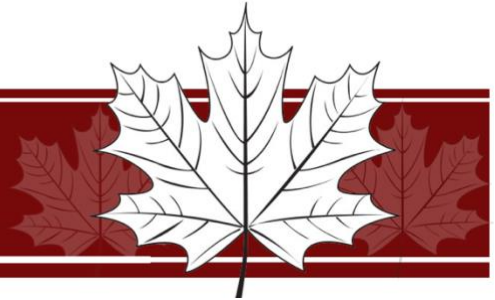


Telling the Stories of Race and Sports in Canada

A Symposium



TELLING THE STORIES OF RACE AND SPORTS IN CANADA INTERVIEW WITH ED WRIGHT

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Name of interviewer: Marsaydees Ferrell (MF)

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0.00.01

MF: Background questions about yourself.

EW: Okay.

MF: Okay. So, what is your name?

EW: My name is Edward, middle initial is L, last name is Wright. W. R. I. G. H. T.

MF: Where and when were you born?

EW: I was born March 3rd, 1945 at 62 Degge Street, Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

MF: And where did you grow up?

EW: I grew up in Chatham, Ontario.

0.00.32

Schools growing up (Victor Lauriston, Victoria Park School, John McGregor, Chatham Collegiate Institute)

MF: While living in Chatham, what schools did you go to?

EW: Elementary schools was Victor Lauriston. And then, I don't know if that was just kindergarten or I guess several grades and then I was moved over to Victoria Park School. And then from Victoria Park, I went to John McGregor and then from John McGregor to Chatham Collegiate Institute.

MF: So CCI, right?

EW: CCI, yes.

Family Background

MF: Can you tell me about your family, like your parents, your siblings?

EW: My father passed away when I was six years of age and then my mother was left with... well, I had six sisters and two brothers. Both my brothers were out of the home and one sister. But the rest of us were still there when my father passed. And then we moved, we moved from Degge Street, we moved over to Wellington Street. And my mother, she worked as a domestic for the Hearsts, who was probably one of the richest families in Chatham. And I had a sister who worked at Eaton's, a couple of sisters who worked at Eaton's and that's how we managed to survive.

0.02.10

Sports within the family (Taylorettes)

MF: Were any of your other siblings involved in any sports?

EW: One sister, she was quite a baseball player. They had a women's league there in Chatham and my one sister played on that team, they were called the Taylorettes. They were part of... they had a softball league in Chatham for women at that time. That had to be back probably in about the... I would say 1958, '59 in there.

MF: Okay.

EW: But the rest of my sisters, they were all in elementary school and they were all into track. Every day, you had that... I forget what they used to call that every year, we used to have field day. My sisters would all win trophies running track and what other things that they offered.

0.03.21

MF: Did you run track?

EW: Oh yeah, I ran track but on field day I tried a little bit at John McGregor, but I wasn't much of a... I was quick and I was pretty fast but I wasn't that fast.

MF: Okay. So, we're going to move on to some questions about your individual involvement in sports. Okay?

EW: Okay.

0.03.52

Sports growing up (baseball, Jaycess Park, Panthers)

MF: Can you tell me about sports growing up and what sports you played?

EW: Yeah, probably my first introduction to sports I think was as a Squirt. I don't know how but I have a distinct memory of being at Jaycees Park in Chatham, Ontario and I was outside the fence, standing there and watching all these other kids, little kids play, and I wasn't playing. And I don't know how I got there all the way from my home, which was... all I can remember is that the railroad tracks, so it had to be several miles down the railroad tracks to get to Jaycees Park from where I lived. And my distinct memories being just a little boy, probably six, maybe seven, just standing outside the field there watching them play and one day, I don't know how often I did it but all I remember is one of the coaches and one of the teachers say, 'hey, you want to play?' And next thing you know, here I was, just a little squirt because I was so small and tiny and next thing I was playing. Playing with the kids, I was playing baseball. And that was always my first love. And not only that, but I was also the bat boy for my brother's team called the Panthers, there were... my brother took over... I'm sure you know something about what is it, the '38 team out of Chatham, that the University of Windsor is dealing with?

0.05.35

MF: I'm not too sure.

EW: Yeah, my brother... there was in a continuation of that team and it was all of the older gentleman in the neighborhood who played baseball, competitive baseball. My brother took over as the coach and the manager and played too. But trying to keep that Black baseball team alive in Chatham, they'd play on the weekends. They'd invite teams in from Detroit to play and the middle of the game they'd pass a hat around, try and pay for the umpire and for the field and for uniforms and what have you. But I was bat boy and that's where... why I love being with baseball and stayed in Chatham minor baseball, grew up. Went to Peewee, we won... I've played on five All-Ontario Championship teams, from Chatham. One at Peewee, one in Bantam, one in Midget and two in Juvenile, where we won all Ontario Championships. So, that was always my first love. And then of course, I played hockey too. And all my... I played through the Minor Hockey League Association in Chatham there and went through the ranks from Peewee, to Bantam, to Midget to Juvenile. And then of course, to the Junior Maroons. Junior B Maroons.

