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Interview with
IRA T. DeFOOR
MAY 24, 1983

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Ron E. Marcello

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Approved: Ira T. DeFoor
(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Ira DeFoor

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello and
Mr. Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: May 24, 1983

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello with Randy Cummings interviewing Ira DeFoor for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 24, 1983, in Denton, Texas. We are interviewing Mr. DeFoor to get his reminiscences, experiences, and impressions while he was the equipment manager at North Texas State University during the integration of the football program at that institution.

Mr. DeFoor, to begin this interview, just 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. DeFoor: I was born on March 17, 1919, at Hahn, Texas, near El Campo, Texas.

Dr. Marcello: Tell us a little about your education. Start there in Hahn, Texas, and bring it up to the present.

Mr. DeFoor: Well, I went to elementary school in the Jones Creek

community near Hahn. Then I moved to Blue Creek community and finished up my elementary education there. Then I started what you'd classify as junior high school in El Campo. I graduated from El Campo High School.

Marcello: Give me a little geography lesson here. Where is El Campo located?

DeFoor: Down on the coast between Houston and Victoria. It's close to Palacios Bay.

Marcello: When did you first become interested in athletics?

DeFoor: In 1935 and 1936, I played football under J. D. Moore, who was principal and coach of El Campo High School, who later became president of Victoria College. He remained there until he retired. He was a North Texas "ex."

Marcello: What year in school were you at that time?

DeFoor: You mean at El Campo?

Marcello: Yes.

DeFoor: I was a junior.

Marcello: So you actually didn't play football until your junior year in high school?

DeFoor: That's right, yes.

Cummings: Did you play a lot of just streetball with your friends?

DeFoor: Oh, yes, a lot of it. At recess we played football. What it was, you'd just throw out a ball, and the guy would pick it up and run with it, and about ten jillion of them would tackle you, you see. There wasn't any organization at all.

You just picked the ball up and run--that's it. How we kept from getting hurt, I don't know, but that's the way it was. There wasn't any organization at all. It was mostly at recess and at lunchtime--that kind of thing.

Marcello: Talk a little more about your family background, that is, in terms of your father's occupation, perhaps, and your brothers and sisters--things of that nature.

DeFoor: My father was a rice farmer. In fact, I was born on a rice farm. Mother and Dad separated when I was about seven years old, and it was just my mother and I. We lived on a farm until we moved into town. Oh, I imagine I was about in the sixth grade when we moved into town--the city of El Campo.

Marcello: Was this the rice farm where you had been living?

DeFoor: No, no. We lived on a cotton farm after...I only lived on the rice farm until I was about--I guess--seven years old--about the time my mother and daddy separated, you see. Then we moved in with her parents, and we lived on a cotton farm then.

Marcello: How large was this cotton farm?

DeFoor: Small. I don't remember the acreage, but it was small. They were small farmers.

Cummings: How big a family did you have?

DeFoor: Well, I was the only child. My dad married twice more, and he had a son by the second marriage. I just met this man--Ken DeFoor--last Christmas a year ago. I knew of him about a year prior to that. He's the captain of the Houston police helicopter

squad now--a very fine-looking man. I'm kind of proud of him (chuckle).

Marcello: Who worked this cotton farm? Was it strictly a family enterprise?

DeFoor: Yes, You'd hire cotton-pickers in August. You see, they'd come in from the border, camp out, and pick cotton. They'd pick the cotton. They didn't pull it; they picked it.

Marcello: So normally, the people who picked the cotton were Mexican laborers for the most part?

DeFoor: Yes, they were from across the border. They'd come in, and they'd move...I don't know how far they'd move up the state, but they'd pick there, you see, and then move on up the state to this part of the country, I imagine.

Marcello: What was your function on the farm?

DeFoor: Oh, I picked some cotton, but I was pretty young then. I would pick cotton, chop cotton. I had to walk three miles to school. When I got in after walking back from school, I had to get a cotton sack and start picking cotton. I didn't particularly like to pick cotton, I'll tell you that (chuckle). I didn't mind chopping it, but not picking it.

Marcello: How long did you and your mother live on that farm before you moved into town?

DeFoor: Oh, I imagine ten years...something like that.

Marcello: In that situation, or in that society around El Campo, what was the general attitude of people with regard to race, that is, in regard to black and white?

DeFoor: Very prejudiced. Very prejudiced.

Marcello: Can you explain that further?

DeFoor: Well, the blacks lived in one area of town. We called it Ox Blood. Maybe I shouldn't even mention that.

Marcello: No, I think that's an important part of this interview.

DeFoor: That's what they called it--Ox Blood. It's still called that. They lived in that part of the town. Of course, they had their own cafe; they couldn't eat anywhere where the whites ate. They had separate drinking fountains. But there were a lot of people who had the blacks in their homes. The blacks lived in there, and they did the cooking and so forth. I guess you'd call them "mammies."

The blacks were well-thought-of there in El Campo. They really were. They're really well-thought-of because they were always helpful, and white people always helped them, too. There was prejudice. They had to be in their place, and we had to be in ours, you see, but I have a lot of friends that were blacks back there. I really do.

Marcello: What were your own attitudes toward race at that particular time?

DeFoor: I was prejudiced because that's the way I was brought up. Yes, prejudiced.

Marcello: When you say you were prejudiced, in what way?

DeFoor: Well, they had to stay in their place. I guess I felt like I was better than they were (chuckle), you know. I really did.

That's the way I was brought up. That's the way we were taught.

Marcello: Were there separate black schools in El Campo?

DeFoor: Yes, there sure were.

Marcello: Did that include a black high school, also?

DeFoor: Yes, it sure did.

Marcello: So El Campo was large enough that it did have both a black and a white school.

DeFoor: That's right--just like Denton did at one time. Mr. Redd was the superintendent of El Campo...I forget the name of their high school. I think it was ~~name~~ Redd High School. They had an outstanding football team. The teachers were well-thought-of and everything. It was all part of El Campo Public Schools, but they were separated.

Marcello: With those sandlot football games, did you ever come into contact with blacks? Did you play with blacks of anything along those lines?

DeFoor: No, they played in their areas, and we played in ours. Of course, I don't know how much football they played like we did.

Cummings: You said that some blacks lived in the homes of some of your friends and some other people. Did you ever have any contact with them other than the fact that they were just there?

DeFoor: No, I just...if I visited in the homes of some of these boys I was acquainted with, well, I'd go in there, and I'd see them and talk with them--that kind of thing.

Cummings: But you never did play with them?

DeFoor: No, I never did.

Marcello: Today, of course, we normally refer to them as blacks. At that time, would it be safe to say that the common white term for blacks was "nigger?"

DeFoor: Yes, that's right. Yes, it sure was.

Marcello: I assume tht was simply a commonly spoken word that most people didn't think twice about.

DeFoor: No, they didn't. Of course, the blacks at that time didn't pay any attention to it, either. I don't think they did. They may have and didn't like it, but we weren't aware of it. I wasn't aware of it, you see.

Cummings: Did the black kids ever want to play with you and your friends?

DeFoor: Well, I never was around them enough to know, you see. The black children...I just never was around them enough to really know whether they wanted to play or not because we were kept separate, you see.

Cummings: Did you question why you were kept separate?

DeFoor: No. No, because that's the way I was brought up. I was supposed to be in a certain area, and they were supposed to be in their area, you see.

Marcello: In other words, it was an accepted way of life all around?

DeFoor: Oh, yes. It was a different way of life altogether from what we have now. It was really a different way. I'll tell you what...this is getting a little farther ahead, but when I first had the first black in my class, I was a little bit ill-at-ease

because he was there. I really was. Now, I pay no attention to it all. But I was just brought up that way.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about your high school football career, since I'm sure that it has in one sense a part in your eventual coming to North Texas State. What position did you play?

DeFoor: Well, I started out as a halfback, and George Taylor, who was the parks and recreation director for the city of Tulsa for years, was a guard. Somehow, he hurt his hip. This is my first year of football. I only played two years of high school ball. He hurt his hip, and he couldn't pull out of the line. You know, we had running guards then, and he couldn't pull out of the line because of his hip injury, so Mr. Moore put me in as guard. I made All-District as a guard that year. Maurice went to end. I should say George Taylor. He prefers to go by George now. He used to go by Maurice, but now it's George. Anyway, we won the regional championship that year, and that's as far as that class of football could go. We couldn't go to the state championship, you know. The teams in Dallas, Fort Worth, Wichita Falls--these big cities--could go to the state championship, but we couldn't. We went as far as we could. We played a little team called Aransas Pass. We went on a special train to Victoria, Texas. We received the ball, and _____ ran the ball back for a ninety-eight-yard touch-down. They received the ball the next time, and they ran it

down to our twenty yard line. That was the closest they ever got to our goal line. The next year, we had practically the same ball club, and we went down to Bay City, and they beat us. We lost the district championship that year.

