



INTERVIEW WITH FERGUSON (FERGIE) JENKINS JR.
CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS

Interview Status: open to public confidential anonymous

Name of interviewee: Ferguson (Fergie) Jenkins Jr. (FJ)

Also present: Carl Kovacs (CK) and John Odie (JO)

Name of interviewer: HJ Jacobs (HJ)

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HJ: All right. So thank you so much for joining us. I'm Heidi Jacobs and I'm interviewing Mr. Ferguson Jenkins. Today is October 1st, 2016 and we're at the University of Windsor's Leddy Library. Just to start we've got a couple categories of questions; some background stuff, some questions about your father and the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, sports in his life after that team, sports in the community, the Chatham community in general, and then just some impact and significance of the... So, can you start by stating the name of the person who you knew from the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

0:00:37.3

FJ: Well my father's name was Ferguson Holmes Jenkins. Born in Windsor Ontario, Hotel Dieu.

HJ: Wow. [laughs] Can you give me a year too? Or...

0:00:46.5

FJ: He was born in 1909.

HJ: 1909. And do you have a, a date, birthday?

0:00:53.0

FJ: Ooh... Wow... I think it was August, maybe mid-August. My mother's born September, so I know my mother's date, but...

HJ: So August.

FJ: Yeah.

HJ: That's great. And so you said he was born in Windsor. Did he grow up in Windsor too?

0:01:06.9

FJ: He grew up in Windsor and moved to Chatham in the mid-30s, working for the William Pitt Hotel as a cook.

HJ: Ok. And can you tell me anything about his family, his parents, or his siblings?

0:01:19.5

FJ: Well from the family Bible, my dad's family were born in the Barbados. And they were part of, I guess an exploratory family that moved to Nova Scotia. They were called the Arcadians. But there's been a lot of different documents, and his family came from Kentucky originally. Like my mother's family. But, the family Bible said that they were born in Barbados, and migrated to Canada.

HJ: Ok. And your... did he have siblings?

0:01:54.5

FJ: My father had one brother, Cyril was his name.

HJ: Ok. And do you know if sports were important to him when he was growing up?

0:02:02.4

FJ: My dad loved to box, and he liked baseball.

HJ: Ok. Just those two, that's pretty amazing. Did other family members, did his brother play sports?

0:02:11.2

FJ: Ummm, I'm not really sure.

HJ: Ok. And do you think they watched sports?

0:02:14.6

FJ: I think they did. Windsor was a sports town, so I imagine, they probably were involved in different sporting events.

HJ: Ok. That's great. Do you know when he started playing baseball?

0:02:27.6

FJ: My dad? No, probably, you know he worked on these ship liners that were the Great Lake liners, and he learned how to cook when he was a teenager. And after he left doing that particular job he moved out, as I said to Chatham.

HJ: To Chatham. And why did he move to Chatham?

0:02:45.6

FJ: I think there was an opportunity to be a chef.

HJ: Ok.

FJ: And a cook for the William Pitt Hotel, with one of the pitchers, Bobby Gibson, was in this picture. They cooked together.

HJ: Ok. That's great, that's really interesting. Do you know what position he played?

0:02:59.2

FJ: My dad was a centre fielder.

HJ: Ok.

FJ: He's left-handed. He hit left-handed, threw left-handed.

HJ: Wow. Ok. And was he known for any particular skills or moves, or...

0:03:09.1

FJ: I think he had pretty good speed. He could catch the ball. He always told me that he was a good outfielder, when I was growing up.

HJ: Ok, that's great. Do you recall any memorable events or stories that he had about his playing?

0:03:23.3

FJ: Well, just the championship teams. He played with Flat Chase and a few of the other ball players. I think because of the fact he would reminisce a lot of times when I was a kid growing up. And we played at the same ball park, Stirling Park -- was a park that was named after the mayor, Mayor Stirling, Archie Stirling. And I've played some baseball there myself. But my dad used to reminisce about playing centre field there in Chatham.

HJ: That's great. Aas there any particular story that he liked to tell about a game or...

0:03:59.4

FJ: Well they were one of the better travelling teams, that played in a lot of the small cities. Wallaceburg, Leamington. Basically the first year he told me they were the first, the Chatham Black All-Stars, and then they changed the name to the Chatham Black Panthers. No I'm not even sure why they changed. But they won some championships in Strathroy, oh, Burlington, Ontario. They didn't go any further than probably the border of maybe Ottawa. But, they won a few championships. Uh, the trophy my dad had, and I had it for the longest time in my room, they won it in 38 and 39. And to this day I can't find that little trophy!

HJ: Oh no! Which, was that OBA?

0:04:49.3

FJ: It could've been an old OBA championship, yeah.

HJ: Ok. Um, do you know what he liked about the game?