0.07.13

MF: So, you played hockey and baseball?

EW: Played hockey and baseball and at CCI., of course I played football. Was on a very, very successful football team there at CCI. And at John McGregor, I also played soccer. And I was also on the basketball team at the John McGregor.

0.07.48

Hockey and the Wakabayashis (Detroit Tigers, Boston University)

MF: So you would say that during your adolescence you were heavily involved in sports all the way through?

EW: Yep. You know, whatever it was. A lot of my training came from just being down in the neighborhood where the Wakabayashis who were Japanese, they came from the west coast. They were interned after the war, and they lived down the street from where we lived. And of course, Herb and I were like brothers. As a matter of fact, I was like a brother in the family because I mean, every day, it was in the driveway. They had a long driveway and Mel who went on to Michigan to become an All-American ice hockey player and also signed a baseball contract with the Tigers. And then of course Herb and I both left Chatham, went to Boston University on hockey scholarships and Herb was a two-time All-American ice hockey player at Boston U. And you know, it was every day. We were in the driveway and if we weren't playing baseball, we were playing hockey. And I mean, it was every day [laughs]. You know, if the lighting got too bad where we would lose the ball and you know, 'hey, see you tomorrow' [laughs].

0.09.08

Influence of baseball as a youth (Cleveland Indians and Larry Doby)

MF: You said that baseball was your first love, can you tell me what you liked most about it?

EW: I liked the fact that they were starting of course to allow Blacks into the Major League Baseball. We lived, of course we lived in Chatham, which was right on Lake Erie, across the way from Cleveland. And of course, Cleveland Indians started with... you know, Larry Doby was the first Black baseball player in the American League and he played for the Indians and they were my team because I could listen to them on the radio, because the signal was directly across Lake Erie, which was good reception. Even better than reception from Detroit to hear about the Tigers. The Indians, and of course, a lot of the Black heroes that I aspired to in baseball, of course, they were baseball. They were baseball players and ice hockey was all pretty dominated by the French Canadians and of course it was a milky white sport.

0.10.22

Hockey as a youth (Al Henningan, Larry Babcock, Mel Wakabayashi)

MF: What did you love about hockey that made you want to play at Boston U?

EW: Well my whole concern was, I had some local heroes by the name of the Al Hennigan and Larry Babcock and of course Mel Wakabayashi. They left Chatham to go to school to get their education. And these were individuals that I saw on a regular basis that went on and became very... used the sport to be very, very successful academically. And of course, I was at 5'3", at 138 pounds. You know, where was I going in hockey or baseball, I was just so small. But I was quick and I think relatively a good athlete and the opportunity to go to Boston and further my education, and I always aspired to be a physical educator, which I became, and hockey of course was the avenue.

0.11.28

Hockey and adversity during travel hockey

MF: While playing hockey, did you face any difficulties or challenges in the sport?

EW: Oh yeah, ice hockey was... before I left Chatham to go to Boston, I was 19 years of age and I had to have an ulcer operation, which was the result of dealing with what I had to deal with in ice hockey and going into arenas, playing against Detroit, those games. And then of course, Essex Ontario, where you

know you'd had the whole sections in your arena yelling racial slurs. And I think probably a lot of it was the result of me being very, very good. And it was the same thing for my Japanese buddy, right. But those were some trying times. I can remember being on the bus, going to play Detroit in Detroit at the Olympia, and I mean, I'd be sitting alone and it was a lot of fear involved, a lot of fear. And ice hockey is quite a brutal sport. You know, it's survival and you have to take... as far as I was concerned, it was life and death approach to the game. One of my sayings was when I was playing the game was, at five-three and a half, I may not be the baddest but the baddest doesn't want to mess with me.

0.13.13

Friendship (Herb Wakabayashi)

MF: I like that. While you were playing hockey, were there any people that helped you or encouraged you in the sport, like coaches or teammates?

EW: Oh yeah. Well, of course my buddy Herb and I. I mean, we were like two peas in a pod. One wasn't going anywhere without the other. And I think that I really credit my going to Boston U, was a lot had a lot to do with the fact that, he was a star and he wasn't going anywhere without his sidekick. And that was me [laughs]. That had a lot to do with the decision coming out to Boston to bring us both there because one wasn't going without the other and then of course he was the star. And you know, I was the... what'd the Lone Ranger used to call it? Kemosabe [laughs].