Cummings: What class was that?

DeFoor: I don't know, Randy. I have no idea. I couldn't no more tell you what it was...I think we were a class below whatever these big schools was. I have no idea what it was.

Cummings: Did you play any other sports?

DeFoor: I played basketball, but I played standing guard. I did a pretty good job of guarding one week, and we had a game coming up with a little town called Louise. They played basketball year-round, you see. I did a pretty good job of practicing that week, and Mr. Moore said, "I'm going to put you on little Antone." Edward Antone was his name. He'd been the high point man in all of the games. Anyway, I made the ball club that game. I guarded him, and he made two points. He was always the high point man, and he made only two points. I made the team, but I made it as a standing guard. Four men did all the shooting, and I stood back out here (gesture) and fed the ball to them. I couldn't hit that backboard. I wasn't a basketball player (laughter).

Cummings: What other kinds of honors...you said you got All-District as a junior. Did you get any other kind of honors in as an athlete in high school?

- DeFoor: No. I was out for track, but I wasn't any good. I just couldn't...I wasn't outstanding in track at all.
- Cummings: But you were a member of the team?
- DeFoor: I was a member of the team, but I was just out there (chuckle). I was on some of the relay teams, but I wasn't outstanding. We had boys better than I was in track. I tried to show in the shot and the discus. I went to the regional meet in the shot put and the discus, but I didn't do any good.
- Marcello: During this period of time, did you ever observe any of the football games taking place between the various black teams?
- DeFoor: No, I never did.
- Marcello: Did you and your teammates ever get into any discussions about the comparisons and contrasts about blacks and white football players?
- DeFoor: No, we never did. To tell you the truth, at that time we didn't even realize there were any black teams around. We were always involved in ours, and they were involved in theirs; and there wasn't any thought about it at all.
- Cummings: Is this even in high school?
- DeFoor: I'm taking about high school. Now when I came to college, the North Texas team was always invited to the black games, and I saw a couple of those. That's the first time I'd ever seen a black football game. I've seen black baseball. I've seen black baseball teams play. I think I saw one. See, I didn't have a car or anything to get around, so I was just

stuck right there. I couldn't move around like other kiddos could, you see. Their parents would take them places. I just stayed right there in El Campo, and that was it.

Marcello: You mentioned that on the farm and so on, you would employ Mexican labor during the cotton-picking season. Where did the Mexicans rank on the social scale?

DeFoor: They were above the blacks, yes, because we would have Mexicans in our homes. In fact, I used to play with Mexican children on the farm, especially at Blue Creek, because they lived right down the road from us. They'd come in our home and everything; whereas, if a black ever came into your home, they'd wonder about you--the neighbors would. But Mexicans were accepted.

Cummings: Didn't childhood curiosity ever get to you as far as why there was that racial class?

DeFoor: No, it never did enter my mind. It never did. I don't know why, but it never did.

Marcello: What were the attitudes of your mother toward blacks?

DeFoor: Well, I never did hear her discuss it. I had a real nice experience here several years ago. My mother used to live... she's living here now, but she lived in El Campo for years, and I went down and visited her. She had an ankle injury, and she was in the hospital. She heard about this man at Weimar that was making molasses syrup, and she wanted to get some. She had the address. So we went out there, and the man and the

lady that was living there...the man used to work with my father on the rice farm, and the lady was helping my mother cook for the rice crews. My mother and she embraced at that time when they saw each other, so they apparently got along real well in this situation, you see. I don't think my mother was prejudiced, I don't think she ever was, really, because she...I don't know why, but I never did hear her speaking against the blacks at all. Now my uncles did; but why, I don't know,

Cummings: If your mother in your view was not prejudiced, where did you pick up or draw your prejudice from?

DeFoor: Oh, I think from the community, you know, from the people around the community and my uncles, I think that's what it was. But my mother never did say yay or nay.

Marcello: Again, when you say she wasn't prejudiced--and without putting words in your mouth--we can probably assume that she did accept the segregation of the races, however.

DeFoor: Oh, yes. Sure, she did. Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

Marcello: When you speak of prejudice, you speak in terms of having perhaps a distinct hatred or something along those lines?

DeFoor: Yes, that's right. They'd stay in their place, and we'd stay in ours. That's about what it amounts to.

Cummings: Go back and tell us a little bit about the process from El Campo High School to North Texas.

DeFoor: Oh, well, J. D. Moore, my coach, is responsible for me going to North Texas. In fact, he took...he brought...well, he didn't

do it. Lanier Hester, who was the business manager of El Campo for a number of years until he retired...he was first an assistant football coach. He was an assistant under Mr. Moore. He brought five of us up here to see about getting a scholarship. Personally, I wasn't as good as the other four boys. In other words, North Texas got the most unskilled athlete of the five. In other words, they got the sorriest athlete--that's what happened (chuckle).

Anyway, we came up here to see about getting a scholarship with Mr. Jack Sisco. He was our football coach. Mr. Sisco set us down and told us about North Texas right out behind the old women's gymnasium. We sat down on the grass. He told us all about it. He told us all about the scholarship and what was expected of us. When he got through, he said, "I'll tell you what, boys, you come up here and make my squad of so many boys, and I'll give you a job, and that'll pay for your room and board, too. If you don't, I'll send you home." And that's exactly what he told us. Whether he told all athletes that, I don't know.

Marcello: What year was this that you graduated?

DeFoor: In 1939. So the other boys...two of them went to Texas A & M, and two of them went to Sam Houston. I played against the two of them at Sam Houston. We were in the same conference. We were in the Lone Star Conference at that time,

Cummings: Why did that coach pick North Texas to bring you kids up here?

DeFoor: He was a former North Texas "ex," you see.

Marcello: J. D. Moore?

DeFoor: J. D. Moore. Yes, he was a former athlete here. In fact, he's still participating in track right now. He's throwing the shot... this old senior citizens. He can't get it out of his system (chuckle). He's a wonderful guy,

I'll go back to one other thing here. I played semi-pro ball for the Palacios Bluejackets. What it was, it was a semi-pro league.

Cummings: Before North Texas or after North Texas?

DeFoor: Before. You didn't get paid or anything. They'd just pay your meals and transportation to a game. You didn't get paid for it, see. The purpose of that league was to get you in the eyes of some of the coaches--some of the less outstanding players. This George Taylor was an outstanding athlete, and he played. The first game I played with him was against the Huntsville prisoners. We went down to Huntsville and played the Huntsville prisoners. That's the first game I played with the Palacios Bluejackets.

Cummings: You did that between graduation from high school and coming here to North Texas?

DeFoor: Yes, that's right.

Cummings: How long?

DeFoor: Oh, just a couple of months. We just had a short session.

Marcello: What attracted you to North Texas other than the fact that you would

get a working scholarship if you made the team?

DeFoor: Well, after the group came up here--the five boys--we found how friendly everybody was. Everybody spoke to you. I just couldn't believe what I saw and heard--how friendly everybody was. You'd walk down the sidewalk, and everybody would speak to you. That's one reason I came. Plus, I liked North Texas, and I got a scholarship. And Mr. Moore had been good to me, and I felt like I should go to North Texas.

Marcello: Had you ever been this far away from home before?

DeFoor: No, sir, that's the farthest I'd been away from home. The spring of 1939 was the farthest I'd ever been away from home. He did bring us up to the Southwestern track meet one time, but I didn't come up as far as Denton. We didn't come up to Denton. He took us up there one year just as a treat, I imagine, because we had some real outstanding track athletes. Some went to the University of Texas and so on. We had a good track team, but I wasn't one of them. I managed to place, and that's it. I wasn't outstanding.

Cummings: What were your thoughts as a senior in high school as far as furthering your education in relationship to athletics?

DeFoor: I needed the education. I wanted to get an education, and the only way I could get it was to get a scholarship. I felt like I had enough skills to participate in football, and I had to have that scholarship. If I hadn't gotten that scholarship, I couldn't have gone to college. That's the way I felt at the

time. Well, of course, a lot of fellows came up here and got jobs that weren't athletes. Of course, I didn't have that kind of knowledge. I had to have that scholarship. We all had to have our scholarships to get an education in those days, and nearly everyone that had an athletic scholarship graduated and went on into coaching or something like that. We all got our degrees, Mr. Sisco made sure of that.

Marcello: How large a squad was North Texas carrying at that time in football? You'd have to estimate that, of course.

DeFoor: I'd say about thirty-six to forty players. See, the freshmen and the varsity played just like they do now. I think the year before I came, they had a varsity and a freshman team, but that year I came up, freshmen were eligible.

