

Lawrence Eugene Doby (LD)

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interviewer Tom Harris, Montclair, New Jersey

This is Tom Harris. I'm interviewing Larry Doby at his home in Montclair, New Jersey. Today's date is February 18th, 1994. Larry, you were born December 13, 1923 in Camden, South Carolina. You were an only child, I understand. You started playing ball in Camden, South Carolina. Sandlot ball, stuff like that?

LD- Well, basically, kids in the street, actually. And then we had a team in the neighborhood that I played with. I guess it would be similar to what we call Little League now. Although we weren't formed as a Little League team. We just had a bunch of kids that in a gentleman's game, the rich and the poor got together. Played in different teams.

OK, I understand that you moved to Patterson, New Jersey. You were about thirteen years old and you went to East Side High School there. I understand the team was very good.

LD- We had good teams. We had a good football team. Won the state title one year. We had a baseball team that won the state championship one year. We had a basketball team, we never won the state championship, but we finished, we got to the final four. And of course, I ran some track. So, we had good athletic teams in my time.

You did pretty well for the school?

LD- Yeah. I had some good years.

Playing, what position?

LD- Well, when I was a baseball player, my freshman year I played third base. My sophomore year I played shortstop and my junior and senior year I played second base. I played in the Negro Leagues with the Newark Eagles. I played second base.

Did you have a favorite position out of all of them?

LD- I guess at that time, being a kid growing up, you don't care, as long as you play, you know. You just want to play and I think that was my attitude. Just put me somewhere where I could play. Of course, when I got to Cleveland in 1947, they switched me to the outfield. That's the first time I played the outfield.

OK, you played with a semi-pro team in the summer during your high school years.

LD- During high school, I played with a team called the Patterson Sparksets. They had a lot of semi-pro teams during that time. I played in the summer with this team with the Cheverly Red Sox, Farmer, Rock's AC, we had a lot of semi-pro teams and some good

players. As a matter of fact I learned a lot of my baseball from playing against some of those people. Some had played some minor league ball. Of course, they were much older.

There were a lot of semi-pro teams in those days, as opposed to now.

LD- A lot of semi-pro teams, and good ones.

I'll bet. Any many in one area, too.

LD- Patterson had about four or five teams right in that area. Cheverley Red Sox were from Patterson, (etc.). They were all from around this area, so you had some good players.

OK, you graduated from high school. What then?

LD- 1942. Graduated in 1942. Went on to Newark Eagles Negro Leagues that summer. Finished playing that summer. Went to college for a half semester, into the Navy and got out of the Navy in 1946. Joined the Newark Eagles again in 1946.

Can I just ask you?

LD- Yep.

The Newark Eagles. When you got out of school. That team, tell me a little bit about that team. Who they played against and who were your teammates.

LD- When we had the Newark Eagles in the Negro Leagues, we had the Baltimore Elite Giants. We had Campanella and Joe Black, who were really good. We had the Philadelphia Stars in that League and had a fellow by the name of Harry Simpson, "Suitcase" Simpson. We had the New York Cubans in that League who had Minnie Minoso on the team. Monte Irvin and myself were with the Newark Eagles. So we had a lot of the players who got the opportunity to play in the major leagues. The early part of baseball came out of that league. So, we had some good competition. In the other league, the American League, we had the Kansas City Monarchs, Cleveland Buckeyes and Chicago American Giants. Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson. Those guys were on the team. So, the competition was very good.

Pretty good. Tell me about after the Negro Leagues, after Newark where you said you went to college. Where did you go to college for one semester?

LD- Long Island University.

Did you play ball there?

LD- That was after high school.

Was that before or after Newark?

LD- In the summer, I played with Newark.

Then the fall, you go to LIU.

LD- Right, which I played under Larry Walker when I played with Newark at the time I came out of high school.

And you played at LIU also?

LD- Just basketball, because I was only there during that semester.

OK, I thought maybe they had a fall baseball schedule. Some do. OK, then you go into the Navy.

LD- Then I went into the Navy.

OK, now. Let me ask you a little bit about your time in the Navy. Did you play any ball in the Navy?

LD- Yeah, we had an all-black team because you couldn't play on the white team so we had an all-black team. We played, they called it the main side team, a couple of times. We beat them once, they beat us once. But we played a lot of semi-pro teams in that area at the time we were in the Navy.

Where were you stationed?

LD- Great Lakes, Illinois.

Did you stay there all the time you were in the Navy?

LD- No.

Did you ship out?

LD- I stayed there for about a year and a half and then I went to Treasure Island in San Francisco and from there I went to Guam, and then from Guam I went to a little island called Ulysses.

Are you playing in those times, too? No?

LD- No, no more playing when I left Chicago.

Now, during the time you were in the Navy I understand that you did meet a couple of ballplayers from the major leagues. Mickey Vernon, for one. Can you tell me a little bit about meeting those guys?

LD- Mickey Vernon. What happened when I went to this little island called Ulysses in the South Pacific, Mickey Vernon and another gentleman by the name of Billy Goodman was on the island when I got there. I was a special aide, and I was exercising. And they were, too. And we would go out in the afternoon and throw to each other. That's when I became friends with Mickey and I became friends with Billy Goodman and Mickey, of course, sent my name into Mr. Griffith, at the time. But, it wasn't really for Afro-American players at the time. I got my first major league bat from Mickey Vernon. When I joined Newark in the spring training of '46, he sent me half a dozen Louisville Sluggers. So, we've always been pretty close.

OK, you finished your time in the Navy, as you said and you joined the Newark Eagles again in '46. By this time you may have heard that Jackie Robinson had been signed by the Dodgers to play in Montreal. Am I right?

LD- We heard that, it came on the radio when I was in the South Pacific. One afternoon, we were all sitting around our bunks and it came on the radio that Mr. Rickey had signed Jackie Robinson for Montreal.

OK, so now you go back to the Newark Eagles. Different teammates at that time? Was the configuration a little different?

LD- No, not that many. Not that much. Most of the guys I had played with before I went in the service were still there.

Tell me a little bit about that league. What kind of attendance did you get and what was the pay like? What were some of the conditions?