0:04:56.3

FJ: Just to talk about it... because of him being an athlete, I think he loved to talk about his fellow players on the team. Flat Chase was probably the best pitcher, and the best catcher, and the best hitter of the ball. So, the Chase family were real popular family in the Windsor area. So there was a lot of Chases that played sports.

HJ: Mmhm, that's great. Did he ever talk about any challenges or difficulties playing ball, either in the community, or elsewhere?

0:05:27.4

FJ: Ooh, not really, no he didn't bring that up. I know that the biggest thing is when they played in the US they were more recognized because most of the players were all players of colour.

HJ: Mmhm, yeah. Ok, and he played at least a couple of years with the Chatham Coloured All-Stars in the 30s; did he ever talk about that particular team? I know you mentioned Flat Chase...

0:05:51.0

FJ: Well Flat Chase, Gouy Ladd, Boomer Harding, there were two Harding brothers, Ross Talbot played, ... two of the Olbey brothers played too, from Windsor. Abie Scott, they had another player. His name was ... Jackie Robinson, and oh come on, trying to think what are the other players that he was a teammate of. That was ... he was Indian, and I can't think of his name now...

HJ: Oh, Willie Shaugnosh?

FJ: Willie Shaugnosh, from Walpole Island.

HJ: Yep, yeah. Did he talk about him very much?

0:06:28.2

FJ: Well the biggest thing is the players of colour are all together, that he was the only Indian on the team.

HJ: Right, yeah. Um, did you personally know any of the...

0:06:38.1

FJ: I knew Flat Chase, not personally --I was a kid growing up. Boomer Harding, Len Harding... Len ended up being a policeman for a while, Boomer was a postal worker for the local Chatham postal company. Abie Scott was from Windsor. Two of the Turner brothers and the Olbey brothers are all from, from, from Windsor. I just knew them growing up as a kid.

HJ: Mmhm. That's great. Would you like to share anything about his life after he played with the All-Stars, like how he made a living after... you said he was a cook, did he stay that way, or...

0:07:19.4

FJ: Yeah he cooked for a private home, Mr. and Mrs. Houston. And they used to go to Florida a lot, and he was the chauffeur and the chef. And he recalls going to Vero Beach, seeing Jackie Robinson play.

HJ: Mm, wow.

FJ: Some of the other black all stars, uh, Larry Doby, ... uh probably uh... Campanella with the Dodgers. But I mean, he just, he hung around because the fact that he really loved sports, and then when my mother came on the scene, and I was born, he basically stayed right in Chatham. I was born in 42. I think he met my mother in 1940.

HJ: All right. Could you spell the family name that he worked for?

0:08:02.4

FJ: Houston ... oh, let me think, how they spelt it... H-O-U-S-T-O-N. Houston. They owned a sugar, they owned a sugar factory in Chatham.

HJ: Oh, ok. That's great.

FJ: You might get better spelling, I might be wrong.

HJ: Ok. Well that's great. And did he continue to play sports?

0:08:23.0

FJ: Not really, my dad, basically was just a hard working individual, worked for the, for the Houston family, and he worked as I said for the William Pitt Hotel, and later on the Holiday Inn. And he just made sure -- I was an only son, only child -- he made sure I got all the right equipment, if it was hockey, or basketball, or baseball. And he would take me to the different arenas, the sporting events that I had to go to. Staying close to the sports in that respect.

HJ: Mmhm, oh that's great. Um, Did he encourage others in his family to get involved in sports? I mean I guess that would be you, right?

0:09:02.0

FJ: You know, he encouraged me to do the best I could, and I think this is the reason why I wanted to be such a good athlete, because I got the encouragement from my father.

HJ: Mmhm. That's great. Um, do you think he saw a value in playing sports?

0:09:17.5

FJ: Well, he seen me as an individual, and I wanted to be a professional athlete. He didn't push me into the sport, but he just said, "Hey, I'm gonna get you the right equipment." He would say that all the time. "What you need, let me know, I'll get it for ya." Which really worked out well.

HJ: That's great. Umm, ... how do you think sports affected his life?

0:09:42.1

FJ: Well, when I became a professional athlete, signed with the Phillies in 1962, he would bring my mother to Chicago a lot of times, or Cincinnati, and my mother would miss me. My mother lost her sight early, from glaucoma. And then me being a child, I was a pretty big kid when I was born, she lost most of her sight in childbirth. She would always have a white transistor radio, and she would listen to the games on the radio.

HJ: Wow, that's ... Umm, was she a baseball fan too?

0:10:15.1

FJ: I think because, I played sports, she was a sports fan, more than anything else.

HJ: Mmhmm. Did his involvement in sports affect your life? And um, can you tell me a little bit about that?

0:10:24.9

FJ: Oh it definitely, I think because the fact that baseball was one of his loves, along with boxing. He really followed baseball. When I signed my early contract to play with the Phillies, he had a subscription, for the, one of the Miami papers, and he would get clippings. And when I went to Chattanooga, same thing, he would get, get ahold of the local paper, or in Arkansas, and get clippings. Win or lose, he wanted the article sent to Chatham. My dad had seven scrapbooks,

HJ: Wow.