Cummings: So coming out of high school, as far as priorities stood, where did athletics and education stand?

DeFoor: Education was on top. That was my goal, but I had to have this scholarship in order to get that education. I wanted a degree, is what I wanted.

Cummings: Did you consider going to any other schools?

DeFoor: No. I wasn't even contacted...well, I wasn't that good an athlete to be contacted by anybody. I talked to Mattie Bell at SMU one time, but some people in El Campo wanted...Mr. Carroll played football for SMU, and Mr. and Mrs. Carroll took me to see their son to play one time, and I was introduced to Mattie Bell. I don't know why they brought me up here, but they did.

I don't know if they was trying to see if they could get me a scholarship or what. But I wasn't that good. I wasn't that skilled an athlete.

Marcello: I assume that you were good enough, however, to make the North Texas team and get your scholarship.

DeFoor: Yes, I did, I came up here and went out for the fall training camp, and Leon Vineyard was the starting guard in that position where I was. See, I came out for guard, too. Walt Parker played. He was a senior my freshman year. Leon Vineyard was the captain of the team, and I tried to hustle as much as I could because I knew I needed that scholarship. I needed it badly. So, anyway, Leon tore a cartilage in his knee, and I think Leon was telling Mr. Sisco that I was hustling and that kind of thing. Mr. Sisco put me his position, which really would have been something for a freshman to have taken his position. But I stayed up there about three days, and he saw that I couldn't block a chair, so...you know, didn't have enough experience. I didn't belong up there. So he moved me to... I don't remember which guard it was, but he moved me behind these other first string guards and moved the second string guards up to that first string position, which should have happened in the first place. I knew I didn't belong up there. If I had had the skills and could have done it, I would have made the team my freshman year. I knew I didn't have the skills.

Marcello: Okay, if you went to North Texas in the fall of 1939, that means

you would have probably been here at the start of World War II and perhaps a little bit after World War II. How did World War II affect you? Were you able to complete your education, or did it interrupt your education?

DeFoor: Oh, yes, it interrupted my education. See, I was a junior. I was drafted the second semester of my junior year.

Marcello: Which would have been....

DeFoor: February 3, 1942. I was discharged on February 13, 1946. Then that next summer, I came back to school at North Texas.

Marcello: What branch of the service did you enter?

DeFoor: Army, 24th Infantry Division.

Cummings: Recap your North Texas athletic career up until you were drafted, as far as playing time, etc.

DeFoor: Well, I only lettered in 1941. Mr. Sisco...I felt like he made it an honor to letter. My freshman year, he lettered nineteen men. My sophomore year, he lettered twenty-two men; he lettered two teams, My junior year, he lettered twenty-two fellows, also.

Cummings: That was the year you lettered?

DeFoor: Yes, that's the year I lettered. You had to play sixty minutes of football, and we played both ways then. See, we played both defense and offense. We had to play sixty minutes of ball in order to letter,

Cummings: For the whole season or per game?

DeFoor: For the whole season before you could letter. Of course, a lot of those boys got a heck of a lot more than that, you know, that played a lot. I just didn't get enough time my freshman

and sophomore years to letter.

Cummings: When you came back from the war then, did you pick back up with the athletics?

DeFoor: No. I had a year's eligibility, but I didn't take it. That's when I became equipment manager. Mr. Fouts talked me into it. I decided I wasn't going to play any more ball because it was hard for me to accomplish what I did before the war. I just wasn't that good of an athlete, Randy, so I decided I wouldn't play. It's a good thing I didn't because some of the boys that...for example, Wilburn Cornutt made All-Conference guard in 1942. I was a first string guard, and he played behind me in 1941. He made All-Conference in 1942. Then he came back, and he went ahead and played. That guy stayed injured most of the time. He couldn't recover because of his age, you see. Of course, he hadn't been working out, either. So, anyway, I became equipment manager, which is kind of hard to do, I'll tell you, when your friends are out there playing ball.

Cummings: You must have still had a pretty strong interest in athletics to want to be associated with it.

DeFoor: Oh, yes, I sure did. In fact, I was thinking about coaching, but when I started on my master's and got to sitting in these classes with coaches, principals, and superintendents, I decided that I didn't want to be either one of them. I was going to do something else because it's a tough life for those fellows.

Cummings: Okay, so did you go ahead in 1946 and try to finish your degree?

DeFoor: Yes, I got my B.S. degree in 1948. I kind of took my time because I had my G.I. Bill. I didn't take a full load because I had to work full-time. That checkroom kept me...see, I was running the old fieldhouse as a student, see. I couldn't take a full load and do that, too. I just couldn't do it and do justice to my classes, so I didn't take a full load. I took twelve hours a semester, is what I took.

Marcello: What differences could you see between that pre-war football program at North Texas and that immediate post-war program at North Texas? Now by the time you came back to North Texas, had Mitchell arrived?

DeFoor: Yes, in 1946. He came in 1946. Lloyd Russell was there in 1942. Then Herman Calley came in the spring of...I understand...he came in the spring of 1946. For some reason he left, and then Mr. Mitchell was hired, he and Dee Walker--DeVere.

I don't believe I could tell any difference because most of those fellows played football prior to World War II, you see. There was some difference in Mr. Mitchell's coaching and Mr. Sisco's. There was a lot of difference. Mr. Sisco was very, very strict out on the field and in workouts, but he tried to make the game a fun thing. He really did. Boy, his workouts were tough, Mr. Mitchell never did have workouts as tough as Sisco did. Have you heard the story about the game in 1941? Did Fred McCain tell you about it?

Cummings: No.

DeFoor: We went down to play SMU, and we got beat 54-0. You haven't heard that story? I don't know if you want to include that or not.

Marcello: This was in 1941?

DeFoor: Yes. We sent to SMU. I played twenty minutes and got the sacrosciatic arch broken right up here in my face. Dr. Hayes took me to the Medical Arts Building. During the second half, I was there, so I didn't see the second half of the game. Anyway, Mr. Sisco was upset at the varsity team, so he played the freshmen the rest of the ball game. They got beat 54-0.

Dr. Hayes and I got to the bus just about the time that they were getting on the bus. Mr. Sisco was really upset. Do you remember where Montgomery Ward used to have their little store on the square there? Well, that's where the Eagle Cafe used to be. That was the cafe in Denton. The street between campus and behind that little store was an alley. He had the bus driver drive that bus right up that alley. We couldn't imagine why he was having that bus driven up that alley. So, anyway, he got up and told us, "I want all you boys to go in that back door, and when you get through eating, you come out that back door because I don't want to see a one of you on the street during this weekend. I'm ashamed of you!" He got beat 54-0, and that's the worse he'd ever been beaten in his coaching career, you see.

Normally, when you get through eating, you just get up and

leave. Well, he told us he wanted to talk to us. We had to wait until he finished eating. He got up, and he talked and he talked and he talked, and finally he says, "I'll tell you what, boys, tomorrow's Sunday. I planned to work you out tomorrow morning and tomorrow afternoon. But I changed my mind. You better go to church tomorrow morning because you're going to need some religion about three o'clock Monday afternoon."

None of us had any money. They had the old "Goose" that went from North Texas to TWU. It was a bus. We called it the "Goose." It cost you a nickel. Well, anyway, I just walked to the fraternity house where it was and got my robe and what-have-you, pajamas, and went up to the college hospital, and I stayed there until Thursday. Mr. Sisco never did check on me. I was supposed to be operated on on Friday.

He finally came up that Thursday to see me. He walked in that room, and he said, "Ira, are you ready to go to the hospital?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You get ready, and I'll be back in a minute." I said, "Yes, sir." That was all that was said. He came back, and we went out to the car. He said, "I want you to get in that back seat. Mrs. Sisco is going with us." I said, "Yes, sir." I crawled into that back seat. He said, "Ira, we sure are having some good workouts. I wish you were out there." I said, "Yes, sir." That's all that was said (chuckle).

What he did that Monday...now Fred McCain can tell you this

because he was out there. He didn't tell you this, Randy? Anyway, you can verify it with Fred McCain. He was freshman quarterback then. He got those poor kids out there, and they worked out an hour of calisthenics, then he had punting practice under pressure, and then they had one-on-one and two-on-one blocking all afternoon until dark. Then he lined them up... you know where the men's building is. That's where the old practice football field was. They lined up there, and they had to do twenty-five laps of leap frogs around that thing. Well, somewhere along, oh, maybe the twentieth lap, he had some boys just falling out. They just couldn't go anymore. He wasn't satisfied after that, so he lined them up on that south goal line and made them charge ten yards at a time on their hands and feet. He'd blow the whistle when they were to start and stop. They did twelve laps of that. He just pulled his hat off and said, "Get in the best way you can." They missed their supper that night. They didn't get any supper. So I was glad I was hurt (laughter). That's a little side I always like to tell.