LD- I thought the pay was good. In 1946, I made \$5000 a month, which to me was good money. Guys like Satchel and Josh Gibson would make like 12-2000 dollars a month. [I think Doby means \$500 a month (or 5000 a year)?] So, the money I don't think was that bad. They'd draw well.

They did draw well.

LD- Yeah.

In Newark, they drew pretty well.

LD- I think that was one of the reasons why you got the opportunity to perform in major league baseball. You'd play, they call it a two-team doubleheader. They would play in Yankee Stadium or the Polo Grounds or Ebbets Field when the teams were out of town. You'd have 40-50,000 people in the stands. I think baseball people saw that there was

some more dollars out there. I'm not saying that's the sole reason but I think that had something to do with it.

Sure, that was a big consideration.

LD- And, I think what happened was when they saw players like the Robinsons and the Irvins and the Dobys and the Minosos and the Simpsons and the Campanellas, they felt that we could play that kind of baseball.

And, you could put some people in the stands.

LD- Yeah, you could put some people in the stands, so that helps a lot, so all in all, the league itself, in my opinion, was a strong league. I would think that we could compete with the major leagues at the time. The difference was, in my opinion, was that the numbers. We didn't have the numbers. We had like 19, 20 players, where the majors had 25 players, so you had this fellow by the name of Leon Day who would pitch the first game of a doubleheader and then the next game he'd probably play left field. He was that kind of a player, though. He was a good player. But, you couldn't play 154 games like that.

No, you'd be dead.

LD- I think from a talent standpoint, well talent plus numbers, we could compete with the major leagues. If you looked at the players who got the opportunity in the early beginning, not too many of 'em failed.

Most of you hung on and stayed.

JD- And we were successful. And, it wasn't a point of being there and saying, "Well, we're going to give him the opportunity, if he's going bad." You gotta produce right away. If you look at the players who got the opportunity in the early stages in the integration of baseball, we all performed well the first four, five, six years. So I think that if you had one good year and then come up with a couple of bad years then you might have not been given an opportunity to succeed.

It was competitive for everybody in those days. You had to get the job quick.

LD- And you talk about a number of teams, you're talking about eight teams and you're talking about twenty five people. Now you talk about the farm teams, you talk about A and A and B and C and Double, and so the competition is very keen.

So, you played all of '46 with Newark? And you began '47 with Newark? Now, let me just ask you. By this time you knew Jackie had been playing for the Dodgers, had been signed and debuted with the Dodgers. I assume you were looking for your chance at this time?

LD- I wasn't thinking too much about it.

No, you really weren't?

LD- My focus and concentration was on Newark because in '46 we won the World Series. We beat the Kansas City Monarchs with Satchel Paige and Hank Thompson and of course, we wanted to repeat. So, my focus was on winning again. Now, not that I was totally focused as far as getting an opportunity to play major league baseball. But, I didn't think that I was going to get an opportunity that soon because I had only played like, maybe, totally two years. Because I played in the summer of '42 and in the service, then '46 the whole year with Newark. Of course, eleven weeks after Jackie signed with the Dodgers, I signed with Cleveland, but I wasn't expecting to get the opportunity that soon.

You weren't really thinking about it?

LD- No.

Let me just ask you a little bit again. You said that the Negro Leagues, at least Newark, drew pretty well. Was it all black fans or was it racially mixed?

LD- Mostly black.

But, were there some white?

LD- Oh yeah. You got 50,000 people in the stands, you got 45 that are black.

And the balance would be white. So, there were more white people there than I thought.

LD- You didn't have that many.

I wouldn't think so, at that time, especially. Now, tell me how you were contacted by Cleveland and Bill Veeck, and all that.

LD- Well, I had a gentleman name of Lou Jones who visited me in the beginning, right after I came out of spring training in '47. We were playing the Philadelphia Stars in Newark and he came to the game and he said Mr. Veeck said to talk to me and see how I felt about coming to be a big league player and he would come back in a couple of weeks and would take me to see the Yankees play. Against Cleveland, I guess Cleveland was coming into town.

We're you excited?

LD- No.

Not really, Just feeling it out.

LD- You know when I'm asked that question and I look back, I just looked at it as, if the opportunity came, to try to be prepared for it. You don't want to be too overly excited.

You were cautious, then?

LD- Yeah. As far as something about the total picture as far as the historical part of it is concerned, I hadn't had no opinion. Now, as I got into it, as Mr. Veeck laid down the rules and the regulations that you had to abide by. And of course, he mentioned something about the fact that you're doing something that was going to be history. Then you recognize the fact that you have to be not only had to perform well but you certainly can't have anything that will affect your playing off the field, activities that would sort of diminish your character. So then it dawned on me that this is what it was all about.

So, how did it progress from this first meeting when you took you to see the Yankees play and all that? How did it progress from there?

LD- Well, we went up to see the Yankees play and a fellow by the name of Red Embree pitched against Spec Shea. I don't recall what the score was. But, we went to the game and I came back home, he said I'll probably be coming back to see you in a couple of weeks. So, the next day I went to play in Trenton, the Baltimore Elite Giants and played, not the next day, a couple of weeks later, with Campanella. He watch the game and after the game was over I rode back with him and he told me that they had been scouting me and were real interested in me and what did I think about major league baseball. So, I only saw about three or four games. I said I don't see any difference in that and what we're doing now. So the question was, "Do you think you could play major league baseball?" I said I don't see any difference in the baseball. So, he said, Mr. Veeck is thinking about a contract and maybe in a week or two I'll be back and we'll go to Chicago. So anyway, he came back two weeks later in July because I played, we had a doubleheader in Newark, we played against Philadelphia. I played the first game and took a train with him to Chicago. I mean, the team was in Chicago and I played my first game in Comiskey Park.

OK, tell me about that first game. The record says it's July 5th. Let me just ask you about the press coverage. Was there any type of coverage, unusual coverage for it that you recall?

LD- Not that I recall.

Was it because maybe Jackie had already played or was it because the media was different then?