0.14.17

Herb Wakabayashi

MF: Can you tell me more about Herb?

EW: Oh yeah, Herb was a very, very quiet, easy-going individual. He had vision and he wasn't very quick, but he allowed the opponent to use, he used their speed against them. I mean, with slow motion moves and his ability to handle the puck and he just had a vision on the ice. He was an extremely fantastic hockey player. Whereas I would be involved in the banging and corners and I was the corner man. I went into the corner there, you know I owned it, so don't mess with me in the corner.

0.15.09

MF: So that was your position in hockey?

EW: Yeah, I was a left winger. A left winger, yeah.

MF: And what position did Herb play?

EW: Herb was the centre man.

0.15.18

Playing hockey at Boston University

MF: Do you have any memorable stories or thoughts on playing hockey while you were at Boston University?

EW: Memorable stories, you mean like on the ice? Well, one of my claims to fame is, of course, I scored a goal in the Boston arena against Ken Dryden. Of course, who left that year to become the goaltender for the Montreal Canadians who won the Stanley Cup that year. But in front of 13,909 in the Boston Garden I... in the last minute the game, we were down one to nothing and I managed to score a goal on him. That was the biggest thrill of my life, right.

0.16.04

MF: Do you have any other achievements or milestones you would like to share about maybe even while you were playing baseball, when you were younger, or any of the sports you played?

EW: Oh, well they were so many. Winning five All-Ontario Chatham championships. Playing football at CCI and playing both ways, both offense and defense and being on a team where your defense for the entire season didn't allow a point against. I mean, those were some pretty serious thrills.

0.16.45

Playing hockey at the Boston Gardens, Teaching at University of Buffalo

MF: It's very impressive.

EW: Oh yeah and going to school in Boston and playing in the Bean pot there in front of, you know in the Boston Gardens and just that whole atmosphere, that college atmosphere and the places just jam packed. And you have guys like Bobby Orr and Derek Sanderson, these guys coming to watch you play. You know, Boston was a fantastic experience. Of course, in Chatham, I mean, just the love of being in Chatham. And I mean, my childhood was like a fantastic world. I mean it was ideal, because we had our sports and we had our friendships. Like I said, I can't think of having had a better childhood than I did, in spite of the fact that I didn't have a father, we were extremely poor but in a way we managed. You had a mother who taught you in her way, the good things in life. I mean, the curtains that hung on the windows at one of the wealthiest people in Chatham were eventually hanging on our windows, right. And the furniture and things like that. So, every day is an education as far as I'm concerned and that continues to this day. This day I was denied tenure at the University of Buffalo where I worked for 42 years. And of course, I do not have a PhD, I have a master's degree. And one of the negative factors posted by the director of our department in my denial of tenure was the fact that I'd yet to complete my education, because I didn't have the PhD. I had a chance to give a speech at the... when I was being honored with the dedication of a facility at the University of Buffalo, I have a facility named after me and in my thank you speech, I had the chance to tell the rest of the world the fact that I was denied tenure for not having completed my education was a fallacy because the only people I know who have yet to complete their education are six feet under, because every day is an education. Every day is a learning experience. Every day is an understanding experience. That's who we are.

0.19.43

Coaching at University of Buffalo

MF: I agree. While you were at the University of Buffalo, you were also coaching, correct?

EW: Yeah, I coached ice hockey for 12 years. When I first got there, was from 1970 through '82, I'd have to say that at the end of the 12 years I was pretty much a burned-out raving maniac. But at the same time I was teaching classes, I was also the director of the recreation and intermural program at the university. And in addition to that, I was a head coach. So, I was wearing three major hats really. And I decided that I'd had enough of the hockey. Was particularly disgruntled with the fact that I thought that the officials were taking it out on a Black head coach and they weren't about to let me be successful.

0.20.45

MF: Can you explain that a little more?

EW: Explain that a little more? Yeah, as a matter of fact, there's an NCAA rule as a result of what I did in one game. I thought that the referees were giving penalties to some of my players undeservingly. I don't think that the position... and as a matter of fact, for what I did was, I had my players exchange numbers

on their jerseys. I had them exchange their jerseys in the locker room before the start of the first period. So if you're wearing number 16, then all of a sudden you're wearing number nine, you follow me?

0.21.40

MF: Yes.

EW: And when a referee is about to call a penalty, he is supposed to say 'number 9, two minutes for holding.' Okay. Instead, so all of a sudden I'm wearing 16, you're wearing 9, my number, and yet he's calling my number right. And I'm not even wearing that number that has a penalty. So, from a psychological point of view, I think I proved my point that my players were being unjustly penalized. And so now, the NCAA states that at the beginning of the game, you must have your number and your name on the back of your Jersey must correspond.