Marcello: That's an interesting contrast, I guess, especially after Coach Mitchell comes along. Describe Coach Mitchell's personality as you saw it.

DeFoor: Oh, he was a very fine man. He was friendly. He was stern; he was firm. But he was friendly and fair with his athletes. He expected you to perform in a very skilled manner. I was just

trying to think...it seems like he would demand more finesse of his athletes than Mr. Sisco would. He had a different formation. He had the T-formation, whereas we had the double-wing and single-wing, before the war. He used a quick opening play. He was a very congenial man, just as friendly as can be. Well, Mr. Sisco was, too. It was just different personalities on the field. Mr. Mitchell would get a little upset at DeVere Walker because DeVere Walker played under Mr. Sisco, and he tried to use some of Mr. Sisco's tactics. Mr. Mitchell would get upset at him, I know, at a lot of workouts because he felt like he was punishing the boys too much. Mr. Mitchell didn't believe in that.

Cummings: What were your job responsibilities from the time that you graduated after the war there up until Abner's arrival in the mid-1950's.

DeFoor: Well, I went ahead and got my master's degree, and I was student equipment manager, is what I was. Then they hired me to teach three classes and be equipment manager for track and football.

Cummings: What year was that?

DeFoor: In 1949. That's when I was hired by North Texas--1949. Mr. Fouts hired me.

Cummings: So you retained your equipment manager duties in addition to teaching.

DeFoor: Yes. I taught three classes.

Marcello: What exactly was involved in being equipment manager at that

time?

DeFoor: Well, I had several boys working for me. I think I had five boys at the old stadium working for me. And then I had the five out here. See, I had students working for me. I had five that would work for me during the fall football season and then during spring training. I had five boys. They had various jobs. One would operate the track checkroom; the others would operate the football checkroom. Then I had a boy that did all the cleaning. Students did all the cleaning out at Fouts and this other place. That was required; that was their job. In other words, I had four full-time student employees and one part-time employee. That part-time person was the one who kept the stadium clean. Then I had a fellow who went out on the field with the team, and he would keep the stadium after the football season was over. They got room and board, and that's all they got.

Cummings: What were the three classes that you taught?

DeFoor: I taught first aid.

Cummings: So you were in that capacity in 1956 when Abner and Leon came?

DeFoor: Yes, that's right. I may have been in charge of the men's activities program. I'd have to look at the records. I've forgotten when. I think I was. Yes, I know I was, because Dr. Cambron asked me to take over the men's activity program. So I had the stadium, taught three classes, and had this men's activities program when Abner was here. I sure did.

Marcello: You mentioned that Mr. Fouts was the athletic director at that time. Describe Mr. Fouts as you remember him.

DeFoor: Well, he was a person who helped a lot of students. See, he was the director of health, physical education, recreation, athletics, and dean of men. He was a man who had a lot of... he had a vision...how shall I say this? He was way ahead of people in his ideas. I could show you a lot of things that he had, as far as recreation parks, that he had on this campus that nobody else had. He was way ahead of people in his thoughts. For example, we had about 4,000 students, and we had an eighteen-hole golf course. We had 19,000 seating capacity for a stadium. We had the Men's Gym, which seats what? Four thousand or something like that? See, he had all those facilities, and I would say we were second to Texas University as far as the gymnasium is concerned, the stadium, and our golf course. Plus, we had this recreation park around where the swimming pool is, you see. That recreation park was put in there in 1926. He did it with wheelbarrows and student labor. He was a man who was way ahead of his time, is what I'm trying to say. They used to have a rock garden out there--two of them--that the National Garden Club used to visit every year--beautiful. It extends all the way around. One part of it is gone now--where the music building is. But he was so far ahead of his time that if they would have let Mr. Fouts alone, he would have bought all of this Owsley Addition where all those apartments are--out

beyond the stadium or north of the stadium. If they'd have let him buy that property, plus across the freeway there, they wouldn't be buying all this expensive property right now. He wanted to buy it, but they wouldn't let him.

He was good to students, but he was firm. I wasn't here at the time, but they tell me that he had a meeting with all the veterans. He talked to them about university policy, and he says, "I'll tell you what. Fellows, if you act like gentlemen, we'll treat you like gentlemen." That's all he said to them. We didn't question people like him. We did exactly what he told us, you see. He was good to his people, but he was firm.

Marcello: At the time that Abner came to North Texas, of course, J. C. Matthews was the president of the university.

DeFoor: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: What are your thoughts concerning President Matthews? The reason I'm asking you about all of these people is because they're going to be the ones that were going to play an instrumental role when Abner came.

DeFoor: Yes. Well, Dr. Matthews...I thought he was a good president, myself. He was firm, and he was the type of person you could go up to and get an answer from. Now you may not like the answer you got, but you got an answer from him. You see, that's what I liked about him. He knew what was going on. He knew every inch of this campus, I'll guarantee you that.

Marcello: He ran a pretty tight ship, did he not?

DeFoor: He sure did. Yes, sir. He did. He was good to me.

Marcello: Did you ever detect what his attitude toward athletics in general was?

DeFoor: Dr. Matthews was real fine. He was for athletics. He wanted it to stay in its place and not overshadow anything else, you see. He didn't want any one thing to overshadow another. That's the way he was. That's the way I saw him. So he wasn't going to let athletics overshadow anything. Now he might have let the College of Education overshadow something else. Now he might have let that happen, you see, because that was his field, and he might have done that.

Marcello: Well, of course, essentially at that time North Texas was still a teacher training institution for the most part, was it not?

DeFoor: That's right. Yes, right. That's right. That's true.

Marcello: In fact, I guess at that time it was...was it North Texas State Teacher's College yet, or had it become a North Texas State College?

DeFoor: Well, I don't know about when Abner came. I forget now what it was then.

Cummings: I think it was a state college when Abner came.

DeFoor: See, when I came it was North Texas State Teacher's College, is what it was. Then it became North Texas State College. It might have been North Texas State College when Abner came.

I don't remember that.

Marcello: Now Abner came in 1956, isn't that correct?

DeFoor: I believe so.

Marcello: The previous year, in 1955, there had been a court case--in fact, it had reached the federal district court--in which North Texas was ordered to accept blacks.

DeFoor: Oh, I wasn't aware of that.

Marcello: That was going to be my next question. Were you aware of that court decision?

DeFoor: No, I wasn't aware of that. No, I sure wasn't.

Cummings: According to the records that we can find and have researched, North Texas in the early fifties accepted black graduate students, but they would not accept undergraduates, freshmen through seniors. Until this court ruling in the spring of 1955, the doors were closed.

DeFoor: I see. I see.

Cummings: And then a student from Dallas filed suit against the school, and the school eventually was told to...

DeFoor: I see. I didn't know that. I really didn't know that.

Cummings: You were not aware of that?

DeFoor: No. If I was aware of it, I've forgotten it. I remember the graduate student coming in. I don't remember his name now. In fact, there was something about...he took a statistics course, and the professor made an assignment that was supposed to take all semester, and he handed it in the next day or some-

thing like that. I don't know how true that is, but that is what I heard,

Cummings: During the early fifties, when you were working in the athletic department and the athletic varsity teams were still all white, what do you recall about your feelings toward black athletes on a collegiate level, that maybe you saw play or heard about or read about, or possible black professional athletes?

DeFoor: Gee, I've forgotten what my attitude was at that time. I can't recall.

Marcello: Had you ever gone over to Fred Moore to watch the high school team at all during that period when you were a student at North Texas?

DeFoor: I did, yes, because we were invited. They gave us tickets, and I think I went to two of the games, as I recall. They had one real good athlete. In fact, Mr. Moore...I guess if the war hadn't come along, he would've tried to get him up North somewhere. I don't remember his position. He was a real outstanding athlete.

Marcello: Describe those experiences in going over to Fred Moore and watching the black football games.

DeFoor: Oh, we enjoyed the crowd more than we did the football games. It was fun to go and see their reaction because it was different, you know--different than whites.

Cummings: What kind of football did they play?

DeFoor: They played real good ball.

Cummings: The kind of football that everybody used to play?

DeFoor: They played good ball. They really did. Oh, yes, they played good ball. They had a good coach, you see. I forget who was coach now. Mr. Redd...was he the coach? I'm not sure now. I don't know. See, I don't know that much about it.

Marcello: You mentioned that you enjoyed the crowd as much or more than you enjoyed the actual game. Can you elaborate on that?

