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Interview with
DUB BROWN
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Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello
~~Randy Cummings~~
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Oral History Collection

Dub Brown

Interviewers: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello Date of Interview: June 6, 1984
Mr. Randy Cummings

Place of Interview: Waco, Texas

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello and Randy Cummings interviewing Dub Brown for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on June 6, 1984, in Waco, Texas. We are interviewing Mr. Brown in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was the sports editor of the Denton Record-Chronicle during the integration of athletics at North Texas State University.

Mr. Brown, 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.

Mr. Brown: I was born in 1935 in Huntsville, Texas, Walker County. My parents were both schoolteachers. My dad taught thirty-five years; my mother taught seventeen years. My dad was sort of an itinerant superintendant and principal who didn't get along with school boards, so we moved a great deal until 1948, when we moved to Tyler. I went on through high school

in Tyler and graduated from there in 1952.

I visited several campuses of state universities, and I just somehow or other chose North Texas. I had some delusions about playing football up there. I went up there, and they had a guy named Larry Strickland, a center who later played for the Bears, and several others of that ilk, and I decided there really wasn't any room for me in football. But either way, I started in 1952. I was barely seventeen at the time. I managed to pack in considerable partying, so I dropped out the spring semester, stayed out eighteen months, came on back in, and graduated in 1957 with a B.A. in journalism.

Marcello: At the time you entered North Texas State, were you interested in journalism at that point, or did that come later?

Brown: It came later. I can't tell you exactly how I got into this crazy business. I went in as a pre-law major. My grades were adequate--no problems--but I just didn't like the idea of sitting and pouring through dusty, dry law books for the rest of my life. I had worked on a part-time basis for the newspaper there in Tyler just as an ad proof boy, but it at least gave me a little journalism background, so I ultimately wound up as one of "Pappy" Shuford's people.

Marcello: Incidentally, "Dub," I assume, is a nickname.

Brown: That's correct. My full name is William Albert. I was named for my grandfathers. However, I had an uncle who

was Bill and another uncle who was Albert, so there was no room for using those names, so I generally went by my initials, W.A. There are a lot of us "Dubs" around because people who go with the initials with the first one "Dub"-- "W" and "Dub"--and that's how that came about. If you've got a last name like Brown, you need something a little different for a first name.

Cummings: Tell us a little bit more about how you floated into sports writing and sports journalism.

Brown: Pure happenstance and pure accident. I had illusions and delusions about being a great political writer. As I said, I dropped out of school for eighteen months, so I elected to go one summer to sort of get back on track where I would graduate in the spring.

During that summer I had a guy in some of my classes named Tom Eastland, who at that time was the sports editor of the Record-Chronicle. He said, "Hey, I'm graduating in August. Would you like to have my job?" I said, "Well, yes, I guess so." I really had it set up where my senior year was going to be my party year, but I thought, "Well, why not. Let's give it a whirl." The managing editor at that time was a guy named Allen Bogan. So I went down to the Record-Chronicle and interviewed with Allen and was hired. I went to work that summer. That would have been, I guess, probably about August when Tom left, graduated. He went on to Lubbock to work for the Avalanche-Journal.

As I said, I stayed in sports. I wound up in sports there and worked for the Record-Chronicle for eighteen months and then went to San Angelo. I was sports editor out there. I worked out there four years. Then I went to the Star-Telegram for a couple of years--still in sports. Then I was sports information director at the University of Texas at Arlington for six years, and I just got tired of crawling on and off buses and planes, and I had some kids by then. I went into the news and information office for a couple of years there. Then I went back to my hometown of Tyler, and I was managing editor there for five years. I came to Waco in 1977 as city editor over here, and I have been managing editor for about four years. As I said, I stumbled into sports, and it took me about fifteen years to stumble out.

Cummings: You said that was the fall of 1956?

Brown: Well, it was actually the summer of 1956 when I went in. I don't remember when graduation or summer school ended, but when Tom left, why, I went in. So it was actually before the season started and everything. It would have been about late July or early August of 1956. I was still a senior. During my senior year--the way my schedule was set up--I was the sports staff. I would go to work at six o'clock and work until about ten. I'd lay out the pages, write everything--do everything. I even took pictures.

I would go to class from about ten until two o'clock and then back in to work and work even late afternoons or nights covering things. Then I worked a split shift on Saturday from about eight until twelve o'clock. Then I had a break in the afternoon, and I'd come back in about six o'clock that night and work until about midnight or whenever the press started. That was my weekly schedule.

Marcello: While you were at North Texas, did you work for the Campus Chat, also?

Brown: I was sports editor that summer before I joined the Record-Chronicle, and I worked as a reporter for them in their lab courses and everything. I had been the sports editor that summer on the summer Chat, and then...as a matter of fact, my wife is a North Texas graduate, and she was editor of the Chat a couple of years later.

Marcello: What kind of control or influence did the administration at North Texas exert over the Chat during that period when you were working for it?

Brown: I don't think there was really that much direct influence. Now there was an immense influence from Cecil Shuford--no question about that. Cecil Shuford, Delbert McGuire, Jim Rogers, and Dude McCloud were primarily the faculty at that time. "Pappy" ran a tight ship. I mean, he ran a tough ship, and everything went through him. But by the same token, I don't think that he was tremendously reluctant to

get into a rhubarb. I am sure that he probably at times was subjected to some pressure from the administration, but I don't recall any specific instances of the administration coming directly to, say, the student editor or that type of a thing.

Generally, the format at that time was that the editor, shortly after he or she had been elected, would go in and meet with J.C. Matthews, the president. They would have sort of a little sit-down and kind of go over the ground rules and everything. You've got to remember that all this was before Vietnam and before the college journalists were quite as fiesty as they are these days. We were a product of the 1950's, and so I don't think we had any...I think all of us were crusaders, but, my God, every college journalism student that I've ever seen rides a white horse and carries a lance.

Marcello: What were some of the ground rules that J.C. perhaps might have laid down?

Brown: I wish I had my wife here because she could tell you more. She sat in on those sessions. In general I think that he just...the impression I got...I was never directly involved in these meetings, so anything I say is hearsay; but the impression I got was that he just sort of said, "I want you to be accurate, and I want you to be fair." That basically was it.

I know that we got into some rhubarbs. I can remember, myself, that Dean Bentley was a power on the campus at that time--Imogene Bentley. I can remember that I was a member of the Student Senate and a friend of mine was the editor of the Chat, and he talked myself and a guy named Joe Don Baker, who is the actor now...we were both in the Student Senate, but we resigned because in all honesty we didn't have the time. But we sort of gave Bill Sloan carte blanche to quote us in any way he liked or whatever, so Sloan wrote a hell of a story. He came up with some great quotes, so the Student Senate, as always, was at odds with the Chat. So the Senate came back in their own publication, and in all honestly they libeled us. They libeled me per se, so I carried it to Bentley and said, "I'm going to get a retraction, or I'm going to sue their ass!" And I got my retraction (chuckle).

Cummings: What kind of working relationship did you people on the campus paper have with the Athletic Department and the coaches and so forth?

Brown: No question about it, in comparison to today's scene, we were probably very much in bed with them. It was a very close relationship, and basically we were probably guilty. I went through some of these clips that I'll leave with you and everything, and a lot of it in today's environment amounts to flagrant boosterism--that type of thing. It

certainly doesn't match the standards that we have today in the newspaper business or certainly the standards that I would expect of my sports staff. I think I was probably just as guilty as anybody else, and I think that most people were at that time. This was not a new development in sports. Babe Ruth was a drunk and a lot of other things, but you never read that in the daily paper in those days. I think maybe we weren't quite that bad, but we were guilty of some boosterism. No question about it.

Cummings: Since we're on the subject, do you recall right offhand any incidences within the Athletic Department that you probably let ride by without putting in the paper during your period on the Campus Chat?

Brown: No, I don't recall that now. As far as I know, I reported any problems that arose. My tone may have been softened a bit or perhaps even unconsciously slanted toward the Athletic Department's side. I went through these clips again, and, for example, when we went to San Jose State to play, we had a hell of a fight out there--a gang fight at the end of the ballgame. I dutifully reported it, and I think in one of my columns, I said, "I think Jim Braymer of North Texas started it because he threw an elbow on the last play of the ballgame." And there were some rubarbs with Trinity involving some officiating and things like that, and, again, most of the stuff...I think I didn't do

what I should have done. I didn't necessarily give San Jose's side that much. In other words, I gave their stuff, but most of it was picked up off of the wire service, and then I would go directly to the North Texas State coaches and get their side of it. Probably I should have just sat down and in a long distance telephone call and talk to the San Jose coach and said, "Okay, they're saying this, and you're saying that. What are you saying now?" I should have done that type of a thing. I just didn't follow through on it to that extent. But I don't recall hushing up anything about a player or a coach or anything like that-- putting a lid on anything.

Cummings: We probably need to touch on this before we get too far into the Abner Haynes thing. Just kind of capsulize your upbringing as far as your racial attitudes you picked up from your parents, your friends, and what your attitudes were by the time that you were at North Texas State.

