

Whitlow Wyatt (WW)

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interviewer Thomas Liley

And if we can, can we start at the very beginning and the very beginning being a personal question, Where is Kensington, Georgia? That's where you were born.

WW- That's up near Chickamauga, Georgia.

I see.

WW- I was born at Kensington, that's nine miles from Chickamauga, but I was actually raised in Chickamauga. That's near the Chickamauga Park, you've heard of that right? During the war, and I was raised up there until I came to high school in 1926 and went to high school in '27 and signed up at the high school.

What high school was that?

WW- ~~xxx~~ and I was signed up by, well, we went down that day to practice and the city, we had a town team, you know, and the city catcher was down there, so Charlie Knowles, and I said, "Who's that fellow?" Well, we had a left-hand pitcher from Anderson, Alabama on our team. Boy, he could throw. That's the reason we had a team. Usually, high schools don't have baseball teams, you know. It's too much to do but we had this boy and he was so good and of course, I pitched some, but I played first base most of the time. I asked Charlie Knowles, "Who is that fellow over there?" And he said, "That's Eddie **Goostrey**, a scout for Detroit." Well, that didn't bother me one bit and I didn't know A from Z, but anyway he asked me about a ball, and he wanted to see Frank Chilton throw some, see. He did know anything about me, now. And I, he threw. I said, "Charlie, see if you can't get that ball, I'd like to throw it." Well, the first thing that started though, he sent a boy uptown to get a ball. And we told him where to go, and he told him and gave him a five dollar bill, I believe. And he said, go up there and get a ball, and he came back and told Mr. **Goostrey**, he says, they didn't have any five-dollar balls. And he told him, they cost about two dollars and a half, and so he went back and came back with a ball, and see in high school like that we didn't have money, and I wanted to get a hold of that new ball and throw it myself, you know, pretty good. After he was talking to Frank and he got through throwing and Charlie had his mitt down there and he was a catcher. He went to Decatur in the Three-I League the same year I went to Edmondville, but he didn't want to stay away from home.

Decatur, Illinois?

WW- Right. So we were catching and he asked Frank, so who is this kid? He says, "He's a first baseman on the high school team." And it turned out that he signed me instead of Frank! So that's how I got started in baseball. I went up to Detroit and visited Detroit in 1927, I have to think back, I guess it was. And talked to Mr. Navin, he owned the ballclub, and I went up there and I'd never been away from home in my life. My brother put me in an upper berth on a train going to Detroit in Chattanooga. My brother was a real good baseball player. In fact, he was a better ballplayer than I was. But, he got an education and I didn't. And, I got up there and I went to, got off the train, of course, and found out how to get to the hotel, of course, the Statler Hotel, and I went in the hotel and registered. You know, real country. I didn't know anything. I was a country boy, sure enough. I asked him about the ballpark and after I put my things in the room, I hurried

down because I had to get to the park, see? So, I asked where the ballpark was and he said, "Well, you go to such and such a street," he told me where to go, "and turn to the right," and he says, "You go down that street until you hit Trumbull Boulevard." He said, "The ballpark is right there." So, I went and walked and walked and walked. I kind of thought the ballpark would be out in the country like here, you know, and I stepped in a place to eat breakfast and I don't think I had ever seen a café very much and I went in and the only thing I knew to order was ham and eggs and he rolled out French fried potatoes and I told him, "I didn't order French fried potatoes." He said, "We serve potatoes with the whole breakfast." So I was learning. So I went on down and I walked and finally came to Trumbull Boulevard, and over here, right at that corner, was a stuck-old building. I said, "Oh my goodness, something wrong here someplace." So I got into Navin Field, that was the ballpark, and I stayed up there about a week. And threw batting practice and just listened, just to tell you the truth about it, and they had some great ballplayers, Harry Heilmann, you remember him?

I know the name.

WW- And Earl Whitehill and George Uhle, a pitcher, U-H-L-E, he was great.

Charlie Gehringer, he would have been at second base at that time.

WW- Yeah, Charlie Gehringer, I couldn't think of him. And I stayed around there. We played Washington first I think and then we played the Yankees. Ruth and them came in, you know, and I was anxious to see Babe Ruth, you know.

In 1927, that was the year.

WW- '27, and he came down and while we had batting practice, he sat on our bench, he cut up all the time, he was a lot of fun! He could tell stories and listen in the dugout like that, I didn't open my mouth. In fact, I finally pitched for Detroit and he hit a home run off me in Navin Field and I said to him, that's the only home run that I was really proud of, because he hit it off me, but I threw some more, too. I stayed there until the last day and Mr. Navin wanted me to come up and talk to him, so they were going to Boston and he came in from the field that day and I waited until, George Moriarty, I'm surprised I thought of that, he was the manager, and I waited for him to get out of the shower before I came out, well, I did come out behind him. And, some fellow had gotten into the clubhouse and he was drunk and walked up to George and said something to him and I think took a swing at him, and he took a swing at him and missed him and fell down and broke his collarbone. And I said, "Gosh almighty, this is a rough game!" I didn't know whether I wanted to play ball then or not! But anyway I went and talked to Mr. Navin the new day and we talked about playing and of course, I told him I was interested in football then, I wasn't so much interested in baseball, but I did have a good arm. I said, "Now, I want to go to school," and he says, "What'll it cost you?" and I says, "Now I can go to school, I don't have no money, but I can go to school on a football scholarship." In fact, I had already told Tech I would come to Tech on a football scholarship. Which I did. I went over and stayed with them about a month or two. When I finally signed I came home and of course, I went up to spring training next year with Evansville, Indiana, my first two years. That was '28 and '29 and I had a fairly good year the first year and the second year I had a real good year and I went up to the big club and joined them in Boston in 1929, the last month of the season. Of course, I played there and at the send of the season I went back in '30 and I stayed all of '30 and '31 I developed a sore arm, I had a little trouble with my arm and they asked me, "What do you think you ought to do?" And I said, "If I could go someplace where it is real hot to pitch, I think it'd help my arm as much as anything." I loved hot weather and coach says, "we could send you to Beaumont." That was one