DeFoor: Well, they would get a little bit more excited anytime a play was developing. Depending on which team it was, they were really pulling for them, and they would get pretty loud, I can tell you that. It seemed like they'd get a little bit more excited than white people would in a game--different types of yells and so forth, but I don't remember what they were. I can't remember then. I can remember it being kind of something different that we hadn't seen. I can say that. Because I never had seen...now maybe some of the other fellows had, but I hadn't seen it. There wasn't any in our hometown.

Cummings: Did North Texas play any teams that had black athletes prior to Abner's coming to North Texas?

DeFoor: Oh, yes, yes. I don't remember who they were, but we did, sure.

Cummings: Do you recall any of the feedback that you picked up on from some of the players at North Texas when they had to play these teams?

DeFoor: Oh, they were after them. They were after them, I can say that. They were really after them, you know.

- Marcello: Were these games played on the road?
- DeFoor: Yes, they were on the road, I don't remember if any came up here or not, I don't recall. I can't recall if any came up here. They were on the road, I know that.
- Cummings: Were you still as fairly prejudiced as you were in high school at that time?
- DeFoor: Oh, yes, sure. Sure, I was. I sure was.
- Cummings: So when you saw these black athletes playing with white athletes on the opposing team, their athletic ability did not in your eyes cover up anything? It didn't cover up their color?
- DeFoor: No. No, it sure didn't.
- Cummings: They were still black, and blacks had their place.
- DeFoor: That's right. That's right. They sure did.
- Marcello: Okay, in 1956, Abner comes. Now describe or recall how you got the word that a black athlete would be coming and what your reaction was.
- DeFoor: I don't remember. I don't really remember what...I'm just trying to think of my reaction. I think I might have been a little uncomfortable about having to serve a black athlete, you know, as the equipment manager, but that soon wore off. It wasn't anything...you know, I didn't mind at all. I think I felt a little prejudice that he came, yes.
- Marcello: Do you recall any special instructions coming down either from Coach Mitchell or Mr. Fouts or Dr. Matthews concerning the coming of Abner?

- DeFoor: No. I don't think Mr. Fouts was here when Abner came. I think Dr. Cambron was the athletic director then. No, there wasn't any special instructions, no.
- Cummings: Coach Mitchell didn't get the staff together and warn some of them?
- DeFoor: No. No, sir. Oh, I don't know about that. But he didn't say anything to me or the boys that worked for me, the equipment managers that worked for me. He didn't say anything to me. We just took care of him just like any other athlete.
- Marcello: What remarks, if any, did you hear floating around among the players when they heard about the fact that blacks were coming?
- DeFoor: Well, if there's any there, I don't remember them. I really can't remember them. There may have been some, but I don't remember it. You see, for another thing, the way the checkroom was situated, and the dressing room, I'd miss a lot of things like that, see, so I really don't remember.
- Marcello: Now we have heard it said from various sources that the older players--and I assume this would have included the veterans and also juniors and seniors--seemed to have had more problems in accepted blacks than the white players who came in with Abner and Leon.
- DeFoor: Yes, because...I believe they had a freshman team when Abner came in.
- Cummings: Yes.
- DeFoor: Yes, that's true. I think Bahnsen coached that. I believe

he did. Or did Ferrill?

Cummings: I think Ken did.

DeFoor: I think Ken coached it. Well, you see, I've forgotten. A lot of these things I don't remember. You see, you're getting right in there where Abner is now, and I don't recall. See, I wasn't that close to him, you see. I remember a few things that happened.

I remember one thing about Abner that...when the freshmen... he proved himself when he walked out on that field, you see, and I think that changed everybody's attitude, is what happened. I remember that more than anything because the guy was really skilled. He was good. In fact, I think he is one of the better athletes we've had. He'll stand up there with the best of them. That guy could start and stop on a dime, it seemed like. He was quick, and when he had to move, he could move and all of that. That's what I remember about Abner.

Another thing I remember about him...I don't know if I should bring this up now, but he had to stay in a different place than the white athletes did. He had to eat in a different place, especially in states where they didn't accept the blacks. He had to eat somewhere else--in the kitchen or somewhere like that. And that's about all I remember about him. He took it in stride--he and Leon, both. They didn't ask for anything extra like a lot of athletes are asking for now--they've always got their hand out for something. They didn't ask for anything like that.

They just took it in stride, and that's what I admire about those two boys. The next year we had another black athlete out, and the way I understand it, he always had his hand out: "I wish I had this. Give me this. Give me that." But those two boys never did do anything like that. If they did, I'm not aware of it.

Marcello: Can you remember the first contact that you had with Abner, that is, in terms of giving him his equipment and things of that nature?

DeFoor: No, I can't remember that. I've forgotten it. I sure can't remember it.

Marcello: Describe what he looked like physically at that time.

DeFoor: Oh, he was very trim. He was a small man—very trim, muscular, all muscle. He was very muscular compared to Leon.

Cummings: What do you recall about their personalities those first few days, the first couple weeks, of fall practice that very first year?

DeFoor: You mean Abner's and Leon's?

Cummings: Abner's and Leon's, yes.

DeFoor: Oh, man, I can't remember.

Cummings: Were they quiet? Were they reserved?

DeFoor: Yes, they were. They were quiet, and I think they'd speak to someone if anyone would speak to them, but they did their job, and that was about it.

I don't know where it was, but sometime during fall training

camp, everybody accepted it, and it wasn't anything...I don't think anybody realized the difference there. I don't think that anybody realized it after a point there, if I remember right. I can remember a lot of times when the boys were walking out of the dressing room with their hands around his neck and that kind of thing.

Abner is quite a kidder, you know, and I think he helped make it a whole lot easier, too. You see, they respected him. They really started respecting him for his ability, and he was a friendly person, and he was fair. I think they finally realized that he was a part of them. He was a good athlete and could help the team, and so I don't think there was any...that prejudice just went out the window after a point because everybody respected him for his ability and what he was.

Marcello: How would you compare or contrast his personality with that of Leon's? We have to remember that there were two blacks who entered North Texas at that time.

DeFoor: Yes. Abner was more outgoing than Leon was. Leon was more reserved. I think Leon was more interested in education than he was athletics (chuckle)--I think. He didn't have the ability that...Leon didn't have the ability a lot of other athletes did. Leon didn't play a lot of ball. I guess you've found that. He didn't play a lot of football. I guess he lettered.

Cummings: How long did it take the team that very first fall to accept Abner and Leon for their talents?

DeFoor: I think it was during the second week of fall training camp.

Cummings: Just a couple of weeks.

DeFoor: I think so. I think so, yes, as far as I can remember, Randy. That's as far as I can remember. It seems like it just took one week there, and I think they started accepting them.

Cummings: Do you recall those first couple of weeks? Now we're going to get kind of specific. This may be tough to jog your memory, but...

DeFoor: Well, he took pretty much of a beating. He really did. He sure did.

Cummings: That's what I was going to ask. What kind of testing did the team give him?

DeFoor: Well, they just tried to...you know, they...I think they tried to hurt him, really. I don't think...didn't Leon come in later than he did?

Cummings: They were high school teammates, and they came up together.

DeFoor: Right there together. Well, see, Leon wasn't out on the field as much as he was, and anytime Abner walked out there, boy, they'd really work him over, you see, trying to hurt him and that kind of thing. They really did. But it finally wore off, you know. After the second week, it just...I think they hurt each other more than they did Abner (chuckle).

Marcello: In your opinion, did he prove that he could take a pretty good shot?

DeFoor: Your dern right. You bet he could. I think that's the reason they started respecting him, because they found out they couldn't hurt him.

Marcello: Did he give it back?

DeFoor: Oh, yes, sure, he did. You betcha. You betcha, he did. He sure did, He and Leon both. Sure, both of them did. They didn't pull any punches, I'll tell you that now. Neither one of them did. Nobody did. Because you didn't pull punches under Mr. Mitchell. You'd either play or get off the team.

Marcello: How much contact would you have had with that freshman team in terms of accompanying them on the road and so forth?

DeFoor: I didn't accompany them. See, one of my other boys would. See, they went through more experiences there than I did-- one of the equipment managers.

Cummings: During those first few weeks in fall workouts, did the team test Abner and Leon maybe a little tougher, a little harder, than they might have tested another incoming white freshman?

DeFoor: Oh, yes. Sure, they did. Sure, they did. The varsity did. The varsity did, but I don't know about the freshmen now because they worked out in different places, and I couldn't be there at all times. I know the varsity would really test them because they scrimmaged against the varsity, see. They'd run the other team's plays, you see.

Cummings: In your opinion, this was a conscious effort on the minds of the varsity players to do this?

DeFoor: Yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. But I can't say about the freshmen because they all came in together. I don't know about that. I can't say. I wasn't out there enough, I was around the varsity more than I was the freshmen, you see.

Cummings: Do you remember any locker room talk among the white players?