0.22.32

MF: What was the... so that was the outcome of your experiment?

EW: The outcome of that? I think from a deeply psychological way, I think it's really, really... it's difficult to handle. I mean, even though the players on the bench were having difficulty dealing with the fact that, 'hey, I'm wearing somebody else's number.' And I think the message relayed across, that it was confusing. But it also, I think that if you have on... like if I were to have on Herb Wakabayashi's number, then I would automatically, in my mind, begin to play like the way I think he plays. You see what I'm saying, 'hey I'm Herb today.' Just like when you're growing up in Europe, you're pretending that you're an NHL hockey player and you're on the street playing street hockey, right. Like today, I'm Maurice. I'm Rocket Richard. Tomorrow I'm playing Gordie Howe. And that whole vision is of what you visualize having seen them play and the way that they play. So, it's a pretty deep psychological, ah what would you call it? Transfer, I guess.

0.24.04

MF: So, you did this experiment for your players or you were trying to prove that the, the referee...

EW: I was trying to prove a point. I was trying to make it quite clear to the officials that I had had enough of what they were doing and I was going to show them how they were doing it.

MF: And what were they doing exactly?

EW: What they doing? They were calling penalties on my players without looking at their numbers.

MF: Just calling them?

EW: Yeah, calling them by their name.

0.24.40

MF: So, was it targeting certain... like particular players or just your whole team?

EW: I think particular players on my team, who were some of my aggressive players. I think across the board. I think it boiled down to... I just felt that I wasn't getting a fair shake from the officials and I would go into rinks where I would see the opposing coach going into the officials' locker room before a game, and I just didn't think that was appropriate.

0.25.22

MF: I definitely agree.

EW: As a matter of fact, in Buffalo where I went, I made a presentation in Boston, Massachusetts for Buffalo to get a national chapter for the National Ice Hockey Officials Association. I gave the presentation on their behalf so that they would get a charter. They got the charter, everything went well. A couple of years later when I thought I wanted to do some officiating, they would not allow me to join the association. The [inaudible] officials in Buffalo. I just ah... you understand how things are done and you just go about your business.

0.26.14

MF: Like the politics of the situation?

EW: The politics of the situation, correctly. Correct.

0.26.20

Coaching at University of Buffalo

MF: What else can you tell me about your coaching career at the University of Buffalo?

EW: Coaching I think... I'm the type of individual who likes to take the total picture and I try to break it down and put it in its simplest form. And to me, after 12 years of coaching, I think I came to the understanding that there's only two things you could do for an individual. You could either, got your arm around his shoulder or you're booting him in the rear end. And your success is going to depend on your ability to know when an individual needs to be booted and when he needs to be stroked positively with the arm around his shoulder. And if you're not doing either or, then you have lost the individual because you're not paying attention as the coach. And I think that applies not only just in... as a coach, but I think as a parent. I think you need to know when your child needs to be loved. You need to know when you need to be a little hard on them to let them know that... hey, you're doing it because you're paying attention, you love them. And I guess the difficult part of all of that is making them understand that when you're being harsh, you're booting them in the rear end a little bit, that it's because you care, because you're paying attention. And you want them to learn and you want them to grow. And it's not because you don't like them, because you've got something against them, you know duh-dit-duh-dit-duh-dit. You know, these excuses that the youngsters want to make, people want to make. I had 19-year-old individuals coming to me at the University of Buffalo to play hockey and some of them had never had anybody raise their voice to them. And As soon as I raised my voice, it was a traumatic experience.

0.28.29

First Black coach at the University of Buffalo

MF: So how was your experience coaching? It seems you liked it was, you liked it. How about like your teams' run? Like how... what was your record like?

EW: Well, I was at the University of Buffalo... when I got there in 1970, they brought me in. I was hired as the... I was the first Black coach hired at the University of Buffalo in the athletic department. What I had, the tools that I had to work with were number one, I had what they called a foreign student tuition waiver. I did not have a grant and aid scholarships, I had a foreign student tuition waiver. So, what I would do is I would... and Canadians qualified. Of course, I'm Canadian. So, you know, we're going to be a Canadian hockey team, right. And I'm bringing you in, you're getting your tuition paid for. And what I would do was, I'd bring people, well quite a few players came from Leamington, Ontario. I had several from Windsor. But I had them from Toronto and they would come in and normally what they would do is they would find housing in Fort Erie, Ontario, which is just across from Buffalo. Because a lot of the people in the neighborhood were Americans who had these, winterized cottages on the lake. And of course, they