Brown: Well, I think I'm a product of East Texas, and when I say East Texas, I mean that area there. If I had to define... and this is something I've discussed and given a lot of thought to, and it goes back to sort of the old cotton aristocracy-type days. You've got a fine old family...in Tyler, for instance. There's a lot of money in Tyler. We didn't have any of it, but there is a lot there. A lot of it came in in the oil in the 1930's, but there were certain

segments who looked down on these people. They had money coming out of their ears, but they were the new rich. This would be the attitude of the fine, old family that doesn't have anything, but they've been here "forevuh" and that type of thing.

Of course, about this time the Little Rock decision came down. Up until that point, I think I had probably always equated prejudice with lack of education for lack of a better term. My father had a master's degree from Texas A&M University. I totally supported the Little Rock decision. I thought it was a terrific decision. I still think so. Maybe I was rebelling against my parents or whatever, but it got to the point that in our house we just had to drop it. We couldn't even discuss it because my father...well, I dislike the phrase, and I don't allow my sons to use it, but my dad's approach was, "There are good niggers, and there are bad niggers, but they're all niggers." We had bitter, adamant arguments over this. It finally just got to the point that I didn't think he was going to change me and I wasn't going to change him, so it was just a subject we did not discuss. I think that pretty well sums up how I felt. I totally supported the Little Rock decision. I was totally in favor of integration. Yet I have no doubt in my own mind, then and now, that I probably was and am to a certain extent a racist. But I'm

not a conscious one. Let me put it that way. It's something I've worked on, and I've been very conscious of it through the years.

Marcello: Let me just clarify something. You're talking about the Little Rock decision. Are you referring to the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954?

Brown: Right. That was sort of a crux there, and, again, I was seventeen at the time and certainly not politically conscious or anything like that, but by the same token everybody was affected and impacted with it. As I said, it got to be a bitter argument around our house.

Marcello: As a youngster did you ever play with black kids?

Brown: Oh, yes. We lived down in the country oftentimes. A lot of these schools that my dad taught at were just little bitty boondocks schools. I'd be on a bus route or something like that, and my only footmates on occasions were blacks. I'd go over to the kid's home, or they'd come to my home, or we'd go fishing or swimming together--things like that. They may live a mile from me, but that was my closest neighbor in that age group or anything like that. The closest white kids might have been five miles from there. I was taught to ride and rope...we had an old man that worked for us, and I called him Uncle Wash--George Washington Rose--and he was a fine old man. He taught me how to ride and rope, and he was associated with our family until he died.

Cummings: By the time you got to North Texas, do you think that your attitude toward blacks was that of the majority of your college peers, or was it kind of mixed?

Brown: I'd say it was kind of mixed. I certainly know there were rednecks around, and there still are, as far as that's concerned. I would probably say I was in the minority, but I think it was a significant minority. If I had to take a percentage figure--it's purely a guess--I'd say it was probably about a 40-60 basis. I was probably in that 40 percent who supported integration and that sort of a thing. Maybe it was 30-70. I don't know.

Cummings: I don't know if you recall, but in the winter of 1955 or spring of 1955, there was a court case which in effect forced North Texas to open its doors to undergraduate blacks. Do you recall anything about that case as far as the impact it made on you as a North Texas student?

Marcello: This would have been the Joe Adkins case.

Brown: I'm trying to recall. Okay, I went in in the fall of 1952, so I was there in 1952 and part of the spring of 1953. See, I was out of school in 1954 and all of 1955, so that occurred in that period when I dropped out. I really can't answer that question. I just wasn't on the scene at that time.

Marcello: I'm assuming, then, that the fact that North Texas State was taking blacks in no way bothered you in terms of returning there.

Brown: No. No, it really didn't. I just had some growing up to do, and I went out and worked awfully hard in a variety of menial jobs for about eighteen months. I wasn't real smart, but I was smart enough to realize that I didn't want to do that the rest of my life, so I decided I'd go back to college. But integration was never even a factor. I just liked the campus. I went up there...unlike other kids, there weren't very many kids from Tyler there, so I didn't follow anybody, or I didn't know anyone there. I just made the decision on my own. I visited East Texas State, and I visited Stephen F. Austin, and I visited the University of Texas, and something clicked when I went to Denton.

Marcello: I guess North Texas State was kind of isolated at that time, was it not, in that there were obviously no interstate highways connecting it with Dallas and Fort Worth and so on?

Brown: Well, you had the "infamous" Saginaw, which was a bar and beer joint that was a hangout. I think we went in on a regular basis to either Fort Worth or Dallas for our parties ...Lake Dallas and the whole thing like that. You really weren't...it probably would have taken you maybe thirty minutes more than it does now. I don't know...matching traffic it would probably be thirty minutes less (chuckle). It balanced out.

Cummings: When you returned back to school during that summer of 1956,

were you aware that the school was going to start allowing black undergraduate students to enroll?

Brown: I don't recall even being conscious of it. I really don't. I possibly could have been, but we're playing that memory game of twenty-eight years. But I do not recall even being conscious of it either way or even knowing, and I don't think it would have been a consideration either way, as far as I'm concerned.

Cummings: During that summer of 1956, that's when you were on the Campus Chat staff. Is that correct?

Brown: Yes, Yes, that would be right--the summer of 1956. Actually, I went back in the fall of 1955--when I returned to school.

Cummings: It was during that period that Abner and his brother approached the coaches and asked to walk on to the program. Do you recall by the grapevine or through the grapevine hearing about that--the fact that they had come up there and had talked to them?

Brown: No, I didn't know that they had come up. Now I knew about it before they ever began fall practice--that a couple of blacks were going to come.

Cummings: How did that come about? How did you hear about that?

Brown: Through the coaching staff. I don't recall specifically whether it was one individual member, or I might have even heard it from Jim Rodgers, who at that time was the director of News and Information. They had no sports information

director as such, so he functioned in both areas. I did know. I was aware before they actually issued uniforms and began football practice. There is a story in that clipbook there that they would be there from Dallas Lincoln. Abner Haynes and Leon King, two All-State players from Dallas Lincoln would be among the freshman team members.

Marcello: What were your feelings or attitudes when you heard this news?

Brown: I really didn't care either way. As I recall, I went out to their initial practice, and I talked with several of the players. I think everybody's attitude was, "Well, let's just see whether they can play football or not." That was really the attitude that was sort of out there. They obviously were in a very high visibility situation where, if they were good, they were going to get more recognition than somebody else of comparable ability, and where, if they were bad, they were going to get more recognition in a negative sense than somebody of comparable ability. Both of them were excellent athletes, and, as far as I know, I remember that was sort of being the reaction among the players: "If they can play, that's fine. If they can't play, well, then that's another story." Again, I'm playing twenty-eight years, and I really don't remember, but I don't think there was any...I don't recall any sense of hostility or animosity or anything like that at all.

I am sure--unquestionably in my mind--there probably were some racial remarks muttered or whispered. I recall it going exceptionally smooth.

Marcello: What seemed to be the initial reaction of the coaches, that is, before these blacks ever stepped on the field and were able to show what they could do athletically?

Brown: Oh, I'm really not sure that I can assess that. I think Mitchell's reaction was pretty much the same as mine: "Legally we've got no choice but to do this. Primarily, can they play football? Let's give them a shot and see." I think that almost from the first day of practice they were running with the first team. Again, in connection with this, this was kind of a new area for all of us because this was the first freshman team that had been formed. Before that freshman had always been eligible for the varsity, but this was in connection with going into the Missouri Valley Conference. We really had a bunch of firsts all tied in together there. Nobody was quite sure how the freshman team was going to work in connection with...and also not being able to use freshmen on the varsity, too. There were some questions on that. I'm not trying to gild any lilies in any sense, but I really recall nothing but just going very smoothly all they way down the line. I think Abner and Leon were very popular personally. They were just nice guys. I think they were...with their teammates

and all that.

Marcello: Set the scene for us. Describe that first practice in as much detail as you can remember.

Brown: Well, it would have been held on a practice field--the area that would be almost due south of the men's gym there on the campus at that time. That was the practice field. The players, as I remember...and I think I'm correct. It seems to me like the freshmen may have reported early. Again, I won't be certain of that. If not, then I know they were divided in two groups. You had your freshmen in one group and your varsity in another group.

There were always a bunch of football nuts--hangers-on or anything. Anytime you go to a practice at any college or university, there will always be a bunch of your hard core fans around--maybe five, fifteen, or twenty. I think there were probably more that day. We had run, as I recall, in the Record-Chronicle a story that they were getting ready to open fall practice and that they would have two black members. I used the term--and I noticed this from going through my clips--I used the term "Negro" virtually all the way through. If Abner Haynes scored a touchdown, it was, "Abner Haynes, a Negro halfback from North Texas," which I find offensive right now. But I did it. I think there were probably more people than were usually there. It seems to me like--I'm just going to guess--there might

have been a crowd of about forty or fifty people. There was certainly no mass but just hangers-on, perhaps townspeople. I think a lot of them were just hard core football fans, but I have no doubt that there were probably some curiosity seekers who just came out to see the two blacks there.

Marcello: In the story that has been given to us from several sources, most of the players were already there when Abner and Leon reported. They had come up from the black section of town by taxicab, got out of the taxicab, and then approached the players. Do you recall this?

Brown: I don't know. I can't confirm it. I certainly can't refute it, but I can't confirm it. I just don't remember.