of their farm clubs, you know. So they sent me to Beaumont and they wanted me to go down there and pitch a game or two before the half was over because Beaumont had a chance to win the half and I came by home, of course, I lived in Cedar Town at that time and I came by home and I stayed down home a day or two and I didn't get down there as earlier as they wanted me but finally went down there and didn't do very good to start off. I went down in that hot sun and every morning to take batting practice and every morning that colored boy that would pitch batting practice to me and I just stayed in the sun the whole time. Finally, I pitched a game and we beat this club and I can't think of them all right now, but we beat this club 3-2, and I felt like my arm had come around a little bit, you know, and so I ended up and won 11 and lost 3. I lost one 1-0, 2-1, and one 3-2. That was the year that Dizzy Dean was at Houston and they were playing Houston see and they finally tied Houston for the first half so during the latter part of the season, the last month of the season, they let three games count for the playoff in the regular season. So I pitched against Dean and beat 'em 2-0, and that's the only game. They beat us 3-2, they won 3, er 2-1 rather and that's the only game we won, and, of course, I came home and went back to Detroit and played there until 1933, I guess it was. They traded me to the White Sox and I went over to the White Sox and did fairly good and Muddy Ruel, the old catcher for the Washington club, you remember him, he was a catcher and he was real smart and he helped me a little bit but they finally traded me in the middle of '36, I guess it was, they traded me to the White Sox.

Do you mean Cleveland in '37?

WW- Cleveland, Cleveland. I'm getting mixed up there a little bit and so I went to, they let me go to Kansas City for a half a season, why, what actually happened, Detroit traded me to the White Sox for Vic Frazier.

Another fine pitcher.

WW- Yeah, and I stayed with the White Sox until '36. Then they sent me to Kansas City for a half a season and at the end of that season they traded me to the Milwaukee club in the Three-I League for a thrd baseman, a great third baseman for a long time, I can't think of his name.

For the White Sox?

WW- No. Cleveland.

No, I don't. I can't come up with a name.

WW- Anyway, they traded me for this third baseman, he stayed up there a long time. I'd say about ten years.

Not Keltner? Not Ken Keltner?

WW- No.

Bob Johnson?

WW- No, un huh. Maybe a right-hand hitter. But, anyway the next year I came home and I went to Des Moines and the next year I won 3 and lost 2 and of course, they traded me to Milwaukee. I was about ready to quit. I had the farm then. I bought this farm in 1933 and they wrote me a letter and wanted me to come up and sign. I told then I was going to quit. I wasn't going to play ball

anymore. And, finally, the man that owned the club was a lawyer up there and he owned the club and he wrote me a letter and told me if I would report to them at Hot Springs, Arkansas, where they trained, and if I got out there and stayed that they'd pay my way back home. So I told my wife I haven't got anything to lose so I am going to go to Hot Springs, anyway. So I went out there and we finally got together on a contract. He wanted to give me so much and forty thousand dollars if I was sold to a major league club which I thought was silly because I didn't think I was worth that much. I didn't think I'd ever get back to the major leagues again, just to be frank. And I finally went out there and he signed me and I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll sign a contract for \$700 a month." And I know what I'm going to get and I know I'm going to come out financially which wasn't much money but back then it wasn't too bad. I could make a living. I'll tell you what. I worked as hard as heck during spring training and finally they opened the season in Toledo and I got beat, they knocked me out of the box in the fourth inning and that disheartened me a lot and I felt no, I'm not going and I haven't learned anything. Anyway, I went on into Indianapolis, no Columbus and beat Columbus 3-2 and I thought that wasn't bad, and I thought, well, by golly, I learned a thing or two. I kind of felt like I had made a little bit of progress and then we went into Indianapolis and I pitched a game and I got beat 4-3 in ten innings which I didn't think was too bad. But, like Durocher always said, "If you get beat, you get beat. If you get beat 1-0, you get beat." That's the way he felt about it. And I left there and we went to Milwaukee and I pitched against Louisville. And I beat them 10-0 and I struck out ten and I struck out Pee Wee Reese, that was his first year. I struck out Pee Wee Reese four times. And there's a little story and I'll get to that later on and stayed at a little old hotel there, the Warwick Hotel I believe it was, and that night I knew as well as anything in the world, I said well, by golly, I have finally become a pitcher. I knew it, and just as plain as anything in the world.

And all sorts of things just sort of fell together for you? That all of a sudden, it made sense.

WW- Yeah. Joe Becker was a catcher. He had a little experience and he helped me a lot. And I started changing the speed of the ball and when I started changing the speed of the ball and I guess I was actually throwing more strikes and I won that game and I ended up winning 22 and lost 6, I believe, it was that year, I don't know if that's what it is.

It was 23-1!

WW- It could have been. 23-1. But anyway, I was voted the Most Valuable Player in the League that year and about a month before the season was over a manager came to me and told me we got a chance to send you to the major leagues. He says, "You can either go to Boston or you can go to Brooklyn. We give you the privilege, you name the club." He said, "I'll put in a word for you." He said, "I think Ruth is going to be the manager of the Brooklyn club next year."

Wasn't that the owner of the Milwaukee team?

WW- No, that was the manager.

I'm sorry, the manager of the Milwaukee team and that was, his name was...?

WW- Uh.

OK, it will probably come back later.

WW- That's age for you.

Well, I've got to admit. I was real curious as to where the idea came that Ruth was going to be the manager of the Dodgers.

