I had my "druthers" about being the size that I was playing pro ball, but when I saw Buddy Dial at 180 pounds playing pro ball, I felt that I could have made it as a professional football player.

But I was always glad to see him do well; I was always glad to go to a Dallas Texans football game to see him, to hear people

talk about him, and have that feeling that knowing that, "Hey, I played with him at one time." It was just a thrill to have know him and to play with him.

No, I was never jealous of him--I don't think. But I've always wanted to play professional football, and it's something that my wife and I had to sit down and talk about because she could sense it as I'd look at football games on Sundays. She'd say, "Hey, he really wanted to be out there." But I had an opportunity to go to the Saint Louis Cardinals, and we sat down and talked about it, and the decision was, "Don't go." And I didn't go. Sometimes I wonder if I made the wrong choice.

Marcello: Why did you make the decision not to go?

King: Family...and the knee. I felt that I could have made it if the knee held up, but then here were by three kids, and I kind of wanted to be there with the boys. My dad worked both day and night, and I could only hear him in the house. I didn't see him on a day-to-day basis. I saw him on Saturdays and Sundays, and there were times I needed my dad. So my brother was more of a dad than my dad was a dad in situations like that. And I didn't want that for my boys, so I said, "I'm going to have to scarifice a few things for them." But, yes, I wanted very badly to play professional football.

But I was glad for "Ab"; I was glad for him to go and do as well as he did, I guess he was right in the stand that he took, and I believe that was the cause of his downfall--his talking and

the boycott at one of the football games in California and all. But if that is what you believe, then you must stand firm on your beliefs.

I question today why an athlete like Abner has not made the Texas Hall of Fame or he's not in the professional football Hall of Fame. I was looking at television during the pre-season football games, and they had listed the three or four guys that had rushed more than 2,000 yards their rookie year or something, and he was one of three or four. So the guy has all kinds of records and milestones, and why he has not made the Hall of Fame is beyond me. But I think he's deserving, unless he's done something in his life that they're ashamed to put him in there for. But I think he's deserving, based on his athletic ability.

Cummings: How do you reflect back on your role in the breaking of the "color line" in athletics at North Texas?

King: Randy, to tell you the truth, it very seldom dawns on me what impact I have on that university today, if I have any. The only time it really hit me was about four or five years ago. I have a brother that coached at Pinkston, and some of the guys were at Pinkston recruiting, and they were talking to the athletes and to my brother. They told him that I was the first black that participated in athletics that received a degree for some six or eight years up there, which means a whole lot of guys participated in athletics but didn't graduate. When he told me that, I got to thinking about it, and I said, "Hey, that's quite

an honor, to have participated in athletics and to get that degree."

It's nice to know that I was one of the first blacks up there, and I hope for some reason or another that I made a contribution. I do know that prior to our going up there, a lot of blacks have flowed through North Texas since. But as far as, you know, me being placed on a pedestal or something, no. But it's a good feeling...just three weeks ago I was in the Safeway grocery store, and a guy introduced me to his son, and he mentioned the fact that I was one of the first blacks to attend North Texas.

If anything rubs me the wrong way...and I don't mean rub me the wrong way, but it sort of bothers me...you want to be know for who you are, and for a person to say, "That's Leon King. He was at North Texas during the time Abner Haynes was up there" gets you. Just say, "He and Abner were up there together." But even today, when some of our old die-hard friends from Lincoln get to see me, they'll speak to me and say, "When was the last time you've seen Abner?" See me and speak to me for who I am, not because I was up there with him. I have nothing against being up there with him. He was an outstanding football player, and I do believe that he put North Texas on the map--first All-American, full-fledged All-American, to come out of North Texas--and it's an honor to be associated with him. But to have everybody say, "Hey, where's 'Lil Abner?'" Today one of the teachers here asked me, "Where is he?" "He's still around; I see him occasionally."

But it does get to you, after all these years, for somebody to say something about North Texas, and they always have to associate you with Abner. It kind of gets in your craw every now and then.

Marcello: Do your children realize or recognize the importance of what you did?

King: I don't think they do. I really don't think they do because I never mention it around them. I never mention it around them, about me being up there. I have had them to come home from Prairie View and ask me things about being at North Texas. But I sort of play it down, and I never mention it around them. Now my youngest son was offered a scholarship to North Texas in track--or a guy came and visited him--but there was not follow-up on it. He said something when he came back...I took him up on the campus to show him around and all that, and he came back and was telling me that the guy had mentioned the fact that I was one of the first blacks up there and some of the things that I had done there. I don't think they realize the impact that it had.

Cummings: Did some of the things that you personally experienced up there help you as a father for your children, as far as raising them in a integrated society fifteen or twenty years later?