Cummings: You mentioned a moment ago that you learned--a few days or a few weeks before the actual beginning of the workouts that these two blacks were going to show up. You also mentioned that you probably heard it from Dr. Rogers since he was information director at that time.

Brown: Possibly Rogers or one of the coaches.

Cummings: Do you recall what his attitude was? I assume that this might reflect the administration's attitudes and anticipations of what was going to happen. Were they a little on the leery side, or were they just trying to prepare everybody involved with what could happen?

Brown: If I had to describe it, I would say it was just sort of

matter-of-fact. I don't recall them being apprehensive or anticipating any problems. They very well may have, but I just don't recall getting that impression, though. It was just sort of a matter-of-fact statement: "We are going to have two black kids on our freshman football team this fall." That was the approach. I'm not prepared to nail it down specifically to Rogers. Again, I'm playing that memory game. I suspect what happened was that he either went to Rogers or one of the coaches and just got an advanced roster--these are the kids and the number of lettermen that will be coming back and the number of particularly the newcomers, who are your hot shot freshmen--that sort of a thing. It would mention your freshmen that were coming in. I suspect that's how it emerged, but I really don't remember.

Cummings: From the other interviews we've done, we get the impression that this is the way they sought to treat this whole transitional period, was very matter-of-factly, very...not exploit it certainly but not try to hide it, either. Let it happen as it happens. Is that the attitude at that time?

Brown: I think that it probably was. I know, for example, that there was a story that I moved to the Associated Press about two blacks joining North Texas practice--the first black athletes in history there. I don't remember anything special on it. I think it was kind of just a matter-of-fact

basis, and I think Abner and Leon were accepted probably from day one in this sense: "Hey, it's more important how you perform than what you are. If you can play football, then that's fine; if you can't play football, then leave." I'm talking about in terms of the team--the attitude of the team. I think personally, if you have talked to some of their fellow team members on their freshman team, both of them were very popular. They were very well-liked and immensely respected by the other kids because they were good athletes--both of them were.

Marcello: We were talking about the administrative attitudes awhile ago. What sort of a person was J.C. Matthews, the president of the school at that time?

Brown: I met Matthews on perhaps one or two occasions. I had no extensive personal exposure to him. The attitude that we sort of got around campus was that he was quiet, soft-spoken, reticent, a little withdrawn or distant. You'd see him on campus or that type of thing, and he was not "Mr. Personality." He was not your outgoing, exuberant type. As I mentioned before we began this conversation, his nickname on the campus, or at least one that I heard, was "The Turtle" because he sort of had hunched shoulders on his neck, and he looked like a turtle pulling his head into his shell. He was always well dressed--very somber-type dress generally--a dark three-piece suit and that type of a thing.

Marcello: Was there any question about who ran the school?

Brown: None whatsoever. Well, there might have been. The question was whether Matthews or Dean Imogene Bentley ran it (chuckle). One of those two ran it. There was never any question about that.

Cummings: I assume that you, being with the Denton newspaper, spent a lot more time out there with the team at the workouts and so forth than any of the Dallas-Fort Worth media.

Brown: Yes, I think so. I probably did. I traveled some with the varsity in 1956, and then I traveled some in 1957. Well, in 1957, I guess, I can recall going to El Paso with the team on the team plane and then flying to San Jose, California, with the team on the team plane. I didn't make all of the trips, but I did make some of the trips with the team. These guys were my contemporaries. Remember, at this time I was either a senior in college or just out of college myself, so I probably related to them a whole lot better than I did the coaching staff.

Marcello: What kind of importance did the Dallas-Fort Worth NEWS media seem to be giving to this event? In other words, was there very much coverage on their part at these practices or relative to this whole process of integrating athletics?

Brown: I don't recall. I recall it seems like they may have come up either the first day of practice or very early in practice and duly reported it, but I do not recall any big spreads in

the Dallas and Forth Worth papers. But I do seem to recall that. I don't remember them at all...they ran stories about the freshman games, but I'm not really sure that Rogers didn't call them into the paper. I'm not sure that they even staffed them. I would think that under normal circumstances they probably didn't.

Cummings: Can you give us a reason why the Dallas-Fort Worth media did not jump on this happening a little more?

Brown: No, I can't. I don't recall. At that time I didn't know any of the sports editors over there. I knew some of the writers on the News and Times-Herald and the Star-Telegram, but I didn't know any of the people that actually were in any of the decision-making process. I just knew the staff writers. I really don't know. I think it may have been... this is pure speculating on my part, but maybe they, too, were approaching it on sort of a matter-of-fact basis and trying to avoid exploitation or create a possibility for problems. I don't really know. As I recall, I think West Texas State had already integrated. I think they had some blacks already playing for their athletic teams at that time. I'm not sure on that, and I certainly won't make book on it; but I think students were already in the school, and so it was just another step in the progression there that was inevitable. I don't really know. I couldn't begin to get inside the heads of the Dallas editors or anything. Bill Rives was the sports editor at the News at that time.

He's dead now. He later became managing editor of the Record-Chronicle. I guess that Flem Hall would have been sports editor of the Star-Telegram. The Star-Telegram... now indicative of this era...I can certainly speak because I worked for them later, but they had a policy...if Jesse Jackson were running for president in 1960, his picture would not have appeared in the Star-Telegram. That policy existed all the way into the early 1960's in terms of athletics anyway. They did not run pictures of blacks.

Marcello: This is kind of significant, I think, because again it might shed some speculation at least on the lack of coverage by the Dallas news media to something like this.

Brown: Maybe. Like I said, I had no contact with the decision-making process or the people who made those decisions, so I really don't know; but I do know that that policy was in existence at the Star-Telegram. I don't know about the Dallas papers.

Marcello: Were there any policies of that nature in existence at the Record-Chronicle during the period when you were there?

Brown: If there were, they were broken by me immediately. We ran pictures of Abner and Leon, and we had numerous action shots of them and that sort of thing. I don't recall any policies existing, but as I said, if there were, they were promptly broken by me. I was not aware of it. I served under two managing editors there. Allen Bogan was the

managing editor when I first went there, and Allen was a crusty old pro who had worked at the old Dallas Dispatch. He had been sports editor over there for them, and he had a sports background. I don't recall the exact transition, but I'd say about a year deep into my eighteen-month tenure there, Allen left and became vice-president of a Denton Bank there, and Tom Kirkland was elevated to managing editor. Kirkland was in his late twenties and a North Texas State grad at that point, and certainly Tom had no...Allen might have had some old prejudices because he was of the old school, but Kirkland was not. I don't think there ever were.

Marcello: Let's get back to that first practice again. Describe your early impressions, first of all, of Abner Haynes and then of Leon King--at that time, that is, during that first practice session before you really knew what kind of ball players they were.

Brown: I probably am off on the physical dimensions, but Abner was a pretty ordinary-looking ball player. I'd say he was about six feet and 180 pounds or approximately that. He was very dark-complected, and he seemed to have a nice, fluid motion and then later proved it during wind sprints and all that. But I'm talking about that when just looking at him out there, he was just ordinary or average on a physical basis. He was not a muscle man or that type of thing.

Leon was a very neat-looking person. That's sounds

funny to say, but he was...both of them...later we tended to associate a lot of black athletes with the Afros and things of this sort, but both had short, well-groomed hair, and both were well-groomed. Later, as I learned on trips and everything like that, they were extremely well-dressed. Hell, they dressed better than I did. They had nicer clothes than I did. They would wear the sports coats with the ties and things like that. They were very well-dressed. Leon, I believe, had a pencil mustache, but I will not say that. He was a light-complected, much lighter-complected than Abner. Again, just watching him without his moving or anything, he gave the impression of having outstanding speed. Abner did not do that just standing or anything, but King just looked fast. He was one of those kids who just looked like he could run. That's basically the impressions that I recall from that first day.

Cummings: At that time how much interest did you as the sports editor of the paper place on that freshman bunch as compared to the varsity? Did you really pay that much attention to them?

Brown: Yes. I think we probably gave them about as much ink as we did the varsity. One of the reasons was, of course, the presence of Abner and Leon, but the second reason was, as I mentioned earlier, North Texas had an extraordinary group of athletes. They ultimately wound up going 5-0,

and they were playing some pretty tough junior colleges. They were outdrawing the varsity. They would play games, and they would draw more than the varsity would on some of the home games there at Fouts Field because the varsity was not anything extraordinary that year at all. I don't remember what kind of a record they had, but they didn't have a particularly good one. So you ride your winners.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about this freshman team. Let's start with the coach--Ken Bahnsen. What were your impressions of Ken?

Brown: Tough, no-nonsense. You do it my way, or you go home. Basically, that's a capsule. Ken was pretty young himself. He had played junior college ball at Tyler Junior College, and I was aware of his background there. Then he came to North Texas and played up there. He had a brother, Gene Bahnsen, who had also gone through the same route. I couldn't even begin to evaluate him in terms how sound fundamentally he was--what his actual coaching ability was. I think he related well to his players. I think the players respected him. I think they liked him, but I think they also respected him. He had that ability to be liked and yet to maintain that certain aloofness that you need when you're in a managerial position.

Cummings: What was it about his personality that enabled him to cross that barrier but then jump back from it, also, and remain separate from his players?