were happy to have people in there during the winter months just paying the heat and what have you and relatively free rent. And it worked out beautifully because of the school year. And so my players would come and then they would, that they would, they'd lived together in these winterized homes in Fort, Erie. Commute to school every day. That was the gist of it all. And that's why we were very, very strong in the beginning because I had a 99% Canadian hockey team with a lot of experience coming with the Canadian background. So here we are, and the next thing you know we're in a championship game because we had a run, my second year there, and we knocked off a team that went onto become a pretty powerful Division One team. And we went into their rink in a game and Michael Denner had a 56 save shutout. We beat them 4 to nothing and the hockey world to the east was like, they were amazed at what Ed Wright had done in Buffalo. And then very shortly after that, the following year, the university made a decision to no longer consider Canadians as foreign students. So, I lost my tuition package. So, they ended with a matter of having to deal with American born Canadian... or American born players out of Buffalo, the Buffalo area. And of course, the quality of our play became you know less than it could have been if I'd had the more experienced Canadians playing for me.

0.32.01

Politics of College sports

MF: Tell me more about why the school would do that?

EW: I think a lot of it had had to do with jealousy within the department. As a matter of fact, we were moving into a brand new building and the third phase of that building was supposed to be a hockey rink. And it just so happened that at that time the athletic director, who was also the head basketball coach. So, and here we are, I'm building a team that's playing off campus and we're putting you know 2 to 3000 students into the rink to play and the basketball team is putting 50 people in a gym on the campus. So a lot of it had to do with the jealousy factor. What's going to be the dominant sport. And we were certainly that. And 'we can't have that, we want basketball.' So what they did was they decided that the money that was supposed to be for the rink, the new rink, was going to be put in... there's going to be a much larger expansion of the basketball facility.

0.33.22

MF: So did you guys... so you guys didn't end up getting a rink?

EW: No, we did not so we had to continue... we continued to play off campus.

MF: And where did you guys... like just local rinks around Buffalo or like...

EW: One was right near campus, the first rink we used. It wasn't very far. And then they built a brand new rink in Cheektowaga, which was from campus, which we had to go every day in vans to practice, it's probably I would say, a half an hour ride away to get to the rink and we played there for several years. Then we moved to another rink in another part of the city of Chatham... of Buffalo, which was probably about 45 minutes to an hour away from campus.

0.34.14

MF: Okay. We're going to move on to like the third section of our interview if that's okay?

EW: Okay.

0.34.23

MF: So we're going to jump back to Chatham and we've kind of already touched on this, but can you tell me about the sports in your community or neighborhood while you're growing up, like what sports were everybody playing?

EW: Well, I came from the East End of Chatham, Herb and I both, we were from the East End of Chatham. I guess we were probably both the only ones that came from the east end of Chatham to play sports throughout all of my time in Chatham. Of course, I had all my black friends in the neighborhood, they just weren't involved in sports. They were involved.... [Audio cutout]

0.35.12

MF: Hello? Oh, sorry it cut out.

EW: Oh, okay. Are you back?

Activities growing up (Roller Skating, Hockey)

MF: Yes. Sorry.

EW: Yeah so, I can remember growing up in Chatham at that time roller skating was a big thing on Sundays for the Black community. And I mean, the Black teenagers who would come, they'd come all the way from Detroit to Chatham. Windsor, all of the area around Chatham. Everybody on Sunday nights, the Black community was at the roller rink. And right next to the roller rink was the ice hockey arena. I mean, I can remember playing a game of ice hockey for the Maroons, you know, finishing the game, showering and walking next door and putting on my roller skates and enjoying the fun of being with the rest of the Black community and all the friends I had in that community, my sisters and everybody.

0.36.16

MF: So this is on Tweedsmuir, isn't it?

EW: Yeah, it's on Tweedsmuir.

Music in Chatham (Kingston Auditorium, Stevie Wonder)

MF: Oh, okay, I used to live right by there.

EW: Oh yeah, you remember Kingston Auditorium, before they tore it down? Oh yeah, I can remember seeing Stevie Wonder come there when he was [laughs]... he was there on stage at Kingston Auditorium, you know with his first song called "Fingertips".

MF: That's amazing. So, when you played sports, you weren't playing alongside other people in the Black community, it was more the white community that you were playing the sports with?

EW: Oh yeah, all my teammates were... you know, Herb and I were the Japanese and a Black and the rest of... all of our players were pretty much white.

0.37.09

Travel hockey (Windsor, Riverside)

MF: Okay. Do you remember going to games or watching sports?