LD-I don't think there was media coverage because naturally there would be because here's an African American coming into the American League. The first player in the American League. Yeah, there was coverage but I don't think of anything where there was any big deal over it. Certainly, it created a certain amount of attention but I don't think it created the same kind of attention that Jack got. In baseball, they probably had

media from all over the world at that particular game. But, I, being the first in the American League, certainly there was a lot of media there and a lot of questions they asked, but I didn't see anything different.

Before the game, I know Lou Boudreau was your manager. Did he talk to you before the game about anything or was it business as usual? Nothing, let's just get out there and play?

LD- No, Bill Veeck was the only man that talked to me about the situation.

What did he say?

LD- "Well, we're doing something that hasn't been done before. You're the first in the American League. A lot of burden is on your shoulders. You've certainly got to be able to perform. I'm not trying to frighten you but give you some ideas as to what you're up against." It never phased me because I had been involved in athletics all my life and I've been fortunate to be blessed by God to have the ability to perform and perform well. So, as far as that was concerned, all I wanted to do was to get out there and play. I wasn't too concerned about what the situation was as far as the people were concerned, for how they feel. I'm not in baseball to try to make friends. I'm in baseball to perform and to be judged as a human being that's a major league baseball player.

Before we get a little further on, you played in the majors thirteen years. Was there any difference in the caliber of play? You mentioned before that the major leagues had more players and could not have a guy play a doubleheader like Leon Day, like you mentioned. Generally speaking, did you notice any difference in the caliber of play?

LD- No.

It was about the same as the Negro Leagues.

LD- I would think it was about the same.

About the same.

LD- I will say this. You had certain players on teams. Like you take the Homestead Grays. You had Buck Leonard, you had Josh Gibson, you had Cool Papa Bell. That would be like the Yankees having DiMaggio, Dickey or Berra, or Henrich. You know, it was that kind of a caliber of player.

So they were comparable. So they were about the same.

LD- Yeah. And of course, if those guys had got a chance to play, I think they would have proved themselves. You had that kind of player.

OK, you talked a little bit about some of the things Bill Veeck said to you. I understand there were some special rules for the black players. Can you tell me a little bit about them, if you don't mind? And, how did you deal with them?

LD- Number one, you're not going to be able to stay with the team.

You had to stay in a separate hotel.

LD- Number two, you're not going to be able to eat with the team. Number three, when you ride the bus, you're not going to be able to get off the bus with the team as they went to the restaurant to eat.

You'd eat somewhere else?

LD- Yeah, you had to make sure that you had no problem with a player or opponent. Like I had one fellow spit tobacco when he saw me. But, you had to get up and walk away. You could not, if you thought that the umpire was calling a bad ball and strikes, you couldn't turn around and show any emotion. And, you're not going to be welcomed by a lot of people.

Did you figure that out? Did you know that before he said it? Or you just thought it was baseball and this is no big deal. But it never struck you that there was a Negro League in the first place. I mean, there was a Negro Leagues that you were playing in and yet, when you went up to the major leagues, it didn't strike you that you might have some problems?

LD- No, because you never had problems in the Negro Leagues. When you played in the Negro Leagues, and we had a place to play, nobody had no problem. You couldn't stay in hotels, but by the same token, we were dealing with segregation at the time. In other words, the bathroom would say COLORED. We knew that so when you got off the bus at a gas station to fill the bus up, you could only go to the bathroom where you could go. Here, you're with this team and you can't go to the bathroom, and you can't go to the hotel, and you can't go to the restaurant that the teammates were. At that time, we all went to the same bathroom.

Right, well with the Negro Leagues, everybody did it together. OK, those rules that you talked about, did they bother you?

LD- No.

They didn't bother you?

LD- Number one, I think I was blessed again, not only blessed with the ability from God but blessed with the idea that people are people and I don't see color. I don't have any hatred in me. It didn't bother me. My thing was to be able to be productive.

Just to play ball.

LD- Just to play ball.

Get the job done.

LD- I'm not out here to make friends. I'm not going to waste my time trying to make friends. I have great respect for you and that's the way I look at it. I deal in the truth and I deal in observing the law. So, that didn't bother me. It was a lonely period of time because now I come from a league where we all got together after the game and sat down and talked or whatever it is. Now, here I am, I'm in this league. I'm with these people and playing on this team and when I leave this ballpark I look for one way and then go another way.

In Cleveland too, you had to do this. You had to stay separate from the team in Cleveland as well?

LD- Well, you had to umm...

Well, you had your own home, a place to live anyway, so this is on the road now. How long did these conditions last when you're staying separate? How long did that go on?

LD- Oh, let's see now. 1954 was the first year we were allowed to stay in a hotel in spring training in Tucson, Arizona. So, I had been there since '47. Then, I could always stay in New York but I didn't because I lived in Patterson, so I came home.

Right.

LD- Couldn't stay in St. Louis and when St. Louis came to Baltimore, I couldn't stay in Baltimore. Washington, you could stay. Chicago we couldn't stay.

Did these cities change at different times or did they all change at the same time? Where you could stay?

LD- Different times.

Now, early on in '47 you didn't play all that well for Cleveland.

LD- No, I didn't play. I played one full game. My first major league at bat was a pinch hit in the first game of a doubleheader in Chicago and I struck out. The second game I played first base. I got a base hit and drove in a run. Then the rest of the year I pinch-hit or played second or played short. The come '48 when I went to spring training, they said we have Joe Gordon at second base and we have to try you in the outfield.

OK, So early on you really weren't getting a chance to play so I guess it didn't bother you that your statistics weren't good because you really weren't playing?

LD- The statistics I didn't think about too much. The part that bothered me was that I wasn't playing. I have never before in my life not played.

You never sat. Right.

LD- From an eight-year-old kid, I was always playing.

You were always playing, you didn't know what it was like to sit.

LD- So now when we were talking about that one chance to hit, I was used to four.

And then some games you didn't play at all?

LD- Yeah, some games I didn't play at all. So, that was a different type of year. As a matter of fact, I would have rather stayed in Newark or someplace else.

I could understand that. What was the difference in the pay between Newark and Cleveland?

LD- Five thousand dollars minimum, that's in Cleveland at that time. Before I was making \$500 in Newark. Big difference.

That was nice. During this time did you meet Jackie Robinson and talk to him about what you guys were experiencing?