Brown: I think that he spoke from experience. On a personal basis, I think the kids understood this, in other words, that he knew what he was asking the kids to do. He knew that the things that he was asking were within their capabilities, and he told them that. I think they understood that, "Hey, this guy has gone down the same road that he's leading us down. He came out okay, and if we follow him, maybe we can come out okay, too."

Cummings: I imagine his youth had a lot to do with that.

Brown: I think it did. He related to the kids very well.

Marcello: Plus, I guess it was pretty impressive for them to have a coach who had been in the pros.

Brown: I think again that relates to just what I was saying there. I think they had a certain amount of respect for him because I am quite sure that all of them were aware of his background and aware of what he had done. He was still a comparatively young man. I think he had a good working relationship with them. But he was tough--no-nonsense: "You do it my way, or else you sit on the bench."

Marcello: The quarterback on that team was Vernon Cole. What are your impressions of Vernon Cole?

Brown: Extraordinary. I was very saddened to hear that he had died of cancer. The thing that jumps into my mind more than anything else in connection with Vernon Cole was leadership. He just exuded confidence and leadership:

"Hey, I'm going to beat you. I'm not the greatest runner, but I can run well enough. I'm not the greatest passer, but I'll pass well enough. But I'm going to beat you. Whatever it takes, I'm going to do it." He was unchallenged as the leader on that ball club.

Cummings: He was like that from day one, wasn't he?

Brown: Yes, he really was. Vernon was kind of the personification of Jack Armstrong: nice-looking guy, clean cut, good athlete--the whole thing. It was his ball club. There was really no doubt. It was his ball club.

Marcello: What do you know about the relationship that developed between Abner and Vernon?

Brown: I'm not aware of anything other than that they were teammates. I think that both had immense respect for the other's ability. I think that's one. I think that was a fairly tightly knit ball club. In other words, they not only played together on the field, but they ran around together, and they hung around together in the dorm. They would break off into cliques and all that, but they associated socially when they didn't necessarily have to. I would say that within a week after practice had started, there's no question that Vernon established himself. Within a week after practice had started, I think that Abner and Leon had clearly established themselves as members of that team. I think the other kids

on that ball club saw enough ability there that they respected that. They respected them for their ability.

Marcello: Let me ask you to speculate in this regard. Suppose Vernon Cole in essence said, "I accept these two blacks." What influence do you think that might have had upon the rest of the team?

Brown: I think it would have tremendous influence. As I said, Vernon was just the leader. He was the leader of the ball club. He was not really the holler guy. He didn't go around and jump up and down and cheerlead or that type of thing. He would jump on people. I've seen him come back to the huddle shaking a finger at a lineman who missed a block. I couldn't read his lips, but it was obvious he wasn't complimenting him and that type of a thing. The kids turned to him. On every ball club--it doesn't matter what sport you're in--there is one player that sort of all the others look to when they're in trouble or when it's going good or whatever. I think they turned to Vernon. Vernon was the guy that they felt, "Hey, he'll do it for us. If we're in trouble, we'll go to Vernon. Come on, Vernon, get us out of this." That type of thing.

Marcello: The reason we're concentrating on Vernon is probably obvious to you at this point. From all of the interviews that we've done, we feel that he plays a key role in this process in terms of making it go smoothly.

Brown: In terms of what you're talking about there, when Randy called me on the interview, if he will recall the conversation, I said, "One of the guys you need to talk to is Vernon Cole." Then Randy told me that Vernon had died. He was just a big ol' strong country boy. As I recall, Vernon was from Pilot Point, wasn't he?

Cummings: Yes.

Brown: Yes, Pilot Point, Texas, and he was a big ol' strong country boy, but he was the leader.

Cummings: It sounds like he was kind of a 1950's version of a Roger Staubach type.

Brown: I would sort of relate to that. I mentioned the Jack Armstrong type. I would say he was a good-looking kid physically, fairly muscular. He really looked more like a halfback. You tend to think of quarterbacks as kind of tall and rangy, and Vernon really was not that tall, but he was muscled up. He was a big, strong kid. He was blonde-headed, good-looking physically. He was clearly the leader of the ball club.

Cummings: We touched on this a second ago, but I kind of want to jump back to it for just a brief moment here. Your bosses and editors at the Record-Chronicle...now you mentioned that they probably did not have any racial bigotry or biases, but did they push you in any direction, when the news that North Texas was going to have a couple of black

football players, as far as your coverage of that incident?

Brown: No, I don't recall it. In retrospect I suspect it happened, but I can't consciously say I was told to play it up or play it down or any specific directions like that. I don't recall anything along those lines. I suspect I was, but I really can't...I have no direct recollection that I was.

As I recall, we didn't make it a big thing. We just sort of adopted that matter-of-fact approach. Again, this is speculation, but our situation was that we wanted to report it, but we didn't want to exploit it. That was probably our approach, but I don't recall that. I don't know whether Bogan...last I heard, he was still kicking around Denton. He might be able to give you some insight into that.

Cummings: I find all that real curious because you mentioned that by today's standards, if something like this would have happened, Dallas-Fort Worth media and everybody would have been on it.

Brown: You've got to remember the environment that existed in Dallas and Fort Worth then. It was sort of a very clubby group. You had a laissez-faire attitude among the Dallas and Fort Worth media. Television was not really a factor at that time. The Dallas Morning News was the morning paper, and the Times-Herald was sort of a warmed-over

version in the afternoon. As I said there was very much of a laissez-faire attitude. The Dallas papers did not go west into Tarrant County. The Star-Telegram was the unchallenged champion in Fort Worth. The Press was sort of a gadfly that bounced around and made a lot of noise but didn't really do any damage. Fort Worth did not go east into Dallas. It went west. It was very much of a laissez-faire attitude at that time, and the competition that exists now didn't exist. It was not nearly the intense media thing that is the situation now.

Cummings: Did the awareness of the talent that Abner and Leon had get out pretty quickly among the townspeople and among the students on campus?

Brown: Oh, yes. Certainly, at least by the end of the first ball-game, everybody knew--the first freshman game--and maybe even before that during some of the scrimmages. The word started spreading, "Hey, these guys can play." As I said much earlier, they were in a very high visibility position. I don't mean that in a pun sense, but I really do; I mean, that they were going to get more recognition, either good or bad, than the other athletes would.

Marcello: You described their physical characteristics a moment ago. Describe their personalities. Start with Leon and then talk about Abner.

Brown: I really don't have any idea on their grades. I recall Leon as very bright--an excellent student. I think he

was involved in ROTC and was an officer or something of that sort in the ROTC unit and had excellent grades. He was fairly quiet. He didn't have a whole lot to say. I don't think he was particularly shy or bashful; he was just one of those rather quiet people.

Abner was kind of a character. He was kind of exuberant. He was not the student that Leon was. As a matter of fact ...again, I say all this just on surface impressions--things that I remember and picked up about that. I would classify Abner...I don't ever recall either of them having any academic problems, but I don't think that Abner was any threat to the honor roll either. Abner just met and dealt with people very well. I can recall rides and buses and things of that sort with him, and they would generally sit together, but not always. I found that situation existed when I was a sports information director even in the 1970's at UTA, that the black athletes tended to stay together and the white athletes tended...not exclusively, but it still exists to a certain extent. Why, I can't begin to answer.

And then as I mentioned on the trips I made with them, too, both--I'm not kidding you--had a whole lot better wardrobe that I did. Both were very sharp dressers and dressed very well. I don't mean in a flashy or flamboyant sense in any way. I would loved to have had some of their sports jackets and things of that sort (chuckle).

Cummings: Evaluate the racial attitudes in the city of Denton along this time as you perceived them.

Brown: Well, it would have to be as I perceived them because there was definitely a town-and-gown situation which probably still exists, and most of my exposure was on the campus. I dealt with the sports aspect of the city, but in terms of the city government or things of that sort, I did know Jack Bryson, the mayor, and a few others. I'm not sure, but I think North Texas was considerably more ready for the presence of blacks than Denton was--let me put it that way.

Cummings: Why?

Brown: Well, I think it was the academic community and that sort of thing. There was at that time a certain amount of reservation or wariness toward North Texas students period --those rich kids or the party kids or this sort of thing. That situation probably exists here in Waco between the Baylor students and some of the townspeople. Denton was, as I recall, not a particularly progressive city at that time. It didn't have a real active chamber of commerce going out and hustling industry or anything like that. They were ahead of Greenville, which still had the sign on Main Street, "The Blackest Land, The Whitest People," but I don't recall them being particularly...as I said, I think North Texas was more ready for the integration

than Denton, the community.

Marcello: On the other hand, during your time in Denton during that period, do you recall any racial violence occurring?

Brown: No, none whatsoever. I don't remember any racial incidents of any sort. If they occurred, they certainly occurred without my knowledge at the time I was there.

Marcello: Well, this is the impression that we get. We can't find any evidence of any of this sort of thing happening. Also, is it not true that the races would be mingling out of necessity down in the business district? There was only one business district in Denton at that time, and it was right on the edge of the black section of town, was it not?

Brown: Yes. The black section was over on the east side of Denton at that time. As a matter of fact, the Record-Chronicle offices were located on the edge of that district there. I don't recall...again, you've got to recall...now remember that, for example, Denton High School was not integrated at the time. You still had Fred Moore. I don't recall a great deal of interplay or anything like that. I don't recall seeing blacks in the restaurants or things of this sort at all. I'm sure that they did shop in the downtown area, but I think it was probably on a convenience basis or whatever.

