

**Ellis Clary**  
**Interviewed by Dave Heller**  
**November 21, 1994**

A: ... (With the St. Louis Browns), we had a great center fielder in Mike Kreevich and had a hell of a first baseman in George McQuinn. And a young, rising player named Al Zarilla, who was an excellent player at the time, he was just like 21 years old. We sold him to the Red Sox, you know. He played well over there for a number of years. The team was a little better than you thought and the team we played in the (1944) World Series, I'd like to take my chance with that outfit today. They (the St. Louis Cardinals) didn't have nobody but Stan Musial and Marty Marion and Whitey Kurowski and Walker Cooper, Mort Cooper and Harry Brecheen ... goddamn, they had a hell of a team. And they beat us four games to two, we felt we should have won the damn thing. We were leading them 2 to 1 and looked like we had the third game won but (Nelson) Potter the pitcher threw the ball out into the street and blew the game, so we felt we should have won it but they beat us 4 to 2. They had a great team, no question about it. A great baseball team.

Q: Now were you with the Browns the whole year, from beginning to end, spring training to World Series?

A: I was there three years.

Q: I noticed you didn't play many games that year, but you were there the whole time?

A: Well, me and Floyd Baker were the utility men. If somebody doesn't get hurt, the utility men don't get too much playing.

Q: I've heard from some other players that you kept the clubhouse a little loose back then.

A: We shot a little shit. Bullshit is an international language. The more you got a routine, the better off it seems like you are. You don't want to take yourself too seriously in any kind of game, like they're doing today, like in this (1994 players) strike here. These bastards are making so much damn money, they got serious about everything ... we started the players association today. Players today don't care about that ... anyways, they're swimming in money today. I don't know, maybe we would have been horseshit too if we'd have had all that money to play with.

Q: Do you think the quality of play today is equal to when you played back in '44?

A: Well, no, not during the war years. But after the war, it is good as it is today. People always want me to compare the past with today because I've happened to see everything that's happened in the big leagues since 1941. Seen 'em all come and go. I don't do that, I don't live in the past. Everyone thinks that if you played way back then, you're going to say that they're better than they are today. That's a bunch of shit. The overall play is better today, and you got better parks, better lights, better gloves. The main thing is that baseball is better today on account of the gloves they use. If you get that glove on a ball today, you're going to catch it. Back then, you had those smaller gloves, and geez, it was hell. You had to get a hold of the ball to catch it back then. But today you got a whole lot better glove. You know Hank Greenberg came up with a glove with what they called a fishnet built on it, it's like these gloves today. They ruled that thing out. They wouldn't let him use it. He had the webbing of his glove that made an extension on that where he could catch anything that the glove would catch. It's no more than the gloves they use today. Shit, I wouldn't have screwed up all those double play balls if I'd had that glove they use

today. But the play is better today, there's no question about that. Everything is better. The bat's still made out of wood. But you have better equipment, better shoes, better everything. And the parks are so much better. And the travel. These players don't have to get on a train and rail somewhere. They get in a damn plane, and they're there in a couple of hours. It doesn't matter where you're going. I was a coach in the 1980s on the Toronto Blue Jays, and I know that things are a lot better. A lot of people don't go the amount of years as I did. As a scout, a player, and a coach, I've seen everything that's happened in the big leagues since '41. But I'm not one of those guys that's going to say it was better then than it is now, that's a bunch of shit. Although I don't see no Ted Williams walking around these ballparks today, I don't see no Willie Mays, and I don't see no Stan Musials. You got a hell of a lot of players, but I don't think they got the standouts they used to have. I don't know, maybe that's just my opinion, but that's what I think. Another thing, the players are so much damn bigger. These people are giants compared to those guys when I was playing back then. Giants. Just like this pro football now, if you're not 300 pounds, you'll get killed at the line of scrimmage.

Q: Speaking of pro football, I heard a couple of stories in the last game of the series against the Yankees, you had the (Chicago) Bears game on the radio in the dugout?

A: No, it wasn't in the dugout. It was in the clubhouse. And Dizzy Dean was upstairs in the press box giving signs as to who was winning and losing. That was Saturday before the game ended on Sunday. That thing has been exaggerated. But it was like that to some extent, yeah.