LD- Naw, we met. We barnstormed at the end of the year.

At '47?

LD- He had two teams. He had a team that he pooled with some of the players in the Negro Leagues and we played 30 games over the time. And, you know, we talked, but not, you know, we never talked about the conditions. Because, first of all, if you look at the situation as far as the way things are there's a level of difference.

Between his debut and yours?

LD- Mine. We didn't talk about it. In '94, we still have problems. So, there's no way for the conditions to be easier for me because he's the first.

No, I didn't think it would be easier. What I was just saying is I wonder if you guys swapped stories, supported each other?

LD- No, we never talked about the negatives of the situation. We tried to talk about the positives. In other words, whatever negative was thrown in front of us, we had to make a positive and that's what we talked about. We didn't talk about, "well, this is..." No,

forget about it. We had to go out there and play baseball and that was the thing. And the other thing was that we never talked too much about it because, you know, the wound is open. Now, you pour a little salt in it. So, we just stayed away from that and talked about the good things and had a good time playing those exhibition games and seeing all those people come to the ballpark. And, just being able to talk to those people and see those people in the ballpark showed you how much they appreciate the fact that you're doing it, and knowing the hardships.

Just want to go off a little bit on something. Tell me about Jackie. What type of a guy was Jackie?

LD- Good person. Into the political arena very strong. Knew how to operate in the political arena. Knew who to talk to, who to see, who to make sure that what I've done, I expect to get some kind of reward for it after I leave this game. That basically was mostly Jack's feeling in terms of himself and what he did on the field certainly helped others. But, by the same token, you have to say hey, look, I've got to look out for myself when this time is over with and what I do will reflect to others in terms of what they have to do to be who I am or get where I am. But, he always had a foresight of when this game is over.

When he was done playing?

LD- Yeah, where do I go now? So, I'm going to surround myself by people that I know that can put me into certain positions. Most of us that got the early chance to play never thought that way. After a while, after we had been coming closer to the end of our careers, we starting think that. But hey, he did that. He prepared himself almost in the beginning.

Do you remember the last time you saw him or spoke to him?

LD- Umm hmm. Cincinnati at the All-Star Game. 1972 I think it was, because I think he died right after that. Yeah, we were sitting in the airport waiting for our flight to come back to New York and that's when he couldn't sleep too well. He had somebody there. But, his spirit was great. You would never know that he had...

Diabetes, I think, right?

LD- You would never know that. And he made a statement at that game that he won't be real happy until he sees an Afro-American sitting in that dugout as a manager.

Did he want to manage? I know he couldn't at that time but did he ever aspire?

LD- I never heard him talk about it. I never heard him talk about managing. I think when he got traded to the Giants, I think he was somewhat upset because he never wanted to be traded.

He just retired.

LD- I think that if he had stayed with the Dodgers and retired, he might have become a manager with the Dodgers.

Let's go back to 1948 now. Now you're starting to play regular, to some extent. So, you're playing center field?

LD- I started my first game in the season opener in 1948, I played right field. We had a fellow by the name of Thurman Tucker playing center and then Dale Mitchell was playing left. And Thurman, about a month later on, kind of had a little slump and then Boudreau moved me to center and moved a fellow by the name of Hank Edwards to right.

So now, in 1948, you do pretty well. The team does very well. You win the pennant. You get to the World Series and you get a home run in one of the games to win it. Tell me what 1948 was like. Was that some kind of vindication for you? How did you feel about playing in the World Series, etc.?

LD- That sort of opened the eyes of some of the people on the team who might not have thought too much about the fact that I was part of the team. Because, here, now I am, I'm here and I'm productive and I can help you make more money so I think a lot of the thoughts might have changed some way. And, then there were those who were really sincere in the beginning as to accept me as a person, as another player. Jim Hegan, Bob Lemon are two of the guys that in the beginning were very kind. Joe Gordon, very kind. So, I think that the idea of here is a person who can play major league baseball can help me earn some extra money so being accepted by those who had some doubt...

Did the press treat you any differently than all these other guys?

LD- The press in the beginning never had much to say to me.

How about the fans?

LD- The fans, I never had any problem with the fans.

Fans in Cleveland were good to you? They were good to you?

LD- Fans in Cleveland, yeah. Now some of the people on the road, in St. Louis the fans were...

No, huh?

LD- New York accepted me.

You were a local guy, that helped.

LD- It helped plus I think that, and this is not to take away anything from fans in other parts of the country, but I think that fans in New York were more knowledgeable fans of the game and of the person and of the production that a person put out. In other words, if I come into Yankee Stadium and I had a good series or good game, there was knowledge of the fact, win, lose, or draw. There were other cities that did not have the same kind of knowledge.

What are your memories of the '48 World Series? Was it exciting? Was it just business as usual?

LD- Exciting. World Series, very exciting because when I hit the home run to win the fourth game, a fellow by the name of Steve Gromek, who was the pitcher, we embraced each other and that picture went all over the country and I think that's the first time that kind of a picture went all over the country. From a baseball standpoint. Now, I don't know, maybe Jack or some person in '47 had the same thing, I don't know. But I know in '48 this was the first time that had ever happened in America. That to me, was more important, and was one of the most important things about integrating baseball. That picture going all over the country and someone's going to have to say Hey, maybe I need to make some big changes in my thinking about people, particularly an opinion going by somebody else, make my own judgment. This gentleman did not have a happy homecoming when he went back to Michigan because a lot of people wondering why we could be hugging and so and so and blah blah blah and he just said, "Hey, you won a game for me!" It just shows you that emotions can happen with this kind of situation and it doesn't really make people based on likes or dislikes. It's a person that has accomplished something and you show your good feelings for.

You beat the Boston Braves.

LD- The most exciting thing was beating the Red Sox. You had a one-game playoff.

Oh, you had the playoff, that's right! Yeah, tell me about that. It was in Fenway Park. Excitement going into that game?

LD- I think we went into that game as a game that you're either going to be in the World Series or you're not going to be in the World Series.

One game season.