Marcello: Yes, Denton was definitely a segregated city as was every other city in Texas and the South at that time. You

mentioned Fred Moore. How much coverage or how much attention did the sports staff of the Record-Chronicle give to what was happening at Fred Moore during that period?

Brown: Well, I happen to have--and I'll read it for the record-- a clip from November 24, 1957, and the headline says, "Farmers (which was Lewisville) and Fred Moore Post Top Area Marks." Fred Moore had a fine football team. They played for the state championship against a Waco high school team. I don't recall the name of it here--the black school here. There in the Denton High School stadium...and I covered the ballgame, and it was played in the midst of the damnest monsoon you've ever seen. It was so bad that I stood up on the counter of the press box and got right up to the top where I could see. You had to catch a number when a kid came in and catch where he lined up because after one play you couldn't read the numbers anymore. There was water stretching unbroken from sideline to sideline.

I don't think there's any question but what we didn't give Fred Moore the same coverage that we gave Denton High School, but I think we did give them probably more coverage than a lot of other black schools in a lot of other communities were getting.

Marcello: Did whites as well as blacks attend the Fred Moore games?

Brown: Only a very few whites. I would go to the ballgames there and staff them from the press box, and there were maybe...

I don't know. I'm just taking a wild guess. I'd guess there'd probably be ten or fewer whites in the stands.

Cummings: Talk about the differences in the style of the actual game of football from what you'd see at Denton High and North Texas as compared to Fred Moore.

Brown: Well, I think I know what you're talking about. The old stereotype was that it was hully-gully--that the blacks ran in all different directions and lacked discipline and all that. I think that depended entirely upon the school and the coach. At that time Zeke Martin was the coach at Denton High. He ran a pretty wide-open offense. Fred Moore had a relatively controlled offense. As I remember, they ran a single wing or something along those lines, and they stressed the run pretty heavily, whereas Denton High threw pretty much.

The blacks, though, had a very limited situation in terms of where they could go after that, so I'm not sure that they had the participation that they would have now. In other words, there were no colleges available short of Prairie View or Southern unless they went out of state. There just really were no colleges. Texas didn't have any --TCU, SMU, all those campuses--so they were pretty restricted. But they had some fine athletes, some extraordinary athletes, and some of them later went on and played in the Pacific Coast Conference or places of that sort.

Cummings: So Fred Moore really had maybe a more disciplined football program than the majority of the black programs at that time, do you think?

Brown: You're asking a twenty-one-year-old to comment. I had been familiar with some of the black programs in Tyler, my hometown. I think the program was a direct reflection of the coach--the philosophy of the coach--and the Fred Moore coach at that time believed pretty strongly in "you do it my way." Obviously, they had a good program. Again, they went to the state finals that year.

Marcello: What do you know about the decision to have Abner and Leon live in the black section of town during that first year they were at North Texas? Did you know anything about that or how it came about?

Brown: No, I don't. I know it existed, but I just don't know the reasons behind it or anything of that sort. Any comment I make would be just rank speculation. I really don't know.

Cummings: What were the reactions of some of the white team members toward the fact that they did live off-campus?

Brown: I suspect they probably liked it. They were probably a little bit envious, in other words, because the athletes lived in Quad Four, and the quads were not...I lived in a quad myself up there one time, and they were those old cement block buildings over there with a central dining

hall--four separate dormitories. I said it was Quad Four, but I'm not sure. But that was the athletic dorm at that time, so all the athletes lived in there, and all ate in the central dining area. They had a separate dining room for the athletes, but they ate the same thing that all the other students did, but they just got more of it. It wasn't any better; there was just more of it (chuckle).

Marcello: Abner and Leon were also not able to take advantage of that situation, as I recall.

Brown: I don't know whether they ate in the dining hall or not. You'd be more knowledgeable than I would on that. I really don't know. I had lived in the quads as a freshman and...generally, the reaction among the students up there was that you were required to live in the quads your freshman year, and you sort of served your duty and then got the heck out (chuckle). Attitudes on college dorms haven't changed a whole lot, so I imagine the athletes were probably a little envious that they got to live off-campus.

Cummings: You mentioned a moment ago that when Abner and Leon showed up, you went and talked to a couple of the white players just to kind of get their attitudes and reactions. Did you go talk to Abner and Leon and try to get their feelings and their anxieties?

Brown: You know, I don't think...as I said, I was a twenty-year-old sports writer, but I don't think I did. I really don't.

I don't remember it anyway. I don't recall that, so I don't think I did, which makes me derelict. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Marcello: Could you detect differences in the attitudes or reactions of the varsity players as opposed to the attitudes and reactions of that freshman team relative to the coming of these blacks?

Brown: I think all the varsity players tended to treat all the freshmen...look down their noses at all of the freshmen--black or white. It didn't make any difference: "They are the new kids on the block, and they have got to prove themselves before there is any sort of acceptance." I don't recall any particular distinction other than that. That basically still is the approach: "I don't care if you were a high school All-American, fellow, let's see what you can do here."

Cummings: Now that freshman year--correct me if I'm wrong--didn't you say you did travel with them, or did you just see some of their home games?

Brown: No, I saw their home ballgames. I didn't travel with the freshman team that year.

Cummings: You traveled with the varsity?

Brown: Yes. And I didn't travel to all the varsity ballgames even then. There are some clips in that stack there (gesture), and I think I staffed about either two or three...

all their home ballgames I did staff--the freshman home games--but I don't recall traveling with them on the freshman team.

Marcello: Do you recall having heard about some of the problems they encountered during their second game when they played over at Corsicanna against Navarro Junior College?

Brown: No, I didn't. They obviously must have run into a segregation scene then, but I didn't know anything about it, no.

Cummings: At that time didn't Bahnsen usually call up the newspaper with most of the road game reports?

Brown: Yes, either Bahnsen or Fred Graham, who was a student assistant in the News and Information Office, and sometimes he would travel...again, we were a p.m. paper, so they could play a night ballgame, say, in Corsicanna and then drive on back to Denton, and either he would call me or I could call him the next morning and get the results and get in that afternoon's paper. It wasn't like a morning operation where you had to have it that night.

Cummings: Do you recall which games you saw that year of that freshman team?

Brown: Well, I can go through it. I know I saw the Paris Junior College ballgame. That was the one when they...

Cummings: That was the exciting one that season.

Brown: Right. And then the Hardin-Simmons "B" team. For example, you mentioned the Corsicanna thing. Here I've got a Corsicanna

special dateline on that thing, which probably means I picked it up out of the Dallas News (chuckle). I don't know. But there's a clip on it. There's the Paris game and Hardin-Simmons and...I'm not sure. As I told you, some of these things are (chuckle) very yellow. Here are some of the varsity games. I would have to look at the schedule, but I'm pretty sure that I did staff their home ballgames. It may have only been a couple of them. They played a five-game schedule--I know that--so I staffed at least a couple.

Cummings: When that team went undefeated, I noticed in going back through the Campus Chat files that the Campus Chat played that undefeated season up pretty big since it was the first undefeated team in the school's history.

Brown: I show in these clips here about a three- or four-column headline. I'd say there's about thirty-six, maybe forty-two, point type on it, which is a pretty good write-up.

Cummings: Not too bad for a freshman team to get that kind of coverage (chuckle).

Brown: I agree. As I said, you ride your winners, and the varsity wasn't particularly doing anything, and the high school teams were just "blah" that year, too. You do ride those winners.

Cummings: Was there kind of an anticipation among the varsity team at the end of that football season after they had seen what

Abner and Leon could do on the field? Was there a little anxiety?

Brown: One thing that we haven't brought out in this whole thing that needs to be brought out...and I think is a very valid point. This was the era of two-way football. You had to play both ways. Abner was outstanding on offense, but he was average to even below that on defense. He was not an extraordinary defensive football player. Ray Toole was the quarterback, but he was an excellent defensive halfback. I was going through those clips to refresh my memory, and he probably had a half-dozen pass interceptions, for example, the same season he was starting quarterback and all that. We knew we were going to get some help on the variety from these guys; but I was looking in there, and Abner was expected to play, but he was not expected to start his sophomore year. And he did not start his sophomore year. A senior halfback, as I mentioned earlier, a fraternity brother of mine, David Lott, from Fairfield, Texas, who was a six-year guy because at that time he had played three years at Tyler Junior College and then transferred to North Texas and had three years of eligibility left...so he was actually playing his sixth year of college football. He started but I would say that if you probably broke it out on a minutes played basis, they probably wound up playing fifty-fifty. But David was the starting halfback in front

of Abner that year, and David, I think, led the Missouri Valley Conference in scoring. But Abner made All-Conference.

Cummings: Going back to those clips in that very first game of that sophomore year when Abner was a varsity member, like you said, he didn't start. I think he was the team's third leading rusher in that ballgame. But the next week, the second game of the season, against Oklahoma State he had a real good game.

Brown: Right.

Cummings: He had over a hundred yards. He got MVC Back-of-the-Week recognition. Do you recall that as possibly being the hump that Abner got over as far as his recognition and maybe total acceptance?