King: Yes. The only thing...when these guys came along, things had began to integrate. Now when they were in elementary school, they went to a one-race school, but by the time they got to the upper elementary grades, the oldest one, anyway, was in an integrated situation. He went to an integrated middle school or junior high

school and high school.

The thing that he had to overcome...he played saxophone in the band. He didn't want to be an athlete. And, oh, that boy ran like an antelope. He really could run, and I don't know why he didn't really pursue running track. But he wanted to play a saxophone. The thing he had to adjust to was that his band director was white. Members of the band wanted to play the kind of rock-n-roll music that blacks are typical of playing, and they didn't play that kind of music. That was an adjustment, and the thing that I had to try to tell him was, "You have to learn to appreciate all kinds of music." He said, "That's fine. I'm learning to appreciate, but the band director needs to learn the same thing. Let us play two or three or four of those." And it was kind of tough, but eventually they changed band directors, and they got to play some of the kind of music that he wanted to play.

But for the two younger guys, they had no problems because they came up through an integrated situation, and they saw people for what they were and not who they were.

Marcello: And you think that this perhaps in part explains why they don't attach that great a significance to what you did?

King: It could have a lot to do with it, it really could. They have a lot of white friends, and they have even brought them to the house, and, "Hey, whoever you bring is just welcome here." But it's a whole different ballgame with them.

Cummings: In some of the research that I've done, I've noticed the dates in

which various universities in the South integrated athletically. SMU was the first Southwest Conference school in 1965, the University of Houston was a year before, in 1964. They got a little box of recognition in Sports Illustrated because of that fact. The University of Texas didn't integrate until the late 1960's, and the University of Alabama, I don't believe, was integrated until the early 1970's, 1971 or 1972. With your knowledge and your experience of having gone through in the mid-1950's, do you ever look back and say, "Why did it take SMU and the University of Texas and the University of Alabama...why did it take those people so long?"

King: No, I haven't. Occasionally, I will get my old scrapbook out and look back over some of the things we've done or some of the pictures in the annual, but I never really asked why SMU or TCU or Houston or anyone else didn't do this. Not at the time, anyway, because it really didn't dawn on me that blacks weren't playing in the ball clubs. I guess I had a little narrow field of vision. The only time the Southwest Conference dawned on me was when we wanted to play TCU that year because we had a real good football team. I kept up with the Doak Walkers and all at SMU, but it never dawned on me that they didn't have any blacks.

It's like I said earlier. I lived within, I'd say, ten or twelve blocks of the old Forrest Avenue High School, which is now James Madison High School, and never really knew it was there--never knew it was there. I guess the only white high school in Dallas I

was familiar with was Sunset High School, and that was because we would meet up at Cobb Stadium periodically and practice, and we would run against each other.

But, no, I never really thought about why SMU or some of the other Southwest Conference teams had not integrated before they did. Now later on in life, yes, I wondered why it took this long for a black to go to SMU, I don't think the ol' boy had the problems that we had when we went up to North Texas, but it really didn't dawn on me why, I guess it was because they weren't recruited or they weren't interested in any.

Any it's just the opposite now. It's extremely hard to get a black to go to an all-black college now. Most of them nowadays want to see just how big a "name" university they really can go to. That's fine, if you can hack the academics. But I see so many young people going to college now to play football or whatever and don't make it academically, and when they get out, they don't have anything to fall back on. They really don't have anything to fall back on, and that's bad.

A young man that went to Texas A&M and played basketball... his brother just went to SMU this past year to play basketball, or will be playing basketball at SMU—from Roosevelt. I can't think of his name now. But I saw him this past summer making barbeque sandwiches at Smokey John's, You don't have to go to college to know how to fix a barbeque sandwich! I mean, here's a young man that evidently didn't get his degree and has nothing

whatsoever to fall back on. He's in bad shape. Go where you can get a degree. If you're good enough, and you want to play professional ball, somebody will notice you. You'll get in there.

Marcello: So you think that goal of playing professional ball can work both ways. In other words, there's such a small, small percentage that make it in pro ball, whether it's...well, whatever the sport is.

King: Right.

Marcello: So it's almost, to a great extent, like a lot of them are being mislead,

King: A lot of them are being mislead. In the old days, Grambling was about the only college where blacks came from that played professional football. Now we have a few from all over. Even Bishop has a few that have made it in the ranks.

Marcello: That's all the questions I have. Once more, Dr. King, we want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with us.

King: I enjoyed it. I hope I've been of some help.

Cummings: Oh, you have, definitely. I do appreciate your time very much, and it's been very interesting...very interesting.

King: I've enjoyed it. I'm going to try to do something this year that I haven't done in many, many years. I'm going to try to make a North Texas homecoming game (chuckle),

Cummings: The way they're playing this year, you may not want to go back,

King: I may not (Laughter),