DeFoor: No, I sure don't because I wasn't in the position where I could hear any.

Cummings: Yes.

DeFoor: If there was any, I can't remember it, I just don't recall that. I sure don't.

Marcello: One of the names that keeps cropping up in our interviews with just about everybody we've talked to is Vernon Cole. What are your thoughts about Vernon Cole both on and off the field?

DeFoor: A very fine man. (Weeping) I'm sorry, I get emotional over Vernon. He was a fine athlete, and he was a gentleman. That's all I want to say, if that means anything. He was a fine athlete, and he was a true country gentleman.

Marcello: We understand that he had a lot to do with easing the transition for Abner. They became very good friends.

DeFoor: Oh, I don't know. I don't know. Well, yes, they were, yes. But that, I don't know, and I can't comment. He may have. He may have, but I don't know. That, I can't say. I really can't. Knowing Vernon, he probably did.

Marcello: We've heard in our interviews that a very close bond did develop between Vernon and Abner, and it was kind of interesting in that,

of course, here was a black man and Vernon Cole evidently was quite blonde.

DeFoor: Yes, he was. He really was.

Marcello: So there was quite a contrast in that sense. But the feeling we get, among other things, is that Abner and Leon are okay because Vernon says they're okay. If Vernon says they're okay, then they must be okay.

DeFoor: Well, see, that might have happened, and I wasn't aware of it. It could have happened. It sure could've. But I never did pick it up, you see, because I was in a different position than the coaches, you see. That might've happened. It sure may have.

Cummings: As an administrator with the program, did you ever evaluate or question or just think about the coaches' reaction to allowing blacks to come out for the program?

DeFoor: Black athletes? No, there wasn't anything...we'd already gotten into that, you see, so...when I was assistant athletic director, everything was accepted, you see. I had a different attitude.

Cummings: I mean, like, when you were...that first year when Abner and Leon came out and you were equipment manager.

Marcello: As time goes on--you know, they come in 1956--could you detect any changes taking place in either one of them--Abner or Leon?

DeFoor: Well, I don't know.

Marcello: In other words, could you perhaps see them gaining in confidence, being a little more sure of themselves...

DeFoor: I started to say that, yes. I started to mention that, but I wasn't sure. Yes, I did. I sure did. I saw a change in both of them because they were a little more outgoing as the time went along. They sure were. They were more outgoing as the time went along. They sure were, They were more outgoing. Just like in the beginning, we talked about how they would kind of stay back, and when they were asked to do something, they'd do it, and, then, of course, after awhile, well, they just mixed in with everybody. Abner would walk up and kid somebody, whereas before he wouldn't do it, you see. Maybe someone would kid him, and then he'd chime in where it turned out the other way, and Abner would come up and kid somebody, you see.

But I was surprised about Vernon Cole. I never realized it from that angle, but it may have been. I just never even thought about that.

Cummings: We've had several players say that.

DeFoor: Is that right? I never have thought about that.

Cummings: In one way or another, they've said the same thing.

DeFoor: Well, that's Vernon Cole. That's the reason I said Vernon Cole was a gentleman—a country gentleman. He was a fine man. He was a leader. He was educator, that's what Vernon Cole was.

Marcello: In fact, I think, during that freshman year, Vernon took Abner up to Pilot Point and so on and so forth.

DeFoor: Oh, I didn't know that. I didn't know that because I wasn't that close to them, you see. Now the coaches were more close to

them.

Cummings: What was your relationship with the players on the team-- white and Abner and Leon? What kind of a relationship did you have with them?

DeFoor: Well, I was pretty firm with all of them. In other words, I wouldn't jump on a black athlete more than I would a white athlete. I was real firm. I had to be. And I might have been too firm. I don't know.

Marcello: They all had to account for those shoe strings (chuckle).

DeFoor: That's right. But I have people coming back to me and telling me that they've used my methods and so forth. But I was firm. I was real firm, but I was fair with everybody.

Cummings: Were you ever a sounding board for any of the players?

DeFoor: No, I never was. No, I never was. I don't ever recall it. No, I sure don't.

Marcello: You mentioned that from time to time, when the team went on a road trip, Abner and Leon would encounter special problems.

DeFoor: Yes.

Marcello: Can you recall some specific instances where this took place, that is, in specific towns or against specific teams?

DeFoor: No, I can't say anything specific. I just mentioned that they had to eat separately from us if it was in a southern state or city. They had to eat separate from...but some of them would accept it. For example, about that time, I'd take my health workshop up to Camp Sweeney, and we'd stop in Gainesville; and the

blacks would eat lunch with us, but we had to make sure that they paid in a different area. You see, now that's the kind of thing that happened to Abner. I don't know where he would stay in a hotel. Sometimes we'd have to put him in a different hotel, you see, away from our regular players, and the coaches had to get him back up there. Some southern states, some hotels, would accept it that way, but he might have to eat in a different place. It seems like I remember something like that happening. I'm just trying to think of some specific thing.

It made it difficult for the coaches, you see, because they had to make special arrangements. I was trying to think...if they'd go to a theater, for example, I don't remember what happened in that case, you know--if they were in a southern city where the blacks weren't allowed to go into a theater. Most of the time they'd either give them money to go to the theater, or they'd take them to a theater to see a movie. I can't recall what happened there. I just can't. I'm sure that some states they might let it happen since they were a group, you see, or some city or some theater might let it happen, you see, but I don't recall things like that. But I know in some cases, they had to eat separately from the rest of the team as a whole.

Marcello: In general, what were Abner's and Leon's reactions to this kind of treatment?

DeFoor: Well, if there was any, I didn't detect it. I didn't detect it. I think they accepted it because they were used to that

kind of thing, anyway, you know, not being able to drink out of the same fountain and eat in the same place and go to the same theater and all that. I think they accepted it.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting point, and I'm not sure if we've ever asked this in any of these other interviews. How about the city of Denton? In other words, when Leon and Abner came here, could they eat in any restaurant they wanted to?

DeFoor: No, not in Denton.

Marcello: They could not?

DeFoor: Not in Denton, no, because, you see, they couldn't even live on the campus. They lived down...well, I think Mrs. Claude Miller made arrangements...I think Fred might have gone to her and asked her to make arrangements for Abner and Leon. However, Abner's father was a preacher, here, though...a minister, I mean. Now arrangements might have been made through that, but Mrs. Miller...I know Mrs. Miller, and I know Claude, also, Claude used to work for "Mama" Gross as a cook, you see, and I knew Claude real well. I went up and visited Claude here a couple of years ago, and I visited him this fall. The first time I visited them in their home, Mrs. Miller told me how she used to take care of...Fred would ask her to help Abner or even other black athletes that came in on with other teams, you see. Fred McCain would make the arrangements with her to find a place for them—a place to eat and all that. But some of the restaurants would accept the whole team, see. I don't know about Denton, but I know in some

cities they would do that.

Marcello: So Mr. and Mrs. Miller were...they were black?

DeFoor: Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Claude Miller. Yes, sir, they sure were.

Marcello: I'm sorry but...this may be interesting. What was their relationship between, let's say, the athletic department and the black community?

DeFoor: Well, Mrs. Miller...I think she worked for Perryman and Williams or somewhere down on Avenue A and Fry Street there, and Fred McCain belonged to this Talon fraternity, and she knew a lot of those fellows and...well, just like her boys, She calls them her boys, you know. Claude worked for "Mama" Gross at the Gross House, right where Joe's Cleaners is. Anyway, Claude worked for "Mama" Gross, and, of course, Claude knew all... "Mama" Gross used to serve the football team during training camp, and a lot of us lived with "Mama" Gross, and so Claude knows all the athletes. He knows a lot of athletes. So when it came up, I guess Fred knew her, and the way she explains it... Fred hasn't told me this, but she tells me that Fred contacted her to help the black athletes visiting in town, and I think they might have entertained them some--I don't know--you know, had them in their home and that sort of thing.

Marcello: That's an interesting slant that we haven't heard before.

DeFoor: Now I'll tell you what--she'd be a lady to interview, too. She's a very interesting lady. I'm assuming her health is good yet. It was last fall. Claude's health is not any good. In fact, I

promised him I'd take him out riding and that kind of thing. I haven't done it because...there's a man that all of us thought a lot of. He was just a father to us, you know--Claude was. We kidded him a lot, but we didn't see any difference in skin there, I'll tell you, with Claude (chuckle).

Marcello: So the Millers, then, were kind of the connection or the liaison, you might say, between the athletic department and the black community.