Q: I also heard you were a bit of a scrapper in your day.

A: It was so much easier to get into a fight back then than it is now. And you don't start no fights, but you try to finish them. I wasn't big enough to start no damn fight, but if somebody is going to step on you, you're going to knock him on this ass if you can. Well, there was a little of that, but that's been exaggerated too. It wasn't all that damn bad.

Q: I guess your team got into a big scrape with the Senators that year.

A: Yeah, during batting practice we had a third-string catcher named Tom Turner that was abusing those damn Cubans that were on the Washington club. And it made it very awkward for me because I had been on the Washington club and played with all those guys in Washington and down in Cuba. And it put me in an awkward situation, I didn't have anything against those guys. But Tommy (Dick) Turner lived down in Texas and he hated a Mexican as far he could see one and he compared the Cubans to the Mexicans because they spoke Spanish. And old Bob (Roberto) Ortiz decided to come over and see about what the hell he's talking about and called his hand. And he had a bat in his hand and Turner told him, "You throw that bat down and so and so." He threw it down and Turner started up the steps of the dugout, and when he got about to the top step, Bob Ortiz kicked him like a football right upside the head. Ortiz was a huge monkey, you know, he was a big guy. And Ortiz was a friend of mine, I didn't have anything against him. And hell, there I am on one team with a teammate cussing out my former teammates. Calling them every damn thing you ever heard of. And they had a hell of a fight. And Bob Ortiz broke his hand, very visibly, a big knot on the back of his hand. And Hal Weafer, the umpire, who was sitting in the stands watching batting practice, he ran out there to break it up. I thought he was a

fan, I grabbed him and threw him down. By the time he hit the ground, I recognized him and I grabbed him and picked him up. He made a report on it, but there was nothing done to it because he explained in the report that I thought he was a damn fan running out. He had on his street clothes, you know, watching batting practice. I grabbed him around the waist and slung him on his ass over there, and when he hit the ground, I recognized him and helped him get up. He came out to break up that fight, which was his job, you know. It was a hell of a fight, they were killing each other. And Ortiz broke his hand about the time Weafer got out there and stopped the damn thing. Because there was nobody out there that was going to stop it like they do today. Shit, let 'em fight. We were enjoying a good fight. They were poleaxing each other, they were knocking hell out of each other. It should have been stopped, but it wouldn't have been stopped if he hadn't run out there. But that thing got blown out of proportion too. I saw Weafer years later and he was a good guy, he was just doing his damn job. Hell, it was a case of mistaken identity. I thought it was a damn fan trying to get in on the damn fight.

Q: I guess the Senators could have had their payback because they were playing Detroit that last weekend you were playing the Yankees. But they didn't lay down at all.

A: No, you don't lay down playing baseball. Except that knuckleballer Leonard was out there and shit, you can't hit them damn guys. He beat the shit out of them and we beat the Yankees and won the damn thing. We had our bags packed to go to Detroit for a one-game playoff. That morning, the president of the league and the owners of the two clubs got together on a coin flip and Detroit won the coin flip and we had to go to Detroit Monday for a one-game playoff in the event we wound up in a tie. We carried our bags to the ballpark that morning to go to Detroit as soon as the game was over. But it never happened because they lost and we won. But we were packed up and ready to go.

Q: Do you remember that game well and the celebration after the game?

A: Oh yeah, yes sir. You don't get to do that but once in your life, some people don't get to do it at all. It was great, it was great to win the pennant because everybody thought we were horseshit. We won the first nine games of the season, that got us going. We won nine before we lost one and went from there. We had a fainting spell in early September, but we bounced back, those good pitchers we had brought us back. Those guys were good pitchers. They weren't just good because of that era, they were good period. Nelson Potter helped the Braves win the pennant four years later. And Jack Kramer and (Denny) Galehouse were good pitchers with the Red Sox years later. They were quality pitchers.

Q: I guess Sig Jakucki was reportedly a little bit of a wild man off the field.