WW- No, it was the manager of the Milwaukee club. So they sold me to Brooklyn, sold me for forty thousand dollars and three players and they didn't give me any of that. I didn't get any money, either. And the end of the season the owner of the club came to me and said, "Whit, we want to do something for you." He says, "We can either give you a car or a John Deere tractor." I had this farm and I said, "By gosh, I'll take a god-blamed tractor." And I got a tractor and I've got a picture someplace here. I think it's actually on the wall. Me on that tractor. That started me to farming. So I went to Brooklyn next spring and that would have been '39.

What was your reaction when you found out that Leo Durocher was going to be the manager instead of Babe Ruth?

WW- Well, it didn't make that much difference to me because I was just happy to be going back to the major league. In fact and going and playing for Durocher is concerned, I think he helped me. He put a little fire under me, just to tell you the truth about it. Durocher was smart, boy. He had as good a mind as anybody has as far as baseball or anything else. He taught me to be a little mean as a pitcher, to be frank, that's what he did. I know a lot of times, I'd knock somebody down, you know, and come in my locker, and he'd have me two or three hundred dollars laying up on top of my locker just for knocking somebody down, you know. I finally found out, by gosh, it paid off.

Yes!

WW- I think I had that kind of a name. In fact, in some write-up not too long ago someplace, it might be in there, but, I don't know who it was but it said I knocked DiMaggio down in the World Series in 1941, the fifth game.

Pete Reiser talked about that a lot. It was Pete Reiser or Pete Reiser (pronounced Riser)?

WW- Both of them.

Oh, really?

WW- Yeah, they both came up. But that's what I wanted to get to. When Reese came to the Brooklyn club in '40, I went up in '39 and he come the next year, '41, no '40. He came up to me and said, "I never will forgive you for striking me out four times because I never will forget it." And, I never have forgotten it. Great kid. In fact, that's two of the finest ballplayers I ever saw come up together, he and Reiser. Reiser was great.

Branch Rickey said that Reiser was the best ballplayer he ever saw.

WW- Probably was.

He thought the world of you.

WW- Who?

Reiser. He thought absolutely the world of you. I read that he said if he had to sculpt a statue of a pitcher, it would be Whitlow Wyatt in terms of form, grace, and style. He thought you were just great.

WW- Yeah, I read that someplace. I don't know where I read it.

He also recalled that about Joe DiMaggio. He said that DiMaggio said that you were the meanest person he ever saw in his life.

WW- I read that someplace the other day. Now, this hasn't been long ago. Something on where I'm rated. Where DiMaggio said he's the nicest fellow I ever saw but he will knock your head off...that day that I knocked him down, I didn't want to knock him down actually, because to tell you the truth, I was getting him out, and they say when you're getting a fellow out.

Let it lie.

WW- Let a sleeping dog lie, and don't wake him up. Particularly a good ballplayer. Now, some player who wasn't too good, you might not wake him up. You might hurt him, which you would. Anyway, after the game was over, it's kind of funny. I went into the clubhouse to tell their clubhouse man, Johnny somebody, I can't remember those names now, where to send my trunk to. And when I went in there, I went in through the back door and the first fellow I saw, I walked into DiMaggio. This was in the visiting clubhouse. And he walked up and shook hands with me and says, "Congratulations. You deserved better luck." And I did, I pitched one heck of a game. I won the first game 3-2 that I pitched.

Nine hits and two errors behind you. That was a tough one to win! Yeah, but the second game...

WW- The second game I pitched great. I forget how it turned out. Anyway, I forget. I scored the only run in that game that day. That's the reason DiMaggio said that and Dickey did the same thing. I shook hands with Dickey and he congratulated me and said you deserved better. So that's, I've learned that, you knock some great player down like that, he forgets it.

Did pitchers at that time literally throw at players, or were they just trying to move them back from the plate?

WW- I never did throw at a fellow to hit him. I hit some but I didn't throw at them. When I tried to pitch...

If they were trying to hit a batter, would they throw behind the head?

WW- That's the worst place you can throw.

Because of the natural reactions.

WW- Because it's your reaction, you're going to go backwards. And, I've been throw at myself. A writer for the *New York Times* told me, "Whit, you can pitch high and inside to anybody better than anybody I ever saw." He was an old writer, too. Roscoe McGowan. Does that ring a bell?

I know the name, right.

WW- Roscoe McGowan. Great fellow. I mean nice fellow. High-type fellow and he told me that.

Well, you had a good year in 1939 with the Dodgers and you had a better year in '40 and even a better year in 1941.

WW- Well, in '39, the first year, I won eight straight games. Four of them were shutouts. I was pitching in Cincinnati against the Cincinnati club and about the fourth or fifth inning, I had run into Lonnie Frey at first base. Tore my knee all to pieces. I won eleven and lost three that year. If that hadn't happened to me, I don't know what kind of year I'd had. There's no telling. Of course, something else could have happened, too, as far as that's concerned. I ended up 11-3, I believe. Have you got the statistics?

I've got the statistics here. It says 8-3 here but I don't know.

WW- That could have been right, because I won the first eight games. I know that.

You had a good ERA of 2.31. That's first rate.

WW- And what'd you say I won the second year? I forgot.

Well, you didn't win quite as many. It was 15-14, but you led the league in shutouts.

WW- That's right, 15-14.

And you led the league in shutouts that year with five of them.

WW- I think the next year, in '41, did I have seven shutouts.

Yeah, you led the league again. Some people have said that you were the best pitcher in the National League that year, nobody even close.

WW- Well, I didn't know then. That was good.

Yes. In '42, 19-7 and then 14-5 in 1943, all great years.

WW- Yeah, I had those years that I had with the Dodgers, had those now, I'd make pretty good money. Somebody wrote me not long ago, I get a lot of fan mail. I get more fan mail now than I did in my playing days. Some fellow the other day, a lawyer up in New York, sent me sixty eight by ten pictures to sign. Sixty! And he sent me fifty cards, you know what I'm talking about, small cards. Fifty of those and two dozen balls.