DeFoor: Well, I don't know about that. That I can't say. All I know is she helped place these athletes, you know, if they come in town and maybe entertain them. I don't know what they did, but I'm speaking from what she has told me. I haven't heard this from the coaches. In fact, that's the first time I knew about it, is when I talked to Mrs. Miller several years ago, you see. I didn't realize she was helping out like that. Fred McCain and she had some connections somehow when he was in school because she worked at this particular cafe...or it was a cafe, I think. I'm not sure.

Marcello: And what was the name of that cafe?

DeFoor: Well, I thought it was Perryman and Williams, but I may be mistaken about that. It might have been a restaurant right there in the corner--right there near it.

Cummings: Along the same idea, what was the community's reaction to the arrival of Abner and Leon to athletics...

DeFoor: I don't know, I don't know.

Cummings: As far as fans that came to the games...

DeFoor: Well, there wasn't anything..if there was any negative things in the stands, I didn't hear it or know about it. I didn't hear anything negative. I wasn't around where I could hear it, Randy, I wasn't around. I was up here in my little bailiwick, and that's it, you see. So I don't know, really.

Cummings: What about the campus reaction? You were among the faculty.

DeFoor: Well, there wasn't any reaction in the faculty because you had a lot of faculty members that had been associated with blacks, you see. There wasn't any reaction there, that I know of.

Marcello: How about the press reaction for publicity. Was there very much publicity that you recall when Abner and Leon came?

DeFoor: No.

Marcello: Obviously, there would have been after Abner had proven himself as a football star.

DeFoor: Yes, there wasn't a whole lot of publicity one way or the other, but, of course, when he started playing and proving himself, well, he got a lot of publicity. But I don't think there was anything as far as the press was concerned. If there was, I didn't detect it. Of course, here again, fellows, I didn't take a daily paper, and I wasn't around the press, so I don't know. It'd be unfair for me to mention anything about that, as far as the press is concerned, because I don't know how they reacted—I really don't because I wasn't around them.

I didn't take a daily paper at that time, either, you see.

Marcello: Do you recall the time when the house where Abner and Leon were living burned down?

DeFoor: No, I'm not aware of that story. I wasn't aware of that. Is that right?

Marcello: Evidently, there was a real outpouring from the people in the community in terms of re-outfitting them with clothing and all this sort of thing.

DeFoor: Well, now I didn't know about that.

Cummings: I think it was their freshmen year--the second part of their freshmen year.

DeFoor: Is that right? Well, I wasn't aware of that.

Marcello: In fact, according to Leon, they were better dressed after the fire than they were before (laughter).

DeFoor: Well, let me put it this way. If it happened, I've forgotten it now. I don't recall anything like that happening. I didn't know about it. Well, I'll be darn. That's a new one on me. Either I've forgotten it, or I didn't know about it. I don't ever recall anything like that happening. Gee, I'd like to talk to some of my checkroom men now (laughter). Some of those boys could kind of refresh my memory, you see. I didn't know about that. I'm going to ask Ken about that. I didn't know about that.

Cummings: You mentioned a little while ago Abner's talents on the football field. Describe Leon King as a football player. What kind

of talent did he have?

DeFoor: Average. Average talent. As I said awhile ago, he was more interested in his education than he was athletics, I think. He was an end, and I think he was an average player. I guess he lettered, I don't know. I'm assuming he lettered, but he didn't play a lot of ball. He sat on the bench a lot. He really did.

Cummings: When you say average, you mean too slow, couldn't catch the ball, poor hands...

DeFoor: In his ability. He was slow. He could catch the ball, but he was slow, the way I saw it. He just wasn't that fast, you see. I don't think he was as quick as some of our athletes were. He could catch the ball, yes, but he wasn't that quick. That's the way I saw it.

Cummings: How about as a kicker. I believe he also did some kicking for a little while.

DeFoor: Oh, I don't remember about that, Randy. I've forgotten that, I'll tell you. Do you mean punting?

Cummings: I think place kicking.

DeFoor: Oh, well, kind of vaguely I remember it, but I'm not sure of that. I wouldn't want to commit myself on that because I can't recall a lot of that. I don't think he did that much, did he? I don't believe he did.

Cummings: I don't think so,

DeFoor: I'm trying to think who the place kicker was. I don't know.

Marcello: Do you recall Abner and Leon entertaining on road trips?

I understand that on some of the road trips where air travel would be involved, they from time to time would grab the P. A. system and entertain in terms of singing.

DeFoor: Is that right? They may have. I tell you what. After a point there, I didn't travel with the team. Dr. Cambron asked me to send some of my other managers. I had a number one boy, and I'd start sending him with them. That, I don't know about. Gee, I don't think it was never mentioned to me about it. I didn't know that.

Cummings: When Abner and Leon became sophomores and a couple of more new black players came in, was the entire situation in the program a little more calm as far as their arrival?

DeFoor: Yes. Oh, yes. I think it was. I think it was.

Cummings: So Abner and Leon really laid a pretty smooth groundwork for blacks entering the program.

DeFoor: Yes, they sure did. And it was under very trying conditions for them, too, you see. But they accepted it, and I admire them for it, you know, because they did come under very trying conditions.

Marcello: I think, as we look back on it, however, the whole process here at North Texas, that is, the whole process of integration, went pretty smoothly in comparison or in contrast to what happened at other southern institutions.

DeFoor: Oh, yes, it did. Oh, yes, it sure did, yes. There wasn't any

problems here.

Marcello: Again, I'll give you a chance to be retrospective here. How do you explain this? In your opinion--now this is strictly an opinion--why do you think that it did go so smoothly here at North Texas?

DeFoor: I think because of Dr. Matthews and the staff, you know, the faculty, because a lot of your faculty were from northern states. I think Dr. Matthews was part of that, and his administrators and everything, and his administrative staff. I think they're the ones that made it work so smoothly.

Marcello: What did they do specifically to make it run so smoothly?

DeFoor: Oh, I don't know, I can't recall that. I don't think there was anything said in a faculty meeting about it or anything like that. I don't recall it. It's just the way that Dr. Matthews handled things, you see. I can't remember anything specific because I wasn't in the administrative level at that time. I was equipment manager, and that was it, you see, and I taught two or three classes, so I just don't recall. Now he may have talked to the athletic director, which was Dr. Cambron I believe, at the time. Dr. Cambron might have laid out some policies toward the coaching staff and all of that, but I don't ever recall anybody saying anything to me. In fact, I know there wasn't anything said to me. I know there wasn't anything said at the faculty meeting because I've been to every faculty meeting since I've been at North Texas. I haven't missed one yet.

Cummings: Perfect attendance, huh?

Marcello: Is it safe to say, and, again, we're being speculative here, that if Dr. Matthews said, "Okay, coaches, this is the way it's gonna be."

DeFoor: That's the way it would be, yes sir. Yes, sir, that's right. That's exactly the way it would be. That's right. Dr. Matthews... when he hired Dr. Cearley when Dr. Cearley was ready to leave the office, he handed him an NCAA rule book. He says, "I want you to know that before you get back. We follow the NCAA rules." As long as Dr. Cearley and I were there at an administrative level, we followed the NCAA rules. There wasn't anything done... because Dr. Matthews would not allow it. That was a good way to get fired--not to follow the NCAA rules. And I'm sure he was that same way with Dr. Cambron. You didn't violate any NCAA rules at that time. I don't know if there's any being violated now. I'm not saying that. I hope you don't think that I'm saying there are some. I don't know. But, I'll guarantee you, North Texas didn't violate any of them.

Cummings: When you look back, there's a very unique mixture of personalities-- that of Abner's and Leon's, that of Coach Mitchell, that of Dr. Matthews.

DeFoor: Yes,

Cummings: And all those personalities blended just right to make the whole process smooth.

DeFoor: They sure did. Well, Dr. Matthews was an educator. You want to

look at that point. He was an educator, and I'm sure he was open-minded and that kind of thing. I imagine he saw the writing on the wall, so he felt like he...but I don't imagine he was prejudiced like a lot of people were because he'd been through... I forget where he got his Ph.D., but I'm sure he was with blacks up in those areas. So I'm sure he...I just feel like he laid the groundwork. I really believe that Dr. Matthews laid the groundwork for it to work smoothly. That's the way I feel about it. And his administrators...I don't remember now whether we had a dean of the college and whether he was there or not, but I'm sure that with your graduate dean and all that, he laid the groundwork for it. I think the administration is what made it go like it did, and for everybody to accept it. There wasn't any big issues about it or anything. There wasn't any big issues about it, that I recall. They came out for the team, and that was it. There was some question marks, you know, in the minds of everybody, but it worked out smoothly. Do you see what I'm saying? There wasn't any big issues made of it.

Cummings: In hindsight, do you find that somewhat amazing or surprising that it did go so smoothly?