A: Well, Jakucki could pitch but he was not the frontline guy, he was a second line pitcher. He would pitch in a fifth game, you know, a fifth starter if you got tied up with doubleheaders and so forth. He could pitch. And he was a mean son of a bitch, a big, strong bastard that would turn over a juke joint every night if he could, you know. And he got into all kinds of crap. He got beat up, but in the process he wounded a few people along the way. He's a tough son of a bitch. But he was a mean monkey. You couldn't help but like him if he was on your side, he was a fun guy, but gee, at night he'd get a few belts and turn over a joint somewhere no matter where he was,

he'd get in trouble. A guy stuck a gun in his ribs in that bar across from the New Yorker (hotel) — right across the street is a big bar. I wasn't in there but they told me he was sitting in there and got into jawing with some damn hood that was sitting on the stool next to him. And this damn hood pulled out a gun and stuck it in his ribs and he grabbed the gun and took it away from him and hit him right on top of the head with his own gun. Knocked him out, laying there on the floor, threw the gun down and walked out.

Q: And that was in New York?

A: Right across the street from the New Yorker hotel. They tell me he busted that guy's head, knocked him cold, left him laying there on his back and threw the guy's gun down. He grabbed that gun and stuck it into ol' Jack's ribs. Shit, he didn't know who he was messing with. He was into something every night.

Q: I guess Kreevich also, Don Gutteridge told me the story about him in spring training, so I guess he was also pretty much a party guy.

A: Kreevich, well he couldn't help but drink. His wife stayed on him all the time. But he wasn't that way, he just liked that booze. If he hadn't have been like that we never would have got him. He was with the White Sox and they got tired of that shit. And Luke Sewell could handle him, our manager, and he got him over there. He was the most underrated player I ever saw. Kreevich could play. He could hit. He was a good hitter. He could hit Hal Newhouser. I don't know how in the hell anybody hit him, but he did.

Q: And Newhouser, you saw him after the war, you said he was just as effective after the war as he was during the war, right?

A: Well he won 27 games after it was over. He won 25, people said, "Yeah, bullshit, wait 'till this war is over." Well, he won 27 (ed.: 26 wins in 1946). Well you had players, shit, it don't make no damn difference whether there was a war going on or not, they could play. If you could play it don't make no difference. But we had good players.

Q: And you were part of the so-called "4-F" nickname I guess.

A: I never heard that expression before. Everybody on that team had a whole bunch of guys had a chipped bone in their ankle. I never seen such a damn bunch of guys ... Gutteridge had a ... you know, way back, if you had a chipped bone then they wouldn't take you in the army, afraid you'd break down marching or some shit. But Gutteridge could outrun a scalded dog and he had one of them things in his ankle, and hell I think it made him faster. He could fly.

Q: Was he the leader of that team, or was it more the manager? Or was there anyone that took charge?

A: Well, not particularly. He could have been. He was the leadoff man and could run like hell. He'd been with the Cardinals, you know. He was a little older than the other guys. But (Vern) Stephens was the offensive leader, goddamn he was a hell of a hitter, and could hit a ball plum

out of sight. He could have been a Hall of Fame type guy if he had not abused himself. He stayed up all night, fooling around. I roomed with him one year and I know. He messed around all night. Women calling his room all the time. He was a good-looking bastard and women loved him and he tried to accommodate them all.

Q: Was that tough for you being his roommate getting phone calls in the middle of the night?

A: Well, I just told them that he wasn't there. He went by three names: Junior, Vern, and Stevie. Hell, there'd be a flock of women calling all the time. I'd say, hell, he ain't here. And they'd say the hell he ain't there. And I said, well, come on up and look. But he wasn't there. He stayed out half the damn night, all night, it didn't bother him because he was 21. You can do anything when you're 21. They said he'd go out like a light, and he did. He finished up all at once. Died when he was 45, I believe. Fine guy, fun guy. He thought every day was supposed to be a picnic so he tried to make it a picnic. Every damn day. And he had a laugh like a hyena and monkey around all night. Then come out the next day and hit one plum out of sight.

Q: I guess Sewell tried to get him to calm down, but then he didn't hit too well.