LD- After you played 154, you've still got a one-game season. But, we went in there and they had a fellow by the name of Denny Galehouse that pitched against us. We were surprised because we didn't think we were going to meet Denny Galehouse. But Boudreau had a good day. Joe had a good day and I played good and then of course we went down the highway about five miles and had to play the Braves. They were pretty good.

They had Warren Spahn and Johnny Sain, I think.

LD- Tommy Holmes.

OK, you had some excellent seasons going on after that.

LD- I had some good ones.

You lead the league in homers in '52 and '54. You win another pennant in '54. The team wins 111 games.

LD- And left it there.

Well, you ran into the New York Giants. Tell me about the '54 team. Was that the best team you played on?

LD- It was a different '54 team than the '48 team. The '48 team there were a lot of veterans, Ken Keltner, Boudreau, Gordon, those kind of guys. On the '54 team there was Al Rosen, Al Smith, Bobby Avila, a younger group of people. But, I think it might have been just a little better. The reason why I think it was just a little better it that we had some backup people, Hank Majeski and Sam Dente. They did some good things for us because Rosen got hurt for a little while and Strickland got hurt for a little while and those guys came in and did a good job for us. The people off the bench, we had a much better bench in '54 than we had in '48.

A more complete team?

LD- A more complete team and the pitching staff was almost the same. The difference, of course, was Early Wynn, who we didn't have in '48 and we had Lemon, of course and we had a fellow who was not at his best but we still had, you know we had a good pitching staff.

Yeah. Like you said in '54 the Series didn't go well for you guys.

LD- So I think, you don't make excuses and I would never make excuses. I respect the Giants. I think the Giants had a good ballclub, but I think what happened was, you know, baseball players have to motivate themselves. You have to get up for games. You have to make sure that you're ready to play. You don't have someone like basketball or football that says hey, you know this and that. You've got and do it all yourselves. You've got twenty-five people so it's tough for a manager and coaches to get to all those people. So, you've got to do it yourself. And, if you look at the fact that we won 111 games out of 154 games, that's a lot of games.

Terrific.

LD- So, the only thing that I would say that I thought was a negative was the fact that we played up until that Sunday and Sunday we won the 111th game. Then Monday was off. Tuesday, we're on the train. Wednesday, the World Series opened in New York and I kind of think that we had really put a lot of effort into breaking that record because the Yankees and Cleveland at that time were great rivals. So, the Yankees had won 110 and everybody is saying the town and the media, say hey, we've got to get this 111. By the time we got to 111 games we kind of said, oh boy...

You got over the hump.

LD- Now, you've got to get yourself back up for the World Series and I don't think we ever got back to that point. And I'm saying that because I'm not taking anything away from the Giants.

Right.

LD- The second thing that people don't realize is that we knew the Giants as well as they knew us. We played all those years in spring training. A week or two weeks before we'd break camp, we'd get on a train and we'd travel back to New York and back to Cleveland and we were playing each other every day. So, it wasn't a point of we didn't know the Giants.

Did you see Willie Mays' catch?

LD- Yeah, I was on second base.

Tell me.

LD- There was no way for him, in my opinion at the time, or any time, or anybody, to make the catch. The way he went after the ball. He went after the ball like this and normally you are taught to go after to go after the ball and catch it in front of you.

Right.

LD- The thing was is that I was on second. And, when the ball was hit I started.

And you didn't figure he was going to catch it in any shape?

LD- No, and I'm almost on third base when he makes the catch and I've got to hustle back to second base. Rosen had to hustle back to get to first base. Of course, some of the much, much smarter people than I am said that if I stayed on second, I could have scored.

He was very deep.

LD- Like I said, I wasn't that smart.

Now, let's turn to a different page a little bit here. After the 1955 season you were traded, to Chicago. How did you hear about the trade? What was your reaction? How did that come down?

LD- I was kind of hurt and shocked.

I thought you might have been. Tell me.

LD- Because I had never before been traded or never before left a ball club. Even in high school you've got four years.

They're guaranteed.

LD- And then you go into Newark and I'm there for two years and then I'm in Cleveland and I'm in Cleveland for like ten. Nine or ten. Then, all of a sudden, you're traded. I guess it's like living in South Carolina and then moving to Jersey. It just makes the people that you knew, the community that you all knew, so now you know. It's not like you've been with this people from age one to age thirteen or have been in Cleveland from '47 to '55 and all of a sudden...I was very shocked. I was very hurt to a great degree because I did not understand the business. I'm a player so I would not understand the other part of it. Because I'm not interested to a point which maybe I should have been but I'm certainly not focused on that. So, I'm thinking that I'm going to be in Cleveland for the rest of my life. And not even thinking about that other people got traded. But that never dawned on me.

Yeah, Babe Ruth was traded.

LD- So, I was thinking, it really never dawned on anybody until it happens to you.

Absolutely.

LD- I mean you can always say, "Hey, I was ready for it, blah, blah, blah" but you know...I was hurt.

Did you like or dislike playing in Chicago?

LD- I liked Chicago. Well see, when I got there, I had a good year. Drove in 100 runs. I had a couple of good seasons.

Right, you had a good year.

LD- It didn't bother me from that standpoint, but the point is, it took maybe, I think in spring training I had to re-adjust myself to Chicago because, the year before we were in Tucson and then I'd go to Tampa. I can't stay with the team. We stayed in different hotels.

So, you're going backwards a little?

LD- Yeah. In that situation. But, from the playing standpoint, it was a good team. We had good people. Sherman Lollar was a good guy. We had Nellie Fox. We had some good people. I had known those guys I played against before it was still a little different than the guys that you are with for like, eight or nine years.

You stayed there two seasons as the record shows and then you go back to Cleveland.

LD- I went from '56 to '57 and I went back to Cleveland in '58. Joe Gordon became the manager and I went back to Cleveland and I had bursitis in my shoulder and I couldn't throw. So that whole year...

You were hurt a lot. So then you ended up back in Chicago.