Brown: I think Abner got over the hump the first play that he touched the football on the varsity level against Texas Western. He went about seventy yards for a touchdown. They ruled that he had stepped out of bounds after about thirty yards on it, which is still subject to considerable dispute, but he actually ran seventy yards. The guy was an extraordinary...and his sophomore year may very well have been his best season because after that everybody started stacking their defenses and keying on him. He came up as a sophomore virtually unknown. The scouting was not nearly as sophisticated as it is now. He was our secret weapon.

I think that the test that you are talking about in terms of Oklahoma State was that there was a question in the minds of North Texas staff and the North Texas students and the Denton fans and everyone else as to whether North Texas was really capable of playing on the Missouri Valley Conference member. That was the first game--against them--and so while they beat North Texas, nonetheless, I think North Texas did show that it could be competitive on that level--at least competitive. I think that if Abner had played in the years of two-platoon football, where he could work solely on offense...because he was average to below that on defense. He was not extraordinary at all on defense. Well, there's no telling what he could have accomplished in two-platoon football, but he had to go out there and play defensive halfback and make tackles and intercept passes, or try to, anyway, or recover fumbles or things like that.

Cummings: There's one thing I just thought of that I don't want to forget, and we're kind of jumping back again. During that freshman season of his, do you recall any scrimmages between the freshman team and the varsity in which he maybe shined and kind of irritated the varsity players or show them up, so to speak? Any things of that nature?

Brown: I'm sure there were. I don't remember them. Again, it is twenty-eight years, but I'm sure that the varsity and

the freshmen did scrimmage, and I'm equally sure that they had their hands full with Abner.

Marcello: What do you recall, if anything, about their house having burned down over in southeast Denton during that first year? Do you recall the house having burned down and the reaction of the townspeople?

Brown: No. I was unaware of it, which makes me a bad reporter. But I didn't know that it had occurred.

Marcello: Well, their house had burned down, and it was purely accidental; but from everything that we've heard, there was an immediate outpouring of aid, I guess you would say, for these two blacks in terms of townsfolks giving them clothing, buying them clothing, things of that nature.

Brown: Maybe that's where those sharp sports coats came from (chuckle).

Marcello: Let me ask you to speculate on something. I've never really found an answer to it, and maybe there is no answer. North Texas was entering the Missouri Valley Conference. At that time--and this is before Abner and Leon ever came to North Texas--the Missouri Valley Conference had black ballplayers--Cincinnati, Drake, Bradley, so on and so forth. Obviously, whoever was trying to get North Texas into that Missouri Valley Conference knew that, if nothing else, North Texas would have to be playing teams that had blacks. I was just wondering if perhaps this may have also been a factor in easing the coming of these two blacks to

the North Texas team. Maybe there's no connection between the two, but by entering the Missouri Valley Conference, they were going to have to play blacks whether they wanted to or not.

Brown: I don't recall that ever...I think that the conference at that time...North Texas had played in the old Gulf States Conference, and it had dominated it totally. It really came down to a two-team conference. It was North Texas and East Texas State, was basically what it had evolved into. I think the last time they played each other, North Texas won 48-0. That indicated that North Texas had in honesty just outgrown that conference, and it was seeking a conference that...of course, the ideal situation would have been the Southwest Conference, but that was totally out of the question. This was before Texas Tech was even admitted, or the University of Houston. The faculty athletic representatives and all of that were just shopping for a conference, and somehow or other--I don't really know how--they came up with the Missouri Valley Conference, which, of course, was a sprawling, far-flung thing and was very prestigious in basketball--not in other sports. In basketball it was outstanding at that time because you had Cincinnati, Drake, Bradley, Saint Louis University, Oklahoma State, Wichita, and all of those. It was probably one of the top three or four basketball conferences in the nation.

Cincinnati about that time had Oscar Robertson, and Saint Louis had Connie Dierking, and both of them became All-NBA later on--that type of thing. I think that was the real rationale--try to enhance...rightly or wrongly, a lot of times universities are judged by the quality of their athletic competition or their athletic endeavors. I think North Texas was trying to just shirrtail or obtain a little more prestige.

Cummings: What do you recall about the black community's reaction to Leon and Abner playing at North Texas?

Brown: Gosh, I don't know. I couldn't even begin to assess it. I know that at a lot of the ballgames or freshman games, you would have a small knot or group of blacks over there. Generally, they were a very small group--ten, fifteen, or twenty persons sitting by themselves, sort of isolated, in one section of the stands. In terms of within the black community, I have no idea what the reaction or the response was.

You've got to remember now--another thing in connection with this--that this was before the era of black militancy. If there was an approach in the black community, I think it would have been in the nature of Uncle Tom or what we now call an Uncle Tom approach. There was no real black militancy of any sort at that particular time or certainly not in Texas.

Marcello: Were you getting any letters from readers who perhaps were reacting to the coming of blacks to the North Texas campus?

Brown: No, I don't ever recall either anonymous phone calls or letters or anything of that sort that protested. I got some phone calls and letters later on when I was the sports editor at San Angelo and I espoused that the Southwest Conference should integrate. I got some very angry things over there about that. But I never got any in Denton. Maybe Denton was more progressive than I thought (chuckle).

Marcello: You brought up the subject, so let's pursue it one step further. Did you have a chance to editorialize relative to the coming of blacks in the Record-Chronicle at that time?

Brown: I suppose I had the chance because I had a column. I don't recall ever doing it. I don't ever remember anything being killed or adjusted, so I probably just didn't take that upon myself.

Cummings: When Abner and Leon got up to the varsity level, how much had they changed from those first impressions that you remember of them from their freshman year to the time they got through their sophomore season? And I ask that not just from the athletic standpoint, but their personalities. Had they been able to relax a little bit and become a little more open with their teammates and a little more comfortable with the situation?

Brown: I think so. I think they began doing that at least with the freshman team early in the season of their freshman year, with their freshman teammates and all. I think by the end of their sophomore year, they were totally relaxed at least on trips and things of this sort. I think they had a pretty clear indication of where they stood and how they stood. I noticed that in one of those columns, there's something in there, as I recall, about one trip I went on with them. They were pretty good rhythm and blues singers. I think both of them had written some songs. On the plane or the bus, they would sing some of those and that type of stuff.

I think they were probably like a lot of other freshman. They were a lot more poised, a lot more confident--the whole thing. I think they both felt like "we've proven we can do it. We belong here athletically." There's always that thing. Anytime a kid comes out of high school and goes to the college level, he's still got a whole new world to conquer out there. He may have been All-Everything in high school, but he's still got to go prove himself. Just like if you leave the Denton Record-Chronicle and go to the Dallas News, you've got to prove yourself over there. I think it's the same thing.

Cummings: During that sophomore year, did you possibly still sense from some of the older players a little hesitancy in accepting them?

Brown: Oh, there were some kids on the ball club, no question about that, that probably still haven't accepted them right now on that team. There were a few hard-nosed rednecks on that ball club. I can't cite you chapter and verse on who they were, but there were some. One of the things that Mitchell was doing about this era was that, first of all, he had had some connections with some of the service teams, so it was not uncommon...I think we had a couple or three guys on that ball club. Maybe they were twenty-six, twenty-seven years old. In other words, they had gotten out of high school, and they'd gone into the service, and they played service football--San Diego Naval Training Center or Quantico Marines or places like that. So they came on in. They were men. They weren't kids, There were a few of those around. I'm not saying they were the guys that had the embedded prejudice, but there were some. I can't recall specifically who they were, but I do recall there were three or four that probably still haven't accepted it.

Cummings: No matter how good their athletic ability was, that wasn't going to override that embedded prejudice that they had grown up with.

Brown: Sure, no way. I can go to Denton or I can go to Waco or I can go down to Tyler, and I can find you some people right now who still think this is a temporary fad, and it ought to go away and go back to chopping cotton and whipping

slaves. They can drive their pick-up truck and the whole thing.

Marcello: Do you recall the coaches at North Texas ever talking about quotas that had been imposed upon them in terms of how many blacks they could recruit in years after Abner and Leon?

Brwon: No. Again, now recall that my direct contact with North Texas...I left Denton in 1958, the spring of 1958, so I would actually have gone through the 1957 football season, and that was my last direct contact with them. Fred Graham went on in there a couple of years later as a sports and information director, and he was, for example, the best man at my wedding, and his wife was the matron of honor, and we've been long-term as classmates. I've never heard him even mention or discuss that, so I'm not aware of the existence of quotas. It doesn't sound totally out of reason, considering the era and the climate at that time, but I've never heard of it.

Marcello: Assuming that quotas did exist, and we're pretty sure they did, incidentally, it may have been a very practical thing, given that time. We can sit here in 1984 and say there should have been no quotas, and they ought to go out and recruit fifty blacks. That could have caused all sorts of problems.

Brown: I think it would have in that era, yes. I just don't know

that it existed. Well, there's still speculation right now in terms of the NBA as to whether there are quotas for whites (chuckle).

Cummings: We've talked about Bahnsen and about Dr. Matthews. Give us an evaluation of Odus Mitchell both in a working capacity and just as a gentleman and a man and a coach.

Brown: I think you used one of the words that...the first word that sprang into my mind was "gentleman." Odus...well, I called him Coach Mitchell. I never felt...