Was he offering you anything for that?

WW- He was the first man who's ever offered me anything for signing anything. Two fellows in Atlanta that I know are real good friends, they do that, they be in this business. In fact, one of them was supposed to come out here yesterday, but I told me to wait until after I had my operation until he came.

I collect autographs, too. I've asked a number of players to sign little cards for me.

WW- I believe he gave me sixty dollars for the pictures and he give me twenty dollars for the balls, which I found out since then from these fellows that that wasn't anything. Really. But that's

the first time I ever had any money given to me to sign anything. Good Lord, I put a picture in the mail this morning. I had pictures. Everyday, they send me. To tell you the truth, it kind of bothers you. Some of them will send things to you and not give you any envelope to send them back in and things like that, you know and you have to put stamps on them, which is all right.

When I do it, I always put in a nice little letter and offer to pay, if there's anything that the ballplayer wants, and there's a card and a self addressed stamped envelope.

WW- I get some real nice letters and when I do I write them a letter. It's unusual, you know.

Yes it is.

WW- I write them a letter and I hear from some fellows two or three times. I write them and then they write me back. I'll always felt like if you made somebody happy, that's life. That's a good part of life. You just make somebody happy all the time.

I got a card yesterday from somebody you know, Enos Slaughter.

WW- Enos Slaughter.

Enos Slaughter, he wrote me back. Let's talk a little about 1941 and 1942. Those were quite the years.

WW- In 1941, I pitched a game against the Cardinals in St. Louis. We went in there to play and I believe we were a game and a half ahead of the Cardinals. We had a meeting and Durocher says, "Whit, how do you feel?" I said, "Well, I had two days rest. I feel like if I had another day's rest, it would help me" because I felt I was a little bit tired. He says, "Well, we'll just let Fitzsimmons pitch today, because he's had three days rest." So he pitched and I kidded Fitzsimmons about that game. I said, "You didn't pitch that game today. You talked your way through that game." He beat them 4-3 or something like that. And he did. Boy, he did and he was a competitor, now if there ever was one. So, I had to pitch the next day. So, I started that game and I had nothing. I just fiddled around and I made good pitches, you know. I didn't have good stuff. I thought, my gosh, I won't last long in this game. And I fooled around. I was that kind of a pitcher, though. If you beat me, brother, you have to beat me the first two or three innings, because I ever went past that I'd pitch nine innings. I think in '41 I pitched 27 complete games. I'm not sure about that.

Twenty three, out of thirty eight that you pitched in.

WW- Twenty three. About the fourth inning, somebody hit a double off me and who came up and hit a ball to the shortstop? Pee Wee fielded the ball but the fellow on second base tried to go to third. Pee Wee picked him off third. No, he threw the ball away. The ball was about that much from going into the dugout, which would have been an automatic run, you know. I had two men on base and nobody out. For just some reason or other, my stuff came to me just like that. I struck out the catcher.

For the Cardinals, Walker Cooper?

WW- No, he was an old catcher. He went from our club over there. Mancuso.

Gus Mancuso.

WW- And, I struck out Mancuso and I struck out the pitcher Cooper and the third baseman came up, a left-handed hitter, I can't think of the name of him, a pesky hitter, and I threw him a slow curve and he grounded out to first base. I got out of that inning and I had the most stuff in a ballgame that I'd ever had in my life after that. I got out of that inning without a run and beat 'em 1-0. And I believe that's the best game that I've ever pitched in my life without saying or looking back, you know, a pitcher makes a lot of mistakes, and he's still gets men out. But, it's still a mistake. That day I don't believe I made a mistake in that ballgame. And we are getting around to Slaughter. And Slaughter didn't play that day and Slaughter came up to pitch hit in the ninth inning and Durocher walks out of the dugout to me and he says, "You know this fellow can hurt 'cha, don't cha?" Well, I didn't say anything. I knew he wasn't going to hit me that day. I threw him two or three fastballs right by him, struck him out and I got out of that game and I think that's the best game I ever pitched in my life. You go ahead now and get me started.

Well, that 1941 team was a great team. They won the pennant. That was what, the first time, I can't recall the time that the Dodgers had won the pennant. It was such a turnaround in the club with players like you and I guess Dolph Camilli came over just a couple of years before.

WW- Great, great.

Pee Reiser was new that year. Pee Wee Reese was new on the club. Billy Herman had just come over.

WW- We got Billy Herman from the Cubs and I want to tell you he's the smartest ballplayer I ever saw, that Herman. He just figured you out. He'd figure hitters out. A hitter would hit a ball and I'd say, "Gosh, I wonder who's that there." He'd be standing right in front of the ball. He'd just know how to play hitters. He was great. The signs, he could pick signs off of second base. We got everybody's signs that year. We knew what was coming half the time it was played. And I'll tell you right now, we had a club that could really hit 'em. Camilli could really hit if he knew what was coming. Medwick, had Medwick. Dixie Walker and Reiser, of course. Reiser was a good hitter. He'd hit the ball hard and run like a deer. I'd seen him hit balls back to pitchers and on one-hop and the pitcher would be a little nonchalant and that dang Reiser could beat him out. He's great. Owen was a great catcher, too. Gosh, he had an arm. He could really throw good.

You started the All-Star Game that year, didn't you? Weren't you the starting pitcher?

WW- I started the All-Star Game against Bob Feller.

Your old teammate.

WW- I was with Feller, see. I was with him. I started against him. In fact, I have a picture of him right there on the wall. He signed that day when we started against each other. He had the most stuff of any pitcher I've ever seen.

Now, by stuff do you mean motion on the ball, or control?

WW- Hard. Fast. And he was mean pitching. He had a windup, gosh, his windup, I know a hitter had a hard time following the ball. And a curve that absolutely exploded. He'd start a curve up here and it'd be down here. He had a big curve. And I really enjoyed playing with him and got a big kick out of starting a game against him that day. I think, I pitched two or three innings that day, three innings?