LD- What happened was I got traded to Baltimore and opened spring training in Baltimore at this time. But Baltimore traded me to Detroit before the season started and Veeck brought me back to Chicago in April, May. I played centerfield for I guess 19-20 games, pulled a groin, plus hurt my back and I was laid up in traction in the hospital for about two weeks. I came out of the hospital and did a lot of exercise and then in order for me to get in shape, the doctors then decided that I would go to San Diego. I went to San Diego, which was just about two weeks before I started playing. I hit a triple in Sacramento and I slid into third base and dislocated my left ankle and they operated on me in Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, put a pin in and I had it in a cast for quite a while and I started exercising and they decided for me to go to Toronto and work out. I worked myself back into shape and I was getting strong and maybe in two weeks I could play the game. My ankle started bothering me so they sent me back to the doctor and they had to take the pin out, because the pin had deteriorated the bone. Cut it again, took the pin out, put it in a cast again. The rest of the year I was in a cast and I took it off, worked out, exercised, went to spring training in '60, but I didn't have no mobility or anything. So I decided I didn't have...

You packed it in at that time.

LD- Yeah.

What did you do immediately then, after retirement?

LD- I came out of it.

I know you ended up in Japan.

LD- I scouted for Bill [Veeck] for '61 and in '62, I went to Japan.

How did that happen?

LD- Don Newcombe, who's a good friend of mine, got a call from a friend of his in Japan, that was looking for a couple of American ball players. So, he called me and asked if I would be interested. "Sure." So I went with him to a town called Nagoya with the Chunichi Dragons. I played there one year and I came back home and opened up a business in Newark, stayed in the business for about three years and John McHale, who got the franchise in Montreal. I wrote him a letter and I tried to be part of it and he hired me in '68. In '69 I worked for the minor leagues as a hitting instructor and '70 I became a coach at Montreal.

Tell me a little bit about Japan. How was your stay there?

LD- I loved Japan. They treated us well. They got a house for us. We had two people working for us. One spoke English in Japan and one spoke only Japanese and we had an interpreter that was with us all the time. He took us around the town and we met the Prime Minister and went to different places like where the Sumo wrestlers trained. We went to the beach city of Nagoya. We had a nice time. They treated us fine over there. The only place, and I could understand and I think all Americans can understand, was Hiroshima. No one was very...it never bothered you, but they were sort of stand-offish-like.

What was it just one season? Was there any particular reason it was only one season in Japan?

LD- Well, because the next season they asked me to come back and I think one of these things, I asked for too many dollars and...

OK, how many Americans were playing over there at that time?

LD- Maybe five. But we were the only the major leaguers. There were other guys over there in the minor leagues.

They were Americans but not major leaguers. Just you and Don Newcombe were the only two major leaguers.

LD- We were the first major leaguers.

You were the first two, yeah. So then you started coaching at Montreal in '70 and I know you coached a few years, hitting instructor, right? I know that you eventually managed the White Sox for a period of time in '78. Tell me how that happened and what that was all about.

LD- Well, Veeck had always said to me that if the opportunity arises, he was going to give me an opportunity to manage. We had a pretty good ball club in '77. We were in the running for up until about two weeks when Kansas City got hot and won like fourteen out of sixteen. And then in '78 we lost Oscar Gamble, and quite a number of good players and we were having a tough time winning. And Bob Lemon was the manager and one

day Veeck called me and said "We'd like you to take over the ball club." I said OK and we didn't play too well at first, maybe the first three or four weeks, the first month, and then we got hot and we played over .500 ball for the next two and a half months, but then at the end of the year he decided to make another change and basically I think the change came about because I think they were looking to put more seats in the ball park. Kessinger, who had been a favorite in Chicago because he played for the Cubs. He played shortstop for the White Sox at the time.

Where did you go from there then?

LD- I just coached.

Did it bother you that you were not the manager? Did you want to be?

LD- Yeah, it bothered me for one reason. I didn't think that I had enough time to find out whether I really could or could not.

Right, you had less than one season.

LD- So, I didn't know whether I could or could not. I saw some improvement that had come about when I got the opportunity to manage for those two and a half, three months, but then there were other things that I wasn't too sure about. The other things was that you win games or you are successful as a winning manager, coach or whatever, depending on the personnel.

Absolutely.

LD- And there's nobody that smart, in my opinion, that can have a less part of the players and be successful as a winner. You've got to have quality players and those quality players have to be inducted to the system. That can't be two or three days, five or six days. No. The system has to be there. We didn't have those kind of players at that particular time. My thing was that I had known Bill for so long and I'd always thought that he would certainly be honest with me in terms of why I was hired number one and why I was fired. I understood why I was hired but I didn't understand why I was fired. And he said to me that I can never really tell you because if I did I think you and I would both sit here and cry. So I said that's good enough. I had a pretty good idea.

Because of Kessinger, don't you think? Something else?

LD- Kessinger plus I didn't think that I got the backing from a majority of the owners. I think my backing really didn't get respect.

Frank Robinson was in Cleveland by now. You were the second.

LD- Yeah, but I was coaching previous when Frank came here. I was supposed to be in '74 because it was supposed to be an opportunity over there from a manager's point. So, Frank came in and I went back to Montreal in '75 and '76. Then I went to Chicago in '77.

So, after that short managerial stint you continued to coach, right? How did that come to an end? I know you didn't coach forever.

LD- No, I went to spring training in '79 and I was sort of put on the back burner. In other words, I was a hitting coach but in the spring I didn't go with the big club in the exhibition games. I would stay back in Sarasota and work with some of the hitters. The person that ran the ball club, he made some rules and I just felt that I was put on the back burner. What I did in '79 was I coached in the minor leagues and teach some hitting and roam around and when the team was going to Chicago I would go back to the minor leagues and at the end of '79 I retired. I joined the New Jersey Nets.

So you spent some time with the Nets and that kind of thing.

LD- I spent almost twenty years there.

OK, we'll get to what you're doing right now in a minute. I wanted to ask you about a couple of people you played with and people you associated with. A guy you mentioned before, Bill Veeck. Tell me what kind of a guy Bill Veeck was.

LD- Probably one of the best, down-to-earth human beings I've ever met. He didn't throw rhetoric around. Dealt with the truth, the facts. I lost my father when I was eight years old. But, he was my father back then.

That's quite a compliment.

LD- You're not going to find a lot of people say that about Bill Veeck. But, I'm saying that because I knew the man. I first met the man in '47 and I was from that day with him and around him and talking with him. He was a solid man. He would never get the accolades that he should get.