FJ: We have them in the museum right now.

HJ: Oh that's great.

CK: Of Black History, has that museum, all the scrapbooks that he collected, it's like archives.

JO: They've all been digitized.

HJ: Wow, that's really neat. Actually just for the record, can you just state your name?

0:11:12.6

CK: Um, Carl Kovacs, President of the Fergie Jenkins Foundation.

HJ: Ok.

JO: John Odie, I'm the Executive Board Member.

HJ: Excellent, thank you so much. I wanna talk a little bit about the sports in the community of Chatham too, obviously the Chatham All-Stars were huge, a huge impact on that city. Do you know if sports were important in the black community when he was playing?

0:11:36.4

FJ: Well I grew up in the east end of town -- not that many black families, maybe 50 or 60 black families at the most. From Jenkins, Jackson, Johnson, Lucas, Van Dusen, cause there's Dutch on my side of the family. That, it was kind of a, a tight knit community. I've played a lot a hockey as a kid, baseball, ran track. I think because the fact that sports were a part of me growing up, my dad was basically an influence on that.

HJ: Mmhm. Umm... did he talk about any barriers or difficulties participating in sports within the broader community of Chatham?

0:12:20.4

FJ: Not really, Chatham was a cultural centre of a lot of different ethnic groups, from Jewish to uh, Pakistani, and we had ... Hungarian, Dutch, there was two Dutch families lived on the street behind me. English, Jewish, that were all a close knit area. And I went to school with all these different uh, ethnic situations.

HJ: Ok. Overall, what do you think is the impact or legacy of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

0:12:58.8

FJ: Well, because they won the championships in a couple different years, I think that people still remember, the impact of him, them, playing at Stirling Park. Horace Chase still lives there, Earl Chase still lives in Chatham. There are some descendants of some of the Lists, some of the Pryors. My family, my first wife's family, still lives in Chatham. Jenkins.

HJ: Ok. Were any of your family members involved in the public commemoration of the All-Stars, or the 50th anniversary in 1984, or the Blue Jays did the recognition...

0:13:38.8

FJ: Did I... I was supposed to go to that, wasn't I? Wasn't there something to do with the Chatham Black All-Stars? No?

CK: We didn't participate.

FJ: No.

HJ: Well guess we'll say no on that one. [laughs]

FJ: No, all right.

HJ: Is this, is this story of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars a story that you think people should know about?

0:13:57.1

FJ: I think so, sure, because of the fact that, there were so many good ball players. None of them really went on to be a professional athlete. This was all amateur baseball. But some of the stories of Flat Chase hitting balls out of ballparks; he was one of the -- really a strong individual. He hit balls 400 feet, in Strathroy I remember a story - there was a small building in centre field behind the wall, and nobody's ever hit a ball that far.

HJ: Yeah I've got a quote, someone said, they're still looking for balls that Flat Chase had hit.

FJ: Yeah.

HJ: Yep.

FJ: Definitely.

HJ: Yeah. Why do you think this is an important story for...

0:14:39.1

FJ: Well...

HJ: ...the community, or

FJ: The ballpark is, is not really in good shape now. Most of the ball playing now's at Rotary Park, and it's named after me, because I played a lot of baseball there. But the baseball program there from Tyke all the way up to Intermediate ball is still real popular in Chatham. We had so many good coaches from Doug Allen, who was the mayor for a while; Ross Day, Casey

Maynard, and so many other individuals that were connected that kept the baseball going. And I played on a couple of championship teams also.

HJ: Mmhhh. That's great. Is there anything else you would like to say about your father, or the team, or...

0:15:26.3

FJ: Well, because the fact that it was an influence there of keeping the baseball a popular - I think this is why I think I played so much baseball. My dad - they said they didn't push me into the game, but I was a tall kid growing up and I played first base. And Gene Dziadura is your scout that ended up signing in me to Phillies. They thought that because I had such a good arm -- I didn't start to pitch until I was 15, 16 years old. And I ended up within two, two and a half years signing a pro contract, with the Phillies. There was Billy Atkinson, Doug Melvin, Eddie Myers, and one other player I can never think of his name - that signed professional contracts, all for pitchers. All of us were professional pitchers. And we all worked out. And we all played in either Stirling Park or Rotary Park as kids when we were growing up.

HJ: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Chatham, Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

FJ: Well it was a small community. When I grew up there was only like 22,000 people. Now it's a lot bigger. I just think that sports was predominant activity that players wanted to do. And it could have been in hockey, could have been basketball, but more so baseball

HJ: That was great. Well thank you. I'm

FJ: My pleasure

HJ: I'm going to turn this off

FJ: All right.

[END]