A: As a matter of fact, Gutteridge is like a preacher. He put him in with Gutteridge one year and I said hell, Gutteridge couldn't do anything with him, he got Gutteridge to drinking. That was a joke. Of course, Gutteridge never took a drink in his life, never did. Not yet. But you couldn't do that with him. Hell, you'd have to tie a rope around him. He did what he wanted to do, just like they do today.

Q: Any memories about the first baseman George McQuinn? I really haven't heard much about him.

A: We had three guys like preachers on there: George McQuinn, Gene Moore, and Don Gutteridge. And ol' George, he'd sit in the hotel lobby, and he was a hell of a player. You know he was later the first baseman for the Yankees. And was a great fielder. He might have been the finest fielder of all time, I don't know, that's one man's opinion. And he could hit a home run. He was a wonderful guy. He never drank. Gene Moore never drank, Don Gutteridge never. But them other bastards made up for it. Drinking all the beer they could bottle. But McQuinn was a very quiet guy and would sit in the hotel lobby and smoke a cigar and watch all that shit going on. Him and Gene Moore. They'd sit there until they got ready to go to bed. Them other guys were frolicking around all night. And that's what they would do. And they had a good time. They would drink anything they could pour.

Q: What did you think of your manager Luke Sewell?

A: Luke was a good guy. He put up with all that shit, I don't know how he did it. He was a stern guy, but he rolled with the punches. He knew them guys had to have fun. He didn't try to overmanage. Most people, you know, get in trouble trying to overmanage. The thing that managers have to do today is write out the lineup, stick it in the dugout, sit down and let them play. Don't bother them. That's the best thing you could do. And he was kind of like that. He stayed on top of everything and tried to keep them in line but didn't overdo it. Good man, good

guy, I liked him. Him and his brother (Hall of Famer Joe Sewell) both, very likable people. But Luke had to put up with all that bullshit and it wasn't easy to do. He had a tough job. And he did the best that anybody could do with that bunch. And everybody monkeyed around except them three guys; well, four, Baker didn't mess around none. He and I would go out but we wouldn't get loaded and get in no goddamn free-for-all, but them other guys did. We had Tex Shirley was rough, Sam Zoldak was just a boy, he went with him. Jakucki, goddamn he was like Al Capone rolling around at night. And Mike Kreevich, hell, he was in the middle of everything that was being, every party you know. We had good guys, but they believed in having their fun and they did. It was a good group of guys, though. Our batboy was Whitey Zimmerman (longtime equipment manager for the NFL's Atlanta Falcons). Freckle-faced batboy.

Q: I read that people called the Browns wartime freaks, how do you feel about that?

A: They weren't no more freaks than they are today. All athletes are nuts and bolts to some extent.

Q: How did you get into baseball and over to the Browns?

A: Well, I was playing on a semipro team when a scout came along and signed me. I was with Washington all my early life, in their chain, then Washington traded me over to the St. Louis Browns (in 1943). Me and a pitcher named John (Ox) Miller for Harlond Clift and John Niggeling. I was pissed off about that, but who knows, that turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me, being on the Browns.

Q: I guess they had a pretty bad reputation back then, the Browns?

A: Yeah, but getting over there with that mob, that's the greatest group a man could ever be associated with, to be around. And we wind up in the World Series. But you never know how it's going to turn out. I was thoroughly pissed when I got traded over there. That was terrible. But it certainly turned out to be the greatest thing in the world.

Q: Were you mad because it was the Browns or you just didn't want to be traded?

A: I didn't want to be traded and I didn't want to go to the Browns, either one. But once I got there and found out what a bunch of guys we had, it was super. There will never be another club like that, never. There will never be another club like any club, but that bunch there was unusual.

Q: Just in its cast of characters?

A: Characters, yeah, that's the main thing. Everyone was a character on that team. Yes, sir, we read them all. Run the gauntlet. I know we must have scared (the batboy) to death. They were a tough-talking bunch of bastards, they'd scare you. We traveled on the train then, see, and you get to know people more traveling on the train. It'd take you all day to go somewhere. On the plane today, you get on there, and hell, by the time you get on that good you're getting off. You don't have much conversation on a plane except with who you're sitting by. But on a train, you ramble

around all over, we had private cars, you know. And you're fussing and fighting all the damn time. Different, altogether different.