DeFoor: Yes. Well, seeing some of the things that's happening nowadays, I sure do. Yes, it worked very smoothly, yes, sir. I think it's wonderful, the way it worked,

Marcello: What sort of a relationship, if any, do you have with Abner today?

DeFoor: Oh, we're real good friends. I remember I was sitting in the office one day (chuckle), and that guy walked in, and he had this long hair and beard. I looked at that guy and stood there, and he just let me sweat it out, you know. He wanted to see if I'd recognize him. He'd gained some weight, see. Finally, he said, "You don't recognize me, do you?" He says, "I'm Abner." It surprised me. I just didn't recognize him. He kind of stuck his head around the door, and I didn't recognize him. He'd gained some weight and everything. We're real good friends. Or I consider him a friend. Now I don't know how he feels about me (laughter). Abner's a real fine friend. And I feel the same way about Leon King.

Cummings: How do you look back on this whole incident historically speaking? Is it that big of a deal to you that you were there and that you were in this integration of athletics?

DeFoor: No, it's not that big of a deal, no. I have no feelings along that line at all. Honestly, I don't. It's just something that happened, and it happened. I don't let things like that bother me. You know, if it's an issue...it was an issue with me just like when I saw the first black person in my class. I was afraid to touch him or something like that, and now, you know, I look back...well, heck, it worked out smoothly, you know.

Cummings: Do you think Abner and Leon deserve or should be tagged as pioneers or leaders?

DeFoor: I think it'd be nice, sure, I think they deserve it. I sure

do. I think they deserve what you are doing for them. I really do. You can't do enough for them because they went through pretty trying times. I don't know how much stress it was on them. I have no idea.

Marcello: It took a lot of courage, did it not?

DeFoor: You're dern right, I don't know how much stress inwardly they had. I have no idea. But I think Mr. Mitchell and Fred McCain and Herb Ferrill and Ken Bahnsen all helped them to keep that stress down because they knew they were good athletes, and they were looking for good athletes. But they might have had a heck of a lot of stress, and if they had they deserve this. In other words, you can't do enough for them if they had a lot of stress on them. But I don't think it's showing anything now, though. They're real fine citizens in their community.

Cummings: This is kind of backtracking, but kind of continue your professional career from the point that we've been talking about Abner's career at North Texas. You say you were teaching three courses and were the head equipment manager. Follow your career from there on to the present.

DeFoor: Well, our activity program wasn't in too good of shape, and Dr. Cambron walks up to me one day and says, "Dr. Matthews is gonna dishand our activity program if we don't straighten it out." So, anyway, he says, "I'm gonna put you in charge of it." And so I had the men's activity program for a number of years.

Cummings: Is that similar to the intramural-type program?

DeFoor: No, that's different. It's activity classes--what we call one-hour P.E. classes. It's an activity. Men and women were separated then. You didn't have integrated classes then. Well, we did in dance classes but nothing else. Volleyball was... they had their classes and we had ours.

But, anyway, I was the director of the men's activity program, and then finally I had to take charge of all of our registration for HPER--Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. And then Dr. Matthews called me in one day when he hired Dr. Cearley, and he says, "We're going to make you assistant athletic director," and I like to fell out of the chair because I wasn't looking for anything like that.

Cummings: What year was that?

DeFoor: From 1961 until 1969, I was assistant athletic director. In fact, I'm the first assistant athletic director North Texas ever had, and I'm also the first assistant director of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. See, we were Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, and Athletics. In 1969, athletics split away from HPER--Health, Physical Education, and Recreation--and so I went to HPER, and I was assistant director there for a number of years. Also, I had the University Interscholastic League. We had three regions. I had that for five years, you know, plus the stadium and...I had all the stadium, you see, and I had all the gymnasiums. See, I had to take care of all playoff games. When I became assistant director, I had to take

care of all the playoffs--the high school playoff games--both basketball and football. For any track meets, I had to make sure we were prepared for that. I had about five jobs at one time. There's five people taking my position now, but we were a smaller school then, you see,

Cummings: Currently, what are your responsibilities?

DeFoor: I'm an assistant professor in health education.

Cummings: Before we end, I'd like to just throw out some names of players that we've picked up through these various interviews and just kind of get your quick evaluations, opinions, and impressions of these kids as you remember them both as athletes and as just persons. We've already touched on Vernon Cole. How about Garland Warren?

DeFoor: Garland Warren. He was a center. He was a fellow that worked very hard in athletics. I think Garland had jobs on the side in the summer--contracting work, you know. He contracted... in fact, he built a lot of these houses right down beyond us here, but that's after he had gotten out of school. But Garland was a very enthusiastic person. He worked hard, and everybody liked Garland. Everybody like him. He was well-liked. I don't know what else to say. Anything he did, he worked at it hard. That's the thing I'd say about him. And he was a good athlete. He worked hard out there on the field. Anytime he did any skill, he went all the way. He didn't go halfway. He went all the way and tried to perform to the best of his ability.

I can say that about him.

Cummings: Okay, Joe Pryor.

DeFoor: Joe was a tackle. Joe was very quiet. He didn't have a lot to say, but he was a strong person. If you kid Joe, he'll kid you back, but that's about it. He was very quiet, if I remember right about him. Is that what you get about him or not?

Cummings: Well, some of these we don't really know very much about their personalities. They've just been mentioned as players that they recall helping them or loaning them money or whatever.

DeFoor: Well, I didn't know about that, but he was a very quiet person and didn't have a lot to say. He was a good athlete.

Cummings: Mac Reynolds.

DeFoor: Mac Reynolds was an end. He was very outgoing. He was just like Joe. He worked hard at anything he did. He went all the way for it. He was a good end. I think he made All-Conference, didn't he? I think he did. I think he made All-Conference. I just remember Mac as a hard-working athlete out there and a very friendly person. Everybody liked him. All those athletes were pretty closely knit, I think. They were all closely knit.

Cummings: How about James Bowdree?

DeFoor: James Bowdree? I don't know him.

Marcello: That's the reaction we get from most people.

Cummings: In our research, I've gone back to the old Yucca yearbooks, and on Abner's and Leon's sophomore team picture, there is a third

black player. They're listed by last name only...Bowdree... and we finally found out that his first name was James, but nobody can seem to recall him.

DeFoor: Well, I'm sure I served him, but he must not have been out there long, do you suppose? He probably wasn't out very long, do you suppose?

Cummings: That's the only thing I can think of, is they might have taken the team picture real early, and he got a uniform, and then...

DeFoor: That's probably what it was. I don't recall that person. No, I sure don't.

Cummings: How about George Herring?

DeFoor: George, he was real congenial-type person, friendly, a hard-working person, and very studious. He wanted to get an education. Now he's the person that wrote Mr. Mitchell a letter. Were you aware of this?

Cummings: No.

DeFoor: He wrote Mr. Mitchell a letter, and his friends sent it home, and it had blood on it. He got killed. Was it the Korean War? George Herring? Am I getting the right person?

Cummings: I'm not sure.

DeFoor: Mr. Mitchell might not have mentioned that, but he got a letter that George had written him, and apparently George was carrying that letter when he got killed, and his friends sent it home to Mr. Mitchell. You might ask Fred about that. I may have that wrong. I'm sure...yes, George is dead. He was killed

over there in the Korean War. I believe I've got that right. I hope I'm not mistaken there. You better check that one out. Make sure...check...ask Fred McCain about it. But that's quite a story right there--about that letter.

Cummings: Okay. What about Jerry Russell?

DeFoor: Jerry Russell? Was he an end? Jerry Russell?

Cummings: I can't remember exactly. I want to say he was either an end or a halfback.

DeFoor: Jerry Russell. Well, I'm sure I...

Cummings: You probably gave him some shoelaces somewhere down the line.

DeFoor: (Chuckle) I'm sure, but I just can't recall about Jerry.

Cummings: What about Jerrell Shaw?

DeFoor: Jerrell Shaw, yes. I think you're getting in an area where I wasn't around the stadium too much, I believe. I remember Jerrell, but I can't remember a lot about Jerrell. I know who you're talking about. He was a nice fellow and all that, but I just can't remember a lot about his ability or anything like that.

Cummings: How about Ray Toole?

DeFoor: Ray Toole was a quarterback, and he was a good athlete, and he could run the team well. I think the fellows respected him about like...maybe not as much as they did Vernon Cole, but they respected Ray, they really did. Ray was a very intelligent person, too--very intelligent.

Cummings: That's about all I have to ask. Is there anything about this

whole time in history here at North Texas that you just would like to comment on? Something maybe we haven't touched on?

DeFoor: Well, I rambled around, and I'm sure that I didn't...I might be mistaken about some of this material. I hope I'm not. I've tried to be as honest as I can about it.

Cummings: You gave us plenty of good material. We appreciate it.

DeFoor: Well, thank you,