Well, I have down here two but you might have gone into the third inning, I'm not sure.

WW- I remember Travis. I got in a little trouble in one inning and Travis hit into a double play and I got out of that inning. I was all right. I believe Williams hit a home run off of somebody. Passeau.

Right. In the ninth inning.

WW- He had us beat. I think he hit ball out of the ballpark.

I think that's right. Quite a hit.

WW- Yeah.

Well, you lost the Series in 1941. The Dodgers lost the Series in '41 and then they had an even better season in 1942 and came in second.

WW- We fooled around and lost it. We had a meeting, MacPhail, he told us if you don't change your way or do better, you're not going to win it.

Do you think the team was complacent?

WW- I kind of believe we were, really.

And Pete Reiser's injury didn't help either.

WW- No, that hurt. We just fooled around. In fact, we played pretty good ball but we just managed to get beat.

I know there was one point where you won six or seven games in a row and lost ground, because the Cards won eight or nine games in the same period. I think they were...

WW- They battled you now.

That last six weeks, I think they were 43-8. Won 43 and lost 8 games. Hard to beat that.

WW- Some of the names are coming to me now. Crespi, he played with them that year.

Did a lot of Dodgers go into the service in 1942 and 1943? Did you lose a lot of players to the war?

WW- I don't believe we lost too many players. I went up myself and I called MacPhail or Durocher and told him that I had been put into a different, what do you call it?

Classification.

WW- Yeah. He says, "Well, you just come on up here. Well, if you're going to go, you can go as good from here as you can from up there." Which he was right. And I went on and they reclassified me because of the farm. I was raising a lot of wheat, cotton, corn, on this farm. I had about fourteen acres, fourteen hundred acres at one time and I guess that farm is what kept me out of the service.

That very well could be. What changes were there on the club when Branch Rickey came on the scene, when he became General Manager? How did that seem to affect things?

WW- Well, I'll just be frank with you. I don't recall but I don't believe he made that many changes. It just kind of played out.

What about when Walter O'Malley bought the club. Were there any changes that occurred? How did it affect you when O'Malley bought the club?

WW- It didn't affect me at all. Now, what year was that?

'44 I believe.

WW- Let's see. I was before...

That was your last year.

WW- '44. Yeah. It was my last year. And I went to, Fitzsimmons got the job over in Philadelphia and managed and I went over and pitched for him but I had a real bad year. My arm was bad all year. I remember going to a doctor and he took a red-hot iron and burnt my arm, seared it. I told someone about the other day. That's a heck of a way to cure an arm, but, if a doctor thought it would help it, why, OK, but it didn't.

Now you retired after the 1945 season, is that right?

WW- Right.

And refresh my memory. We talked about this on the phone. After the 1945 season you came back to Georgia, is that right?

WW- I came back, I went to the farm, in order to make a living, then I find out I couldn't though. And I piddle around on the farm and raised a lot of stuff but it's hard to make money on a farm. And, I finally, I had a friend of mine, I was raised close to him, we are not related and have the same name, Knox Wyatt. He was selling insurance for the Franklin Life Insurance Company. And he came down and I went with him and he said, "I'll just pay you to go with me. You just go around and introduce me to the people, you know, and I'll just give you so much money for doing that." And that's what I did for about two or three years. I did fairly good. He begged me to stay with him but I didn't, after I got a chance to get back. Well, we were sitting right there on the porch out there and Dixie Walker came by in 1950. He came by and we were real good friends on the Dodgers. He says, "Buddy," he says, that's what he always called me, he says, "Buddy, I think I'm going to get the job over in Atlanta this year, this afternoon. I've always thought about you being my pitching coach." He says, "Would you want to get back in baseball?" Gosh, I was thrilled to death to be back in baseball and I said, "I sure would." So he called me back about four o'clock that afternoon and he says, "Buddy, you've got a job."

Great.

WW- And that started me back in baseball and so I stayed with them. In 1950 we won the pennant. Eddie Mathews was with us that year and he had a good year. So, I coached that year first base for him and was pitching coach. In 1951 I coached in Atlanta and in 1952 they made me

the pitching coach. So Gene came there and he was a real smart manager, a baseball man, smart, I mean real smart. And I coached third base for him that year and he decided next year, that was '54, he decided next year that he wanted to go back and play some so he went back to the Red Sox and played some with the Red Sox, two or three years at second base. And Earl Mann came to me after the '53 season and essentially asked me, "Would you like to manage?" I really didn't, to tell you the truth about it, I didn't know if I could manager or not. But I needed the money. I might have said to myself, "I might not have a job if I don't try it." So I told him and I took it. And Earl gave me \$900 a month. I think he told me, I'm not sure about this, but that's the most he ever give anybody. And if I had a good year the next year I may not ask for any more. So we had a pretty good year. We won everything. We won the right to play the All-Star game in Atlanta. We won the All-Star game. In fact, I pitched in that All-Star game.

Really.

WW- Dixie Walker told me in Nashville, after a game one night, we was coming home, he said, "I'm going to let you start the All-Star game." I thought that was the craziest thing I ever heard of in my life. And, I started it.

You were only forty-six years old.

WW- Yeah. And hadn't pitched in several years.

It sounds like Jim Palmer, this spring, doesn't it?

WW- I told him you're crazy but I got to pitching batting practice and my arm came around and I felt pretty good. I remember I got in trouble in the first inning. Little outfielder got up and was hitting about .380 for Little Rock. I can't think of his name, a left-hand hitter, he came up with the bases full and two men out. They had scored one run. I looked out and Dixie was going to have to take me out. We had about sixteen thousand people there that night, I think the biggest crowd that they ever had. I remember the catcher gave a fastball sign and I shook him off. He came back with a curveball sign and I threw him a curveball and struck him out. He took it. He didn't strike at it. He took it right down at 3 and 2 and there's something about that, I'm going to tell you. And I struck him out and got out of that inning and I pitched the third inning and Dixie asked me in the fourth inning, "Do you want to go any more?" I says, "Yeah, let me pitch one more." And my brother, who was sitting in the stands that night, with my family, he says, "Yeah the darn fool is just like that, you never know." I got out of trouble, you know. And I went out there and got 'em out and I pitched all right. He told me that afterward. I did, I could throw pretty good.