EW: Oh, I can remember, not vividly, but there was one incident when I was a Peewee playing and the Chatham team was going to Windsor, or to Riverside to play against Riverside and they were not going to let me play because they just weren't going to let¹... the Riverside team said that they would not play if I played. They didn't want me to play against them. And the Chatham coaches of the team at that time

¹ Riverside is a neighbourhood in Windsor, Ontario.

says, 'well hey, if Ed doesn't play then they the team's not playing.' That was a Riverside incident at that time.

0.37.54

MF: Do you remember who the coach was?

EW: It was Mr. Phipps. He was the coach of the Peewee team.

MF: Finch?

EW: Phipps. P-H-I-P-P-S, I think.

MF: And when you're Peewee, about how old when you when you played Peewee...?

EW: Well, that was probably, I was probably nine. Nine, ten, yeah.

MF: So, you would definitely say that he was encouraging and supportive?

EW: Oh yes, great love. Of course, in Chatham, the coaches I had all along, I mean they were all just fantastic individuals.

0.38.40

Coaches (Chatham Minor Baseball Association, Willy Casanova, Bruna Cassanova, Chatham Maroons, George Aiken, Copper Lake)

MF: Can you tell me more about some of your coaches and some experiences you've had with your coaches?

EW: In baseball particularly, every summer they would bring in, the Chatham Minor Baseball Association would hire a very, very talented coach that they could get their hands on to come and work with us kids. And I mean, out of Windsor, Ontario they brought in the Casanova brothers. The first one was Willy Casanova. I had him, he was a coach as a Peewee and then I had his brother, Bruno Casanova who was a coach when I was Bantam and Midget. The Casanova's we're out of Windsor and they had minor league baseball experience in the States and they would come and they would teach us, we just absolutely love these guys. I mean even as Peeweess we had practices and the things that they taught us, I mean we kind of intimidated teams that we played because of what we were taught. We practiced every day with these individuals during the summer. And they taught us the game. And Spires hockey was pretty much local individuals. Several of the coaches I had growing up had played for the senior Maroons, the Chatham Maroons. George Aiken and Copper Lake. I mean, these were famous Maroon hockey players for the Chatham Maroons. They certainly taught us how to play the game and play it successfully.

0.40.41

Chatham Maroons

MF: Did you watch a lot of Maroons hockey games growing up?

EW: Oh yeah. Yeah, whenever I could get there to watch the Maroons in Chatham, hey yeah, I was there. If I had to sneak in, I would sneak in [laughs]. But yeah, a lot of my heroes back then, the games between the Maroons and the Windsor Bulldogs, I mean those were like war games.

0.41.11

MF: What was the atmosphere like watching those games?

EW: Oh, it was exciting. I mean, when you're coming up at the time... my mother used to wake me up in the middle of the night and say 'hey, hey, hey, hey, relax' [laughs]. Cause I'd be playing baseball, I play hockey right in my sleep, that's what I live for. And although I did quite well academically in elementary school, I think that's what really carried me through was the teachings at that elementary level that carried me through because in junior high and at CCI, I just did the least I had to do to get by because I was still involved with my baseball bat and my hockey stick. I didn't have time for anything else.

0.42.05

Various Community Organizations (Jaycees, Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Knights of Columbus)

MF: Do you remember people in the community, while you were living in Chatham, that we're responsible for organizing the sports?

EW: Yeah, as a matter of fact, I have to give a great deal of credit for what helped me get through because of my poverty were the service clubs in Chatham like the Jaycees and I mean like the Rotary Club. Kiwanis. Knights of Columbus. And particularly when I got a little bit older there, I couldn't afford to skates, I couldn't afford sticks. I mean, these people stepped up and they wanted me to have the experience and I could never be too thankful for what they did for me. I mean, as matter of fact, I give thanks every day for just my existence. When I give thanks for the life that I've been granted.

0.43.19

MF: Do you remember any of the individuals who worked for these organizations that were helping or what other kind of things they did?

EW: No, not really because when the people in these organizations, give up their time and give up their finances. I mean, they don't want to be up front and noted for that, they're just contributing to their community and hoping it to be worthy educational and growing experience for youngsters.

MF: Okay. Overall, would you say that sports were important and valuable in your community or in the Chatham community as a whole?

EW: Oh, yeah, I think that sports certainly are a beneficial factor in any community because of the lessons and the discipline that's needed to be a part of a team. The hard lessons and the easy lessons and it's a part of life. Baseball's a part of life, hockey is and you know your ability to transfer that from the playing field and the playing environment to your everyday life and how you deal with adversity. I mean if you're not taught those early lessons in adversity growing up, then when you get to... as you grow up, when you have somebody raise their voice for the first time and then it's not the shock that it is if you haven't had any lessons growing up. And I see that particularly in the youth of today. So it's a major problem is, they've been so mother-coddled and loved and it's got to be that, of course, but it's also got to be the harshness of life, the adversity that you're going to encounter when you grow. And what appears to be adverse is dependent on the lessons you've had in that area.