Cummings: I think everybody still does.

Brown: I guess in a sense he was sort of a father figure to me because I was twenty, twenty-one. I very easily could have been his son. He had a son playing basketball at North Texas about that time--Fred Mitchell. He played for Pete Shands. I always found the man totally upfront. There were instances where he wouldn't volunteer information, but if I asked a question, I got an answer. I asked him some questions on a couple of occasions dealing with rather sticky subjects that he perhaps would not have cared to deal with. We had that situation of that fight in San Jose, and we had the situation of a lot of rhubarb going back and forth about officiating and dirty play against Trinity University. He always was completely candid with me. He didn't play the off-the-record game. He perhaps wouldn't volunteer the information, but if you asked him

a question, he'd give you the answer. I found him very easy to work with.

He told some great stories. I can remember going to El Paso once with the team. We had a night ballgame, and we sat around and watched a ballgame on television out there, and as I recall, the color man was Red Grange, who was atrocious. I mean he was really bad (chuckle). They had a lot of fun with him. Mitchell had coached Y.A. Tittle in high school when he coached in Marshall, so he would tell some stories about Tittle. Tittle at that time was with the Giants. I just found him a jewel. I think very highly of him.

Cummings: He was a pretty, for lack of a better word, straight man, wasn't he? A straight-living type of man?

Brown: Yes, as far as I know.

Cummings: Didn't cuss, didn't drink.

Brown: As far as I know, he didn't. I'm not aware of any of that.

Cummings: He wasn't a screamer on the practice field.

Brown: No, actually Mitch, if anything, was kind of quiet and soft-spoken. He'd go over and talk to somebody...if the kid made a mistake, he'd sort of take him aside and say, "You did wrong," but he didn't just scream at the top of his lungs or embarrass the boy or anything like that. He had no hesitation about taking him aside and saying, "You missed your block, and here's how you missed your block,

and here's why you missed. Here's what you need to do to correct it." It was that sort of thing.

Cummings: Did he delegate a lot of the coaching responsibilities to his assistants?

Brown: Yes, I think he did. I feel confident that he had the final say on say a game plan or the defense or who was going to start or who wasn't going to start, but by the same token...again, most of this is speculation, but I just got the very strong impression that he relied very heavily on his assistants. He felt confident in them. He would say, "Who do you think ought to start?" If he disagreed, which I imagine he didn't a whole lot...I imagine he pretty well accepted their assessment or their recommendation, but if it wasn't working, I think he would probably scrap it and go to something else.

Cummings: Just as an observer, a bystander, what were your impressions of him as a football coach? As a football mind?

Brown: I hate to be trite and use a cliché, but go look at the record. That's got to tell you something there because it is a pretty darn good record. I think if Mitchell probably had a deficit in the one sense, it would probably be that he was not an aggressive recruiter--like a lot of coaches of that generation. He was more used to the kids coming up and tugging on him and saying, "Hey, Coach, can I come out for football?" It might be this 6'5"

255-pound...because the recruiting was not anything at all like it is now. A lot of times you got some tremendous athletes particularly from your smaller school, like, Pilot Point or places like that. They sort of came to you; you didn't go to them. So I don't think he was a particularly aggressive recruiter. Now he did have that pipeline set up with the service schools, and we often played those service schools--San Diego. If you go back and look at those schedules at that time, there will be one or two service football teams virtually every year. He would look around and maybe go talk to a kid or have Herb or Fred primarily...I think Fred probably ran the offense as much as anybody else--Fred McCain--because Fred McCain did have an extraordinary football mind as far as tactician and all that. I think he had major input into the offense. Then Herb sort of handled the line. Mitchell just did it all--oversaw it all.

Marcello: If you were to speculate, what do you think Coach Mitchell's contributions would have been toward making the coming of black athletes be a smooth one?

Brown: I think a vast amount of credit has to go to him for the simple reason that...my philosophy has always been that regardless of the sport, a team tends to reflect the philosophy and the personality of the head coach--basketball, football, track, whatever. If you've got a real fiesty, aggressive, outspoken coach, oftentimes you've got

a real fiesty, aggressive team. I think that obviously this whole thing went well and went smoothly. There were no major problems or anything like that, and I think that is directly due to Mitchell. Mitchell is just kind of a low key guy. He certainly deserves the lion's share of the credit in that area.

Cummings: By the end of Abner's sophomore year, were Abner and Leon still on the same level as far as how their teammates looked at them as far as their talent?

Brown: No. Leon just simply didn't have the physical ability, the physical attributes, that Abner had. I think there's no question but what in terms of the talent aspect...and Leon, if you will recall or go back and check the record, quit his junior year, I think it was, and I believe he went on into the ROTC program on a full-time basis at that point. He just didn't have the physical ability that Abner had. He was just not as good an athlete. His contemporaries on the football team recognized that and accepted that.

Cummings: It was also, I think, during this sophomore year that, as far as their closeness as friends, they started to split a little bit, too. Perhaps it was because of the talent differences and how they were being treated by their teammates.

Brown: That may have had something to do with it. Again, I don't have any personal knowledge of that, but there was a disparity in terms of their athletic ability. There's

no question about that. I think Abner was a more gregarious person. He met and got along with and dealt with people, and Leon was rather quiet and withdrawn and more intellectual. It's entirely possible that they could drift apart. They were obviously held together by the unifying bond or tie being the two the blacks in an all-white world at that time.

Cummings: I guess Abner had the ability to let any kind of racial statements bounce off of him a lot easier than Leon did, also.

Brown: I would suspect that would be true. Just based on my recollections of their personalities, I would think that Abner would tend to let them just bounce off, and I think that Leon would tend to brood--just based on what I recall of their personalities and all. I think that he would feel more of an impact from them. I feel completely confident that in that era there were innumerable ones thrown at them possibly by some of the hardcore teammates that I talked about earlier and almost assuredly by members of the other teams.

Marcello: What do you know about the decision of Ole Miss to drop North Texas once blacks were playing at the varsity level? You may recall that every year North Texas opened up against Ole Miss.

Brown: Yes. I don't recall any specifics on it, but it was not at all uncommon in that era. That happened in...well,

when I was at UTA in 1962, we went to Louisiana to play a school down there, and we couldn't carry a black with us. That was written into the contract. This is much later.

Marcello: That's interesting, however, because in the North Texas case, they would not play against any teams that would refuse to allow them to bring their blacks along. In other words, the choice against Ole Miss was, "You may play us if you leave the blacks at home," and the reaction of the coaching staff was, "No way. We either all go, or none of us go."

Brown: Again, that reflects on Mitchell, too.

Marcello: It does. It does. What do you know about the special accommodations that had to be found when the varsity went on the road?

Brown: I don't know that much about it, really. Again, it's a reflection of the era. You're going into a lot of places where you'd have two water fountains--one for the whites and one for the "colored." I do recall...I think it was in San Jose, as I recall there, that the team stayed together and ate together and everything. I don't remember about El Paso, quite frankly, and those are two of the road trips their sophomore year. I just do not remember it.

Marcello: Well, again, I think this was the general policy that was adopted, that is, they would always be together and they always would stay together. Obviously, there were going

to be some problems in finding accommodations where they could pull that off.

Brown: Yes. I would say that was a reflection of the tenor of that era. God, we've come a long way, haven't we?

Cummings: Let's talk about that San Jose State game. I think that was probably the most memorable of that sophomore year for all these players involved. Just kind of go back and tell us the atmosphere around that game and some of the things possibly that led up to the outbreak of the fight and then consequently the mudslinging that occurred a couple of days afterwards.

Brown: Of course, it was a heck of a trip, certainly for me at the time and for the kids: "Hey, we're flying to San Jose, California!" This was a big deal (chuckle). We got out there and had a good time. As a matter of fact, Jim Rogers and I went into San Francisco and spent the whole day in there touring the city and everything. The game itself, as I recall, was quite frankly a rather a dull game. San Jose had Ray Norton playing halfback for them, who was a world class sprinter who would just scare you to death, and he really didn't do anything. We just choked him down. I've got the game story in this collection of clips from that game. North Texas just pretty well dominated the game. They didn't score a whole lot of points, but they were just in total control of the game. There really hadn't

been any major penalties or any rharbs or anything like that,

Near the end of the ballgame...we had a guy named Jim Braymer, who was a tough, tough dude, and I think he may have been one of those ex-servicemen that I'm talking about. This guy just ran into him...he was playing line-backer, and this guy ran into his area, and Braymer popped him with an elbow, and it was just about the last play of the ballgame. This guy came up swinging.

So here came two other San Jose players, and rather than trying to break it up, they piled on Braymer. Then we were off to the races. It got really ugly. You had guys with their helmets off and grabbing them by their face bars and swinging those things.

The situation I was under was because of the time difference, and it was a night game there. We had held the Record-Chronicle and held space. I am on the phone thirty seconds before the game is over and before the fight, and I'm dictating my story. About that time, the fight erupts. I'm not a skilled pro or anything, and I'm having to dictate this in: "Wait a minute, Bogan! I got a hell of a fight going! We need to put a new lead on this thing!" (chuckle) Then I took it off the top on that. It had the potential for just being a very, very ugly situation.

Cummings: The fight lasted a long time, didn't it?