Well, the next year you were teaching people in Philadelphia how to throw.

WW- Yeah, well, the reason for that was, I missed the pension plan by one year. One year. If I'd been there in '46, if I'd had been in the major leagues in '46, I'd have been in the pension plan. But I missed it. Sixteen and a half years was my playing time, see. I kept back in my head I'd like to get in that thing because you had to go back and stay five years. Now, three coaches can participate in the pension plan just like a ballplayer can. But, you had to be there five years to do it. So, Mayo Smith managed the Birmingham club that year and he thought we had a pretty good year. The general manager, **Hank Roy Haney** called me and said, "Would you like to come up to Philadelphia next year as our pitching coach?" And I finally talked to him about it and finally agreed on the salary. I think they agreed to pay me twelve thousand dollars a year. And I said, "Well, what kind of a contract will you give me, how long?" He says, "Well how about three

years?" That was great. If I get three years then I could certainly get two years somewhere else, if I don't get it there. I took it up and I went there and I think I helped a lot, a good many pitchers.

I know that Jack Sanford pitched real well.

WW- I helped Jack Sanford a lot. In fact, you don't help all pitchers. They had some good arms that year and some of them you are always disappointed when you don't help them and I understand that now. You just don't help everybody. They can't do what you tell them to do. When I started to change speeds on the ball, that made me a pitcher. But, you know what? I actually learned that myself. I didn't have anybody tell me that.

Was there a pitching coach on the team when you were there?

WW- No. Well, there was with Detroit, yeah. What's his name?

Was there anybody in particular on that Phillies team that could have been a great pitcher if they could have actually done what you were telling them to do? How had the natural ability but not the...

WW- Of course, Roberts was there and a left-hand pitcher, what's his name?

A left-handed pitcher?

WW- A left-hand pitcher on the club that year. Went to St. Louis.

Was Turk Farrell left handed?

WW- No, no.

Let's see, there was a fellow named Jack Meyer on that club.

WW- Yeah, Jack Meyer, he had a good arm. He had a real good arm. He ought to have been a better pitcher than he was, really because he had good enough stuff. Sanford, Meyer, Roberts, that was it.

Were you able to help Roberts at all? Did you try to do anything with Robin Roberts?

WW- Well, there wasn't much you could do. He was a good pitcher. I'll bet that book of your has got all the names in it.

Well, this doesn't have all the names in it, but we're looking at '57. Robin Roberts, is that who you're looking at, 1957? Or '55 through '57. They had pitchers like Robin Roberts, Murray Dickson. I'm not familiar with this name, Harry Wehmeier. Curt Simmons, is that the one?

WW- Curt Simmons. I had Curt Simmons, too. But he finally went to St. Louis, you know. He stayed in St. Louis several years. He started changing the speed of the ball and it helped him a lot. Yeah.

I remember him as a pitcher. Now Harvey Haddix was on the team, too. That's another good lefty.

WW_ Harvey Haddix. He should have...well, he did right good.

Well, he certainly did real well for twelve or thirteen innings against Milwaukee in 1958, didn't he?

WW- Sure did.

Don Cardwell, he was a righty, wasn't he?

WW- Yeah, he had a good arm. They had some good arms.

Jim Hearn. He was from Atlanta?

WW- Yeah. He was up there that year.

Well, did you have a chance to do any managing while you were coaching? Did you get any offers to do any managing?

WW- No, I didn't, well, I never did finish that story. I wanted to. I got those three years in see, with the Philadelphia club and I think Roy Hamey called me on Thursday and said, "Whit, we're not going to renew your contract for next year." And I didn't ask him why or anything because to be frank with you, I didn't want to go back to Philadelphia. In fact, if it hadn't been for Wally Moses over there, I don't think I'd have stayed because he and I were real good friends. And I'd probably stayed there because he's from Georgia, too. What's the little place down south, Vidalia?

Yeah, he died this past year. I think it was in Vidalia.

WW- I bought a ham from a fellow down there, a fellow by the name of Morris and he knew Wally and Wally came down there and they put he and his wife in a home together and they stayed in a home and every time I called Mr. Morris up, he'd tell me something about how Wally was doing. And he finally called me and told me he died. Yeah. He was great. Boy, he was a good egg and he could run like a deer. But anyway, we agreed, well that my reason for going back as a coach and not as a manager. Earl Mann tried his best to get me to come back as a manager. I don't know whether I made a mistake or not. Know, I'd say I didn't.

Jim Greengrass said you would have made a great manager.

WW- Yeah. He was a pretty good ballplayer. What's his name? Jones that played third base.

Puddin' Head.

WW- What was the shortstop's name?

Granny Hamner.

WW- Granny Hamner. They had some good ballplayers. Who was the big first baseman?

On the Phillies?

WW- Who?

Big first baseman on the Phillies?

WW- Who?

You're asking who was the big first baseman on the Phillies about that time?

WW- Yeah, yeah. Right-handed. Lopat. No.

Well, the only name I come up with is Marv Blalock as a first baseman with the Phillies.

WW- Stan Lopata.

I think he was a catcher.

WW- Yeah, he played first base then. Who was the outfielder, a good hitter.

Richie Ashburn?

WW- Ashburn was good and I liked Ashburn. He and I were good friends.

Maybe the best defensive center fielder the National League's ever had.

WW- I'm not talking about that. The left fielder. Good hitter.

Del Ennis?