How did you feel when he was put in the Hall of Fame?

LD- I felt great but I felt that there was a lack of respect for him before he passed away. But that's the way some people operate. That's the way the politics are, whatever.

OK, your first manager in Cleveland was Lou Boudreau. Tell me about him.

LD- Nice man.

Good ballplayer, right?

LD- Yeah.

MVP in '48.

LD- He was a good ballplayer. He knew the political arena very well and worked them real well. I can't say that we were real, real close or real friendly. I mean, he's the manager of the ball club and twenty-five players, what can you expect from being close like that? There was a fellow by the name of Bill McKechnie who was real, real close and who helped me a lot during their first four or five years. Him and of course, Joe Gordon. McKechnie was the kind of a man who said how you'd behave. So and so and so. This is the way you should and this is the way you shouldn't. I never forgot one day in St. Louis. There was a gentleman in the stands who was making remarks about my wife and I sort of lost my bearing and I started up into the stands. He grabbed me, pulled me back, and he set me down and said "Remember now, these are things that are going to be happening. I think we can work it out."

You mentioned Joe Gordon, a real good ballplayer. Tell me about Joe.

LD- Real, real good people. One of those good people. I will never forget my first day in Chicago. You know, your time to warm up. So, I walked right out on the field and I must have been there for five minutes, but it seemed like a year. I was waiting and he warmed up with me.

You mentioned Bob Lemon before. You said you got along.

LD- Bob was a decent man. There was a lot of guys, younger guys but in the beginning these guys, we're talking about the first week in baseball. Gordon, McKechnie, Lemon, they were nice.

Bob Lemon was a great pitcher and he was a good hitter, too. He seems to have the impression of being an easy going type of fellow.

LD- Yeah, Bob, you know, you play the game of baseball and play it hard and you have a good time.

OK, I know you played with Bob Feller, too. He was probably one of the older players, too.

LD- When you go on a baseball team, every time I went on a team, there are people who hang out with each other. And of course, I was never in the hotel with that so I never became real friendly with Feller.

And you mentioned earlier, Wynn. We heard a lot of stories about how he was mean out on the mound.

LD- That's one thing about him. The day he's pitching you don't have to worry about knockdowns. Nobody is going to knock you down because you knock me down or

somebody on my team down and he'd knock down the whole nine people who came to bat. So, he was that kind of competitor. Plus, he was a good person.

You played with Al Rosen in '54. He had a couple of really good years with the Indians.

LD- Good third baseman.

Do you remember anything about Al? I know you probably didn't get to know some of these guys because you were not with them a lot, right? In Chicago you ended up playing with Minnie Minoso.

LD- Minnie was with us in Cleveland.

Right. So, tell me about Minnie. And you knew him from the Negro Leagues, too, right?

LD- Good hustle. Good player. Hard player, played hard, loved the game. All around good person.

Still trying to play to this day.

LD- He'll always try to play. As long as he lives, he'll try to play.

OK, you played with Nellie Fox, too.

LD- Nellie was a good player and a good person. Sherm Lollar was a good player and a good person.

And you played with Luis Aparicio, too.

LD- Luis was a good player.

Now, I know that you also played for a period of time with Satchel Paige in Cleveland, if I'm not mistaken.

LD- Yeah, in '48. He came up with us in September.

But you knew him from before. Tell me about Satchel Paige.

LD- Any stories you hear about him as far as ability goes...

He threw really hard, right?

LD- We played the 1946 Negro World Series against Satchel. We beat him two games, 2-1 both times.

There are lot of stories about him, like folklore almost. Was Satchel half the guy he was [portrayed as]? He seemed to have a lot of catchy phrases.

LD- Yeah, he was a happy person. Nothing bothered him. Baseball was his main thing and he was a very jovial type person. Funny person. Somewhat of a self-made comedian. But good people.

Now you played for Lou Boudreau and Al Lopez. How would you compare those two? Both Hall of Famers.

LD- We got back to their personalities.

Well, tell me about Al Lopez. You told me about Lou Boudreau.

LD- We had a good ball club when he won the pennant in '54. You talk about Rosen. The skipper played great shortstop. You talk about Avila playing second base and a fellow by the name of Glynn at first base. Easter was there before. He spent some time in the minor leagues. Then you had Al Smith and then got those four pitchers. You got Garcia, Wynn, Feller, Lemon. You had good players. Boudreau had good players.

How would you compare them as managers?

LD- They were both similar. Just let you play. They didn't crowd you with a lot of fundamentals. Basic fundamentals of the game. They would teach you that and then you would have to do it consistently until you got it done right. They would never put you into a position where when you needed execution, you couldn't do it. So, they never put you in that position. The first thing I think most of them had was being able to deal with the personalities. You know, yourself. You got twenty-five players and that's twenty-five different personalities. If you can blend those personalities together who know just what to do and how to do it is what makes a good manager.

And you said your closest friend is Joe Gordon. When you were growing up in Patterson, did you follow the game? Did you have a favorite player or team or you just played and really weren't a fan?

LD- Most of the people I followed and one I would like to be like was a kid in the school I went to in Carolina named Bose. He played baseball, football, and basketball and he was real good. I wanted to be like him. And then when I moved to Patterson, there was a kid by the name of Bob Smith. He was a good athlete in high school and I wanted to be like him. But when you talk about the baseball end of it, there was no one because there was no black players, so I couldn't see myself saying "I'm Joe DiMaggio or I'm Joe Gordon" or I want to be like them. It just wasn't in the thinking. Football-wise I saw players in college. There was a guy by the name of Ozzie Simmons. He went to the University of Iowa and I listened to once in a while on the radio. Bill Stern was a tremendous football player. As a matter of fact, when I was in high school, we used to

have a semi-pro football team in Patterson called the Patterson Panthers. I used to usher their games. After he got out of college he came there to play.

OK, after you finished your work for the Nets?