Brown: No, it didn't last that long. These things seem like they go on and on, but I'd say at the very most it lasted five minutes and, realistically, only a couple of minutes. Both benches got into it, and everybody was out there. Like I said, you had some guys who had their helmets off and had them by their face bars and were just swinging them like weapons.

Then a day or so after the ballgame, we learned that their quarterback had gotten a broken cheekbone, and their coach was talking about all this dirty play and everything. The wire service moved that story, so I went out with Mitchell and said, "What is going on here? How did this guy get hit or whatever." We looked at the film, and the way he got hit is that Vernon Cole just walked up to him and popped him on the cheek. And that's it--just like I'm going to walk up to you. He was a big ol' strong country boy from Pilot Point, Texas, and he laid him out. It wasn't a sneak blow, and he didn't hit him with his helmet. He just knocked the hell out of him (chuckle).

Cummings: So that game really wasn't that rough until those last few plays?

Brown: Let me just find that...I brought a clip on that thing. This was a follow story on that thing. Like I said, the actual football game wasn't a particularly exciting affair

because North Texas had almost complete command all the way. North Texas had 268 yards rushing, and San Jose had 127. That tells you something right there. North Texas ran seventy-seven plays, and San Jose ran forty from scrimmage. The Eagles just had it pretty well locked up.

Cummings: I found it interesting--the last time we talked to Abner a couple of weeks ago--that he remembered the exact headline word-for-word from that game. I think it's the one that says, "North Texas Wins Fight And Game."

Brown: I've got a quote in here from Jim Cody, who was a North Texas trainer at that time. It says he went into the San Jose locker room after the game and reported that it was the Eagles all the way: "One player with a long gash on his cheek looked up and said, 'Well, you won two tonight,' Cody said." Another one allegedly said he was going to Texas because he liked the spirit, that there wasn't a player on the Eagle squad who didn't get at least one lick in the fight. Here's one that says that San Jose with six seconds left on the clock called timeout to stop the clock, but they didn't have any timeouts left, so we called it to their attention. They started the clock. Before that there had been three consecutive penalties against San Jose, and then the center was ejected from the ballgame. It had gradually built. From what I have seen in other situations, I think they were just getting kicked and got

mad and lost their cool, was what happened. I'll leave all these clips with you, and you can do whatever you will with them. I remember the game very well, yes.

Cummings: Is that probably the most memorable game that you have of that year?

Brown: Yes, I think so. I've got a clip in here of their final game of that year, which was a total rout. We were playing some rinky-dink...Youngstown...and beat them 68-13. But I remember the San Jose game more clearly than anything else.

Cummings: Correct me if I'm wrong, but that year, when North Texas played Trinity, was also the final year of Trinity's varsity program, was it not?

Brown: No, that's no accurate. Trinity later went into the Southland Conference and played in the Southland Conference when I was sports information director at UTA. They're still playing varsity football right now, but they're playing in this Texas Intercollegiate Athletic Association or something. I think it's a non-scholarship program. But they were in a scholarship program in the Southland Conference. They were one of the charter members of the Southland Conference, which was formed in 1964, I believe. They did continue to play varsity football.

Cummings: During this 1957 season that we've been talking about, by this time two more black players had been brought in, had

they not, and they were playing again with the freshman team?

Brown: They may have been. Who were they? Can you give me their names?

Cummings: Billy Christle...

Brown: Yes, he sure was. He was from Waco as a matter of fact. Arthur...

Cummings: ...and Arthur Perkins.

Brown: Arthur Perkins. Yes, that's right.

Cummings: Were the next two.

Brown: Yes. I had forgotten that. I remember seeing both of them play. Billy was a scatback, and Arthur was a big, strong fullback.

Cummings: I guess by this time, with four black players out there in the program, that the newness of all this had kind of worn off.

Brown: I guess so because I wasn't aware of it, or I didn't recall it until you mentioned it, so I think that's right. I think that would be a fair, accurate description.

Cummings: Were the people who were involved in the program at that time anticipating or forecasting big things for Abner? Could they tell right then the kind of talent that he had?

Brown: Yes, I think so. Again, I go back to the thing that his offensive abilities were unchallenged from the first day that he hit the football field, but it was still a two-way

football era where you had to play both ways. He had to learn how to play some defense. That was the only question. I think he would have started as a sophomore had it been platoon football where you have your offensive and your defensive units. You had to have them play both ways at that time under the substitution rules, and that was the only thing that even began to hold him back. He was an outstanding offensive player, but he was just average on defense...average to maybe below that even.

Cummings: What was it about his talents offensively that made him such a good player?

Brown: Abner had moves you would not believe. He had speed, and he could run inside, but he was just an extraordinary broken field runner. I don't think that on a one-on-one situation there was a defensive man in America that would bring him down. Abner would give him a hip that would leave him there and the whole thing. He was just an exceptional broken field runner. It was just not uncommon at all that Abner might gain thirty yards on a run, but he might run seventy-five yards to get that thirty yards. He would zig-zag across the field two or three times. He had just great moves, and he had that stop-go. He would just never break stride and give a hip and elude the tackler.

Cummings: You may have mentioned this earlier in the interview, but you left the Record-Chronicle after the 1956...

- Brown: No, it was after the 1957 season. I left in the spring of 1958.
- Cummings: But you were not working for the Record-Chronicle during Abner's junior season?
- Brown: No, not during his junior or the senior season. I think I saw one ballgame. It seems like they played Hardin-Simmons in Abilene his junior year. I think I went up to Abilene to see that ballgame.
- Cummings: I was going to ask if you'd seen him as a junior.
- Brown: I think I saw that one ballgame. I followed him pretty closely, as closely as I could, because I felt involved. I knew all the ballplayers, and I was an alumnus and the whole thing. I followed him all the way through his career, not only his junior and senior year but then later on in the pros.
- Cummings: Are you kind of sorry maybe that you didn't get to follow through his collegiate career, or were you just happy to have seen him a couple of years and be part of it?
- Brown: Well, I think I would have liked to have seen him. I just had an opportunity to go to a bigger newspaper with more circulation and everything like that. Then from what I read and saw and my impressions a little later on, I'm not really sure that I didn't get to see perhaps the best years of Abner or the best year of Abner simply because everybody knew about him his junior and his senior year, and he was

a marked man. They stacked their defenses and the whole thing. He had good seasons, but by the same token I saw him when he came in as a total unknown, and he just drove them crazy. Nobody knew much about him, and they hadn't figured out any way to even slow him down.

Marcello: Back near the beginning of the interview, you mentioned that you had not on that first day of practice approached either him or Leon to get any comments or quotes. In subsequent games, and in the sophomore year, did you ever conduct any personal interviews with Abner or Leon?

Brown: I talked with both Abner and Leon innumerable times, but I don't recall ever doing a feature or column on them or anything like that.

Marcello: That's what I was leading up to.

Brown: No, I don't. I think at that time I was...in that era of sports writing, you sort of covered the ballgame from the press box and described what was happening on the field. Later on, we went into a new wave in terms of sports writing, which, I think, is immensely better, I might add, where you pick up the quotes and do all the features and everything. But at that time, we really didn't do it quite that way. As I said, I talked with them on a personal basis innumerable times.

Marcello: Did you know anything about Abner's family background in terms of his father or anything of that nature?

Brown: No. I didn't know anything, really, about him or Leon other than that they attended Dallas Lincoln, and that was really about all I knew about them.

Cummings: We've mentioned all the main ingredients in this whole process, and I think everybody generally agrees that it went pretty smoothly considering the time period that we're talking about. Just in a review, why do you think it went so smoothly? Can one or two or three things be picked out and pointed to?

Brown: I think it was probably the people involved. Abner and Leon deserve an awful lot of credit for that in terms of they were the right people in the right place at the right time and probably in the right atmosphere. We talked about this much earlier in the conversation, but I think that the sort of the overall thing was "let's take this on a matter-of-fact approach, and let's try to avoid polarizing in either direction and go about it on a matter-of-fact, straightforward basis." I sort of think that's kind of what happened, and I think Abner and Leon were people that...what I'm trying to say is, there's no question but what they were targets of a great many racial slurs and things of this sort, and I think they were mature individuals and responsible individuals enough that they overcame this. In other words, they weren't the hotheads or the intemperate people, and had there been that situation, then I think it

could have been a very explosive situation. I think an awful lot of credit has to go to those two individuals.

Cummings: Would you agree that you also have to credit their talent as playing a major role in making this thing smooth?

Brown: Yes, I think so. Again, we go back to it certainly in Abner's case. That's true. But Leon's talent was not all that extraordinary. I think he could have continued to play varsity football had he chosen. I think he had enough ability, but he was certainly not your superstar. Yet he adapted well and handled it well, too. Yes, I think the athletic talent had an immense factor on it. That sort of gave them entree, let's put it that way. But after they had gained that entree, their personalities were such that they utilized the entree.

Marcello: I think that exhausts our list of questions, Mr. Brown. We want to thank you very much for having participated. You've said a lot of very interesting and, we think, important things, and I'm sure that we're both going to find them quite valuable when we get into this material.

Brown: I'll be very fascinated to receive a copy of the transcript (chuckle).

Cummings: Well, I enjoyed it. We do appreciate your time very much.

Brown: Well, I enjoyed it. You brought back a lot of fond memories for me.