WW- Del Ennis, they ruined him, it was unmerciful, for the type ballplayer he was. And they ruined the heck out of him.

They, the fans?

WW- He lived there, you know. His daddy lived there and he worked for a famous hat place.

Stetson?

WW- Yeah, Stetson hat place, I actually went down there and we had a carload of hats.

And the fans were real hard on Del.

WW- Oh, they were real hard on Del and it was pathetic because he wasn't a great fielder. But boy, he was a good hitter.

He hit balls nobody else could get.

WW- They'd get on him because he couldn't catch balls out there. He'd have a ball right in his hand and he'd drop it. Anyway, he said he wouldn't renew my contract and I'd had three years in, see. And, after I hung up on the phone, I said to myself, well, what am I going to do? I said, I'm out of a job. My son's out of a job now. But, Eastern Airlines, I was telling him. He's a pilot for twenty five years, Captain, and doesn't have a job. And doesn't have a pension. They've even got the money tied up in his pension. I know how he feels. I said what in the world am I going to do?

It looked like the good lord has always come along and he's always taken care of me. I tore my knee up. I got along all right. I had my arm operated on. It took thirteen chips out of my arm, I couldn't even move it, just like that. After that, I've always said the good lord has come along and kept me as many times in life. But, he did this time. I said after that, what am I going to do? On Saturday, a man called me by the phone and said, "Whit, I see you're not going back to Philadelphia, would you like to join our club?" And I want to tell you I didn't even know who I was talking to and I said, "Yes!" I didn't care where it was. He finally said, "This is John Quinn, the General Manager of the Braves." I could have fell over. That was 1928 now and they had won the pennant.

'58.

WW- Fifty eight, I'm sorry. They had won the pennant and beat the Yankees in the World Series. Who makes a change then? You don't make changes. And I couldn't believe that he wanted me as the pitching coach. Some fellow from Georgia was the pitching coach. But anyway, I didn't understand it but I didn't argue with him about it. He evidently thought a lot of me because it wasn't hard to make a deal with me. He asked me what about a contract and I was getting twelve thousand dollars at Philadelphia. He said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll give you eighteen thousand dollars." Just like that.

Big jump.

WW- That's the most I got when I won twenty two games. I had to hold out all spring training to get eighteen thousand. I said, "OK, how about the length of the contract?" He says, "Well, whatever you think what you want." And just something popped in my head and I said, "How about three years?" He says, "That's fine."

And so that puts you over the five years for sure.

WW- So I had my...if I did well enough, he didn't send me home but of course, I stayed there nine years. In other words, I got thirteen years in as a coach and that was my pension. I think my pension is all right. I did fine. Like I said, the good lord has always taken care of me. And I had this farm and I had fourteen hundred acres here together and I figure I made more money out of real estate than I have anything else. And I...forgot what I was going to say...

They had some really good pitchers when you came along. What do you say to somebody like Warren Spahn when you were his pitching coach?

WW- Let him talk to me. Spahn and Burdette. Now you talk about two cutters. Now, there's two cutters. He was probably the greatest pitcher I ever saw, Spahn was. I mean, I'm talking about from a pitching standpoint. I'm not talking about a fellow with stuff now. You know, he was in the service about three years.

Didn't win his first game until he was twenty five.

WW- When he got on that mound, he really knew how to pitch.

Well, I was thinking about how mean you were. And, you probably know the story. Casey Stengel got mad at Spahn back in the forties for not being mean enough. Did you ever hear that story?

WW- No. Said he wasn't mean enough.

Right, it was back when Casey was coaching, managing the Boston Braves.

WW- I don't remember him being that mean, but he was a competitor.

Well, Stengel told Spahn to throw inside to somebody and Spahn did but not close enough to suit Stengel. And Stengel went and yanked him out of the game immediately and said you haven't got any guts at all. And the next thing Casey knew about it, Spahn had been in World War II, a Purple Heart and a couple of Silver Stars. So, it was a little bit different.

WW- Boy, he was a competitor if there ever was one and had the best control of a screwball that I've ever saw anybody throw. Boy, he could take that, right here, that plate, that corner right there and he could hit that corner just like that right there. All day. Right hand hitters, boy he made them look bad.

Well you saw Carl Hubbel pitch, too, didn't you? Was he still pitching when you came up to the Dodgers? Can you compare Spahn and Hubbel?

WW- Really, I'll tell you, I didn't see him pitch that much. I couldn't say.

He was kind of at the end of his career, I guess, by that time.

WW- Yeah.

Well, if you don't mind, let me go back over a couple of things because I've got a couple of questions and a couple of things I'd like to clear up, if I could. When you said that Babe Ruth hit that home run off you, what year was that that you were talking about? Was it '29, your first year up?

WW- I believe it was in '30.

I was curious about that.

WW- Was that his last year?

No, '34 was his last year. '34 was his last year in the American League and then he went over to the Boston Braves in '35.

WW- Philadelphia, no Boston Braves. Yeah, yeah.

Did you, a couple people wanted me to ask some questions of you. Did you pitch against the A's when you were in the American League?

WW- Did I pitch against who, the A's?

The A's, right, do you have any particular stories or memories about the A's and Connie Mack, Mister Mack, in particular?

WW- Well no, yeah, I pitched against Philadelphia. Ah, Simmons, Dykes, and Haas, how you pronounce it?

Probably a fellow named Foxx.

WW- Well, I don't remember too much. When I joined the White Sox, they had made a trade with Philadelphia. Haas and Simmons and Dykes.

They were all over there.

WW- They were all over there, see.

Let's see. Were pitchers still throwing spitballs when you were there in the thirties or was something that was history?

WW- Yeah, it seemed like there were two or three, Grimes.

He was still around then. And was Red Faber still pitching?

WW- Oh Red Faber, right. He'd join the club that year.

