

Curt Flood, outfielder for St. Louis Cardinals

Interviewer: Clifford Evans

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Clifford Evans (CE): Curt Flood, outfielder on the St. Louis Cardinals, going in five...Curt Flood, you came up to the Major Leagues in 1958. You played in 59, you played in 60 but you didn't really arrive until 1961. Now, what happened along the way?

Curt Flood (CF): Well, more than anything else Cliff, I really got a chance to play last year. I got a chance to settle down and learn a little bit about playing in the major leagues. About the pitchers, about playing the hitters, things like that.

CE: Well, you certainly knew enough about how to play the outfield because, first of all, you were brought up to the major leagues and that's an indication of talent. Secondly, you remained in the major leagues so of course you had talent and know-how. Why was it in 1958, you didn't play as many games, or '59 or '60 as you did in '61. Were you developing along the way, you weren't ready, or were there other factors?

CF: You answered your question. I was just a young fella coming out of the minor leagues, at the time I was with the Reds. Actually, it was '57, and the outfield was more or less set. They were fielding the best ball team that they had. There were several people ahead of me. I was playing in and out, latter part of the ballgame generally where defense was more important than anything else. Shortly thereafter though I got a chance to start regularly, I think was 1960, and I was able to start quite a few more ballgames.

CE: Of course, last year was a great year for you. It wasn't only that you hit .322 but you played in 131 games and you proved, if nothing else, that you can play an awful lot of outfield. You were there with Stan Musial on one side and Joe Cunningham on the other side. You played a pretty big centerfield. How far back, was it, that you wanted to play pro baseball?

CF: Well, I guess it goes back to my early childhood. I've always played baseball of some sort. In grammar school, the American Legions, semi-pro, right on up through the ranks. Into high school and finally into the pros.

CE: And when you were younger did you actually have a dream that someday, you hoped that strongly, that someday you would play in the major leagues?

CF: Well, I guess every kid does. Mine was no more intense than anyone else, I guess...

CE: No. All kids don't. I would say most kids want to play baseball and have dreams of Frank Merriwell¹ but there's sort of a different intensity of a dream. And I was wondering just how much you...How hard were you pulling for baseball as a career? Was there anything else you ever wanted to do?

CF: Well, no not really. I really never thought about playing ball professionally until I got into high school when the scouts started to come around and to talk to me. It was then that I realized the potential of

¹ Frank Merriwell was a children's book character and radio serial hero who was an expert athlete and solved mysteries.

being a ballplayer. Not necessarily a Major League ballplayer. You realize you can make a pretty good salary in the minor leagues, of course, this is the top of the profession and everybody wants to be on top of their field. After I found that I had the chance to play in the Major Leagues then my desire became a little more intense. I worked a little harder, maybe.

CE: Well, here you were being graduated from high school and you had the opportunity to play pro ball. Did you give any thought to going to college or was your ambition completely directed towards professional baseball?

CF: I didn't really have any intentions of going any further in school than I did. For one thing, my family couldn't afford it and I didn't have the chance for scholarships or anything like that. I was really concentrating on more of a commercial career in art or something similar. I, however, had a chance to go on and play pro ball right out of high school and I sort of jumped at the chance because I needed the dough.

CE: You said art. Do you draw or did you draw or paint or anything like that?

CF: Well, I did quite a bit of it in high school.

CE: What kind of artwork did you do?

CF: Commercial art. Letting and poster design. Design, illustrating, things like that.

CE: For the school publications?

CF: Yes, as a matter of fact.

CE: What kind of drawings were they?

CF: Well, in school they were more or less for the different affairs that went on. You know the posters for the Junior Prom, etc. Nothing any more than that.

CE: You are just a self-effacing guy. People who have talent, who can draw up posters, have talent. Everybody can't do that. The fact you didn't become a Rembrandt is no reflection on you. In baseball, when you first started career, when you were pointing for the major leagues, when you started to climb, was there any one player that was your idol?

CF: Of course, the one real idol that I had was Jackie Robinson. He set a real wonderful example for most of the young fellas coming along during his time. Everyone had the desire in the back of their mind to follow in his footsteps. And I was no different. I respected him as a man and as a ballplayer as well.

CE: What position did you play when you were in high school?

CF: I've always been an outfielder. In high school, I played left field. A little bit at third base, but not very much. Basically, I've always been an outfielder.

CE: Curt Flood, during the past few years that you've been in the major leagues, was there any one pitcher who was particularly difficult for you?

CF: They're all difficult in the Major Leagues or otherwise they wouldn't be here...

CE: But that's a cliché for an answer answer, come on...

CF: Well, [Don] Drysdale gives me a great deal of trouble. I don't mind saying that because I don't feel like I'm alone. Warren Spahn gives me a great deal of trouble. Many, many others. [laughs] I hesitate to name...

CE: [laughs] Well there can't be a great many, many others for a fella who hits .322 for the season. You probably weren't one of the first ten but that's a healthy batting average. Is there anything more than, is there one thing more than anything else that you would like to accomplish in baseball, looking ahead, not only 1962, but looking ahead as far as you can?

CF: The one thing that I would like to do, this year if possible, and since I've been in the Major Leagues, I've never had the chance to play in every ballgame. I'd like to do that. Even though there are 162 to be played, it would be a great thing for me, if I could play every ballgame just for one season.

CE: Well, here's hoping that in 1962 you get to play in 162 ballgames and still hit over .300. Curt Flood, to you, all good wishes. This is Cliff Evans, reporting.