0.46.03

Community sports (Stirling Park, Taylor Community Centre, swimming, hockey)

MF: Just finishing up the section about sports in the community, are there any particular memorable stories or memories about sports in your communities, like going to parks or events?

EW: Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, Stirling Park and the Taylor Community Centre, which was in the Black community, the Stirling's Park and the Taylor community. Oh yeah, those and the swimming pools and going swimming and playing baseball and playing ice hockey on the outdoor rinks, that they would make in the wintertime. And some of the older gentlemen that did that, like took care of the parks, those

are all just a learning experiences that kept your mind occupied, kept your mind occupied with the positive aspect of life, and leading other friends and dealing with the difficulties of friendship and the intimidating aspect of life. That's what I often remember being in the east end of Chatham, I mean there were individuals that you had to be aware of, who had reputations for being difficult. And you learn how to deal with that whole intimidation aspect of life and it's like I said, I may not be the baddest, but the baddest doesn't want to mess with me. You know what I'm saying, you learn how to be able to walk down the street and not to be afraid of your shadow.

0.47.58

MF: Have you been back to Chatham recently?

EW: Oh, I get back... when was the last time I was there, probably about three months ago.

MF: Three months ago.

EW: Yeah. My sister is the president of the Chatham Black Historical Society.

MF: Oh yeah. I remember Dr. Wright saying that. But since the last time you've been in Chatham, would you say things have changed in the community sports wise?

EW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I've heard things about the minor baseball, the kids just are participating. They can't... some team they can't even form teams, because of the lack of individuals, or youngsters who wanted to go. The other drawback too I think is that really hurts my community is of course is the cost of sports today and what they've done. I mean now, these sports teams, the travel, I mean everybody gets to travel. They're travelling to Chicago, taking a team to Chicago for a weekend, taking a team here for a weekend. And I mean, you're talking thousands of dollars per individual, per athlete, per sport, and some people just can't afford it. That's the downfall of a whole lot of it. And they've turned it into a, I don't know what you could say... I mean, I can understand the value of taking an individual and travelling for that whole learning experience. But I think it's a little bit much. I really do. I think that these... the world has just changed so drastically in terms of turning everything into a moneymaking system.

0.50.17

MF: So, you say that sports are just less accessible for the community?

EW: Yeah, I think so. Definitely.

MF: Okay, great. So, our final section, I'm just going to ask you about some questions about some other teams that were in Chatham. Is that okay?

EW: Okay. Yeah, by all means.

Taylor Athletic Club and Chatham Panthers

MF: So, what can you tell me about the Taylor ACs and the Kent Panthers? And what years did you watch these teams?

EW: Oh, well the TAC, I never saw them play, that team play, but I heard stories growing up, like I said. But I spent quite a bit of time with the Panthers as their bat boy. My brother was the manager and on their uniforms it had the TAC Taylor Athletic Club was the moneymaking aspect of the Panthers. But I knew a lot of the players and I learned... and everybody back then, I mean, particularly the Panthers, I mean everybody had style. The players were great and they played their positions and they had style and something that I always aspired to when I played too. You learn so much, the little intricate details of the game and how people approach the game and how they play it. I can remember in Chatham when

they'd bring in a former, well he was in a minor league system, but he was one of my favorites was Abbie Scott from Windsor. I mean, he was close to being in the major leagues but never really got there. But I got to see him play and got to see him practice. They'd bring him in on the weekends to play and you really just pick up being around those individuals, you learn so much. And I'm a firm believer that there's something to be learned from everybody you meet, everybody you greet and see. And you know, it's either how to be or how not to be and what you're willing to more or less steal from an individual and make it a part of who you are, you know?

0.53.03

MF: Yeah.

EW: You're like a sponge, you absorb all of that. And that's the whole aspect of growing and of course the knowledge.

MF: Just to clarify, while you were bat boy, around what time would you say this was?

EW: Oh, let me see. I was born in '45, my father died father died in '51, so I would say probably about '56, '57, '58 in there.

Chatham Panthers (Mel "Beef" Cross, Stirling Park, Chuck Cooper, King Terrell)

MF: Okay and you said that the players had a lot of style. Can you tell me more about the players?