LD- What happened was, Mr. Giamatti came to Princeton and I had been working for the Nets for almost ten years. A fellow by the name of Joe Cobb, who created ADP, data processing, he bought the New Jersey Nets and that was a time when I went back to Chicago and I was doing the minor leagues and I decided to take the job and get an opportunity to go to the Nets. Mr. Giamatti became the Commissioner of baseball. With a history that I had brought to baseball, that I should be in business. So, he called me up and I talked to him and we put together a program. [Unintelligible for 30 seconds] We did speaking engagements and cultural activities. Spread some good feelings. A lot of the players are involved in the program, especially in the last five, ten years. You can send out a check for \$100 to those kind of places. Makes you feel good because they never made the big money.

Right.

LD- You go back in my particular era, you're talking about a \$5000 minimum and if you made 25 or 30 (thousand) you are making big money. So these guys, a lot of them are still around, still have kids and all that sort of stuff, so when you send them some extra bucks...So, I enjoy it. I enjoy the job number one because I work with good people. I enjoy being able to get a phone call from each player.

OK, what's your opinion of baseball today? Do you follow it?

LD- Baseball is baseball. My opinion of baseball is that baseball is always going to be baseball. Baseball will survive whatever the facts are, because it involves people and it involves people with knowledge and with knowing that whatever the situation may be, whatever the negatives may be, in order to make that negative a positive, we've got to work together as people. There is no question that people talk about the numbers in terms of dollars that are going to players. Well, it just so happens that these are the times. This is what it's all about. If this game is destroyed then you would have to blame players and people who are involved in the game. But, I don't think so. People are smart enough to understand that this is an All-American game. A lot of people are out there watching. For the good of the people, the good of the players, and for the good of the people that own the ball clubs, whatever the problems are, let's get together and work them out. I don't care what anybody says. The people will work it out. Whatever the reasons for the negatives, they'll work them out.

The new playoff format, I guess by now you've heard about that. What's your opinion?

LD- It puts more money in people's pocket. It's hard for me to grasp that idea because I come from the old school. I come from a thing where you play 154 games and the person that's at the top at the end of 154 games, he plays the person at the top in the other

league. So, it's hard for me to digest what we're seeing now. I'm going to have to see. I'm going to have to look at it. I'm going to have to judge it from a standpoint of what will happen in the future. Are we going to do something else to change this? I don't think that baseball is trying to think you can change a lot. You can't tamper with baseball too much because it's basically runs scored, hits, in the field and that sort of stuff. You know like even with the number of teams we've got. The one thing it has done is it has given more jobs. You still have the quality. Because we're dealing with something too many people think about. We're dealing with education. We're dealing with basketball and football which are much more popular now that they were in the 1950s and 1940s. But, the most important thing you're dealing with in my opinion is education. Because now you've got kids that play baseball, basketball, and football. Now, here comes a college coach and he's going into a rich neighborhood or he's going into a poor neighborhood and he's going to give out a four-year scholarship for education, a scholarship for football, for basketball. Now that changes his perspective. But there are not enough baseball scholarships that football or basketball. So, we've got a lot of that going on and we lose a lot of good players. If Bo Jackson had come up through my area, he'd never play football. Sanders, he would have never played football. Because the moment that he got out of high school and having the ability that he has, he'd have been put into the minor leagues. So now, you're dealing with that. And like the kid in North Carolina, Taylor, that the Yankees signed. He left college, but once you settle a million and a half... So, how many kids can you afford to give a million and a half before you even know them? Before they even pitch A ball, or Double A ball, or Triple A ball, how many kids can you give that kind of money to? In our area, you didn't have to because once you reach high school, you can't go to college (because you don't have a scholarship). I went to college. I had a scholarship. But how many kids could get a scholarship at that time? Not that many. So, your mother and father have jobs. The best job in the world is to be able to play baseball and go to the minor leagues and earn x number of dollars doing something that you liked and you don't look at it as your work.

OK, you had some ups and downs in your career, I guess. You seemed to have turned your negatives into positives. Any other thought that you'd like to just close with, because I don't have anything else to ask?

LD- OK, well, I think that when I talk to kids about it, I kind of let kids know that you can be whatever you want to be. That's good, but you have to be what you want to be as what am I qualified to be. You just can't tell a kid you can be a baseball player, a football player, basketball player if he doesn't have good amount of ability. But, he certainly can be something else because I think athletics is probably a tougher thing to do and the second thing is the percentage from a baseball standpoint is very, very low and you have to carry yourself with something else because you do have more than one thing. God has given you a mind and then when he gives you athletic ability, that's something extra. But, we all have a mind so we develop that mind in terms in what we can best do. My take is that whatever you do and wherever you go, particularly from an Afro-American standpoint, you're going to met with negatives. So you have to make sure that you know how to deal with the negatives to make them positives. Because if you don't then you are never going to be successful. When I walked into baseball, why did I have to go through

all those things? Why couldn't I be just like any other American that goes to the game and enjoys the game and the things at the hotel, because of the fact of the color of my skin. So, if that ended up as being something where I was not able of being successful, I would have never been able to play the game of baseball and wouldn't be talking to you. The last thing is this. I never intended to do anything in 1947 but to simply better myself. My point is that to experience exposure and maturity, I know what it is to have gone this way. I would like to be a part of this world to God, the church, to let people know that we can live together as people if we decide to do it and sit down and communicate. I joined that ball club to better myself. You don't judge me until you see me. You're going to have some differences. I'm going to have some differences. But based on each other's person. The God above that put us all on earth, in my opinion, put us on earth with different colors to see if we could get along. But we can't. As strong as we are, as big as we are, we can get together as people if we want to but if you don't want to then you're not going to do it. One of the things that hurts, in my opinion, is that you got inner cities and suburban. The kid in the inner city never sees suburban and the kids in suburban never see inner city kids to communicate. The only time you see them is on television. When they do meet, it's going to be strange. It's going to be a real experience for both kids. Understand, he knows what he's being taught over here and he knows what's being taught over here. But then I talked the same thing and one of the other things that is good about my time is I grew up in tough times but when I went to Cleveland in the 1940s, it wasn't so much as people had never been around. If we don't consider this, we can't work this thing out. We're people.

OK, well it was certainly great talking to you. Thank you.

-transcribed by J. Thomas Hetrick, Oct-Nov, 2004.