Q: Did you guys feel you could win the World Series against the Cardinals?

A: Well, yeah, we thought we could beat them. That damn bunt, Potter picked it up and let her go and shit, it went out to the street almost. That opened the gate. We figured if we had them 3-1, you know you figure to win the thing. But they had a great fucking team. I'd sure like to have them today because they could play. They could play.

Q: Have you kept in touch with Pete Gray?

A: ... up in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania. I hadn't seen him in 45 years, He opened the front door and pointed at me and said, "You're Clary." And I said I know that. I don't know how he recognized me after 45 years. Of course, I knew him because he only had one arm. But he screwed up the whole damn team. If he's playing, one of them two-armed guys is sitting in the dugout pissed off. And we had ol' Jack Kramer, one of our better pitchers, could talk just like Bugs Bunny. If you weren't looking at him, you'd think it was Bugs Bunny talking. And he would sit there on that bench when Pete Gray played center field and he'd say, "Eh, don't look now, there's a one-armed man out there in center field." He'd talk just like Bugs Bunny. And everybody would laugh like hell. He'd say it every day. It was a fun club. Man, them bastards had some fun. Sitting on the bench during the game, in a bar, it doesn't make a shit where they were. The bullshit was flying.

Q: Who let it fly the most?

A: Oh, Nelson Potter. We'd have three or four of them guys would agitate that one-armed guy all the time. Tying his shoes. He'd go to sleep on the train before it got out of the station. They'd tie his shoes together and hot-foot him. Jakucki and Nelson Potter and two or three other guys were agitating him all the time. Called him a Kildy with one wing shot off. They were on his ass — kidding, not in a mean way. Kidding him and teasing him and fooling around with him, pissing him off all the damn time. The main one was Potter. Well, there were three or four of them that stayed on his ass all the time, picking at him. But it would be funny to get on there. He'd sit down on that train and by the time it started moving he'd gone to sleep. They'd tie his shoestrings together, knot 'em up, and then hot foot him. He'd come out of there snorting and raring, cussing and raising hell. He'd go back to sleep and they'd hot foot him again. It went on all the damn time. Then they take his sweatshirt and tie his arms in knots. He couldn't get the damn thing off, someone would have to help him. And a one-armed man can't tie his shoes, you know. He'd have to get someone to tie his shoes for him. He'd go along with it, it'd tickle the shit out of him too. But every now and then he'd get pissed off. But it was a fun outfit. These guys today, they don't have that kind of fun. There was something going on on the bench, in the clubhouse, on the train, everywhere you went. And get three or four of them in a bar at night and beat the shit out of somebody or turn it over or something. They had fun.

Q: I read somewhere that you said you might not have been in the major leagues if not for the war, do you really believe that or were you just kidding around?

A: Well, I was supposed to be there before the war. But back then, you know, you had to hang the moon to get into the big leagues. Today you can play down in the Florida State League and have a good year and you go to spring training with the big team the next year, particularly pitchers. Back then you had to leap from A, Double-A, Triple-A and everything else. And if you had a good player in the big leagues, you were screwed. At your position, I'm talking about. Blocking you. Hell, I could have been there sooner. But, shit, you got to do something. Today you can just be a prospect, it doesn't make a damn what you hit. If you're a prospect, you get a shot. Like right now, the Blue Jays have a damn relay between Syracuse and Toronto. We brought some guys up last year and they would stay but two weeks. That was unheard of years ago. You had to do something a whole year to get a damn shot, get a chance. And I'm not going back saying it's better then than it is now, it's better now than it was then. But they operate differently. A whole lot differently. Here's another thing. Back then you had eight teams in each league. How many do you have now? 14. That means there are 350 players in the big leagues that wouldn't have been there back then. You ever think of that? I'm not saying that's better than now. But you have 300 players, or 350, that wouldn't be there when you had eight teams in each league. Don't take no damn brain surgeon to figure that out. There's 300 to 350 players that would be in the minor leagues today. There's more damn doors opened up there than there used to be. ... There's so many more opportunities to play in the big leagues than there were back then.