EW: Oh yeah, we had... I can remember one with a big left hander, played first base. And of course, the nicknames you learn is here was Cross. His name was Mel Cross but his nickname was "Beef" Cross. Everybody called him "Beef." He's a big heavysset guy. And I mean, he was big and he was strong and he could hit right. You go to Stirling's Park that fence there and he'd hit the ball over the right field fence into the oil refinery yard [laughs]. And then you had Chuck Cooper in centre field. And I mean, he was like smooth, he played the game with the smooth style, you know everything. And, you know, then you, third base, you had a left hander, you didn't really see that, but he was a left-handed player, right. I mean, he was fantastic, King Terrell. He was called King Terrell.

MF: What was it, King...

EW: Terrell. T-E-R-R-E-L-L, I believe it is. Yeah, his name would be on that team that's in the Sports Hall of Fame there that Windsor's been dealing with.

0.55.11

Baseball players (Abbie Scott, Earl and Horace Chase, Billy Selby)

MF: Okay. Yeah, that's a familiar last name for me.

EW: Yeah, and then of course there was Abbie Scott and I'm trying to think of so many. Of course, the Chase's. Big Earl Chase and Horace Chase and Billy Selby. And then of course my brother, he was so small that his nickname was Mick, they called him Mickey. For of course Mickey Mouse [laughs]. Don't mention that, just Mick.

0.55.48

Taylor ACs and Chatham Panthers

MF: That's funny, you said that you heard about the Taylor ACs. You never got to any...

EW: I really wasn't knowledgeable about the whole background, before I got there, just TAC. All I knew was that it stood for Taylor Athletic Club, right. But I didn't know really anything about the club or how, what had gone on before I arrived on the scene, you know what I mean? But my brother of course

would've known all about that, and he knew all of those players before him. And they taught him and that's why, he just thought that was a thing to continue to do for the community. And like on Sundays, that was an event for the older folks in the community. 'Hey, the Panthers are playing today over Stirling Park, come on over and watch the game and see the neighborhood boys playing.'

0.56.50

Sunday Baseball (The Singing Catcher)

MF: So that was like an event every Sunday, people would come out...

EW: Oh yeah, pretty much on Sundays, whenever they could schedule a team. They would bring in teams from Detroit. I can remember they bought in this one team from Detroit and they had a catcher and he was called the singing catcher. And I mean like he would be behind the play and he'd say, 'come on Baby, pitch that ball in here to me' [laughs]. I mean, it was kind of a distraction, you know, catchers can be distracting and he was, it was quite a show.

0.57.23

MF: So, the Panthers, as a team you would describe them as smooth. How else would you describe them?

EW: Smooth? Like I said, I thought they had style and I remember my brother for the first time, he ordered their uniforms were like the New York Yankees, the pinstripes. And I mean, when they put those pinstripes on, I mean they thought they were playing for... in the World Series [laughs].

MF: So, they took it very seriously.

EW: Oh yeah. Yeah. I mean it was like, hey when they came to play on Sunday, on the Sundays, it was serious business. And I wait for them to exhibit their inner being, so to speak.

0.58.22

The Singing Catcher

MF: Are there any particularly memorable moments or events related to the Panthers that you'd like to share?

EW: No, I think that like the singing catcher from Detroit [laughs], I particularly remember that. But I mean, as the bat boy, I had to have their bats arranged with the labels up in a fan so to speak. I had to have them laid out and each player had a particular bat that they were just in love with and you would still look at the bat and you'd say, 'I wonder why he really likes that bat,' but he does. And then of course going on the trips and I'd be in the car between two of these older men, and all I know is I'd be falling asleep. And I'm sure the conversation was something that I wasn't supposed to hear. You know, I was there and it was an experience that was a part of who I am today.

0.59.42

MF: My final question is, do you have a sense of how the people in the community felt about the team, about the Panthers?

EW: About the Panthers?

MF: Yeah.

EW: Oh yeah, they loved them because, I mean, these are people who had full time jobs who lived in the community. Some of them had kids, they were married and just the very, very successful men in the community who had jobs and worked every day. Went to work to provide for their families. And then on

Saturday or Sundays they had a game that was their outing for the day. And of course, with Stirling Park, one of the big events there was for anybody to hit a home run. And if you hit a home run, then you were given a free brick of ice cream at Stirling Drug Store. And when a player hit a home run, I mean it was like, in the major leagues when somebody hits a home run, the fireworks go off, it's an event. But yeah those were special moments to see a home run hit over the fence and then all of a sudden all you could do, you know you weren't going to get it, but you could taste ice cream.

1.01.12

MF: Did home runs happen often at Stirling Park?

EW: Yeah, quite a bit. Yeah.

MF: Well that was my final question, but is there anything else you want to touch on that you feel that we didn't address fully?

EW: I think I pretty much... at least I'd like to think that I have relayed how important sports have been to me and contributed to my life. And I think, it certainly paved the way to me to become a you know a...

END