There's a story that I've been asked to ask you about, and so I will. It has to do with Paul Waner. Let me see if I can pull this out here. There are two versions of the story and this gentleman is wanting to know which one is correct. Paul Waner was with the Braves and you were pitching for Brooklyn. You had a two-run lead in the fourth inning and nobody on. And so you decided to experiment. You started throwing Paul Waner fastballs inside to find out if he still had the power to pull it over the fence, so the story goes. And if Waner did do that, you'd still be ahead because you had the two-run lead, nobody was on and you'd know what not to throw to Waner in the clutch, you know, if the game were on the line. According to this version of the story, Waner was thinking right along with you. He deliberately backed away and deliberately fouled your inside fastball and that gave you the idea that you were too fast.

WW- I don't believe anybody deliberately fouled the ball. He might have fouled it but he didn't deliberately do it. I don't believe that, huh uh.

OK, well let me continue. That's very interesting to hear. It says Waner was setting a trap for you. For the moment when he could unload on an inside pitch.

WW- Of course, let me mix my brains up along that line.

OK.

WW- There's three pitches, I'd say, pitchers in the major leagues today can do. If you can pitch to a good hitter, I'm talking about good hitters now, not your weak hitters, and throw your shit stuff to your good hitters. Two and nothing, three and one, and three and two, if you can throw something over the plate, and I really don't, you can spot pitch them if you've got that kind of control. But, if you can throw a strike a strike at those times in the major leagues today, you can win in the major leagues. Two and nothing, three and one, and three and two. I want to tell you, Durocher relieved with me in the Polo Grounds against the Giants and we were leading, hell I forget what the dang score was. This must have been '40...when was his last year of playing?

Who, Waner or Durocher? I'm going to guess, about '38 Let me find out for sure..

WW- Must have been, of course.

Well, he played two games in 1945.

WW- That wouldn't have been it. It must have been '38. He was managing and he'd called me in from the bullpen with the bases full, two men out, and three and two on the hitter.

A pressure situation.

WW- And the reason I know it, he was still playing shortstop because I had to walk by him coming in from the bullpen and he walks all the way from shortstop into the mound and on the way in he says, "What are you going to throw him?" Do you know who the hitter was? Mel Ott. I didn't have any more idea than the man in the moon what I was going to throw him and I thought he was a dang fool for asking me what I was going to throw him in the first place because I knew whatever I threw him, he'd hit it and he'd second guess me, so I didn't say anything. I want to tell you what I did. The right hand catcher on our club, Owen, I don't know how come he'd catch that day, but anyway he caught. I made, you're allowed seven pitches, warm-up pitches when you come into a game. I threw three of seven slow curves. I didn't throw a fastball at all and Ott was sitting over there on he knew with that bat in his hand and I knew what kind of hitter he was and he was the kind of hitter I'm talking about, and I said to myself, he's guessing with me and I'm guessing with him. I says, by gosh, I know what he's going to look for. He knows I'm a pretty good pitcher. He gave me credit for being a pretty good pitcher. Of course, all this goes threw and he knows, he saw me throwing those slow curves and he knows I'm not going to throw him a fastball. So, I hope and the catcher goes down and the manager of the Cubs one or two years?

I'll have to work on that.

WW- I says I hope he calls for a curveball. In fact, he thought that's what I wanted to throw because I had throw all slow curves, didn't throw a fastball at all in my seven pitches. He thought that's what I wanted to throw. And just like that, I said, by gosh, I'm going to throw him a fastball, which ordinarily ninety nine times out of a hundred it was the worst pitch you could have thrown. And I knew that, but, he was guessing with me and he knew that's what he was going to get. And when I threw him the fastball I took a nice, easy windup like I was going to throw, just like I was going to throw something easy, and all at once I came through and I threw him a fastball and I threw that ball as straight down the middle, by gosh, as you can throw it, right like that. Just about that high. And he stood there and took it.

Got him flat-footed.

WW- I went to the bench and Durocher got on me. He said, "If you ever get a hitter like that in a spot like that, don't you ever throw him the fastball!"

But he didn't mind that you struck him out, did he?

WW- So, we won the ballgame and I managed to the year '54 and Ott lives in New Orleans and we were playing down there that day and he come in the clubhouse, I made a move on my pitchers, and McMahan, who was my best relief pitcher, I didn't pitch him and I let somebody else pitch. He was with the Philadelphia club, a right hander, and he pitched a great game in Mobile so I let him come in and I knew, I was trying to give Don a little extra rest, a days rest. He was pitching the heck out of it. They beat us that ballgame and after the game was over I went to the clubhouse and I was sick because I knew that was me. Managing, I lost that ballgame myself and they were batting enough for the dang pennant. And I was sitting there grieving about it and

somebody patted me on the shoulder and I looked at him and that's who it was, it was Mel Ott. And he sat down and talked to me and I told him what I had done. And he says, "Well, I'll never forget one pitch you made..." And all that time, he remembered that pitch! He said, "You would bet a million dollars to a dime that I never would have thrown him a fastball at that day." And, ordinarily I wouldn't. But that's just part of pitching. I don't know why you do some things sometimes but, you do 'em. I was the wrong pitch but it was the right one.

Would you remember this game against Waner when he was with the Braves? Does that ring a bell at all? According to Ty Cobb, eighth inning with two on and nobody out and a home run would win the game. Waner's up there. Anyway, he hit a sacrifice bunt to advance the runners.

WW- I don't remember that.

There's another one where he did hit the inside fast one for a home run. Do you remember Paul Waner beating you with a home run?

WW- Home run, no I don't, but I know one thing. He was that type of hitter. I mean, he could hit a fastball. He was great, in fact, he was on our club here.

That's right, during the war.

WW- We had a good club.

How many springs did the Dodgers go to Havana for spring training?

WW- Only one.

Only one, 1942?

WW- Yeah.

Do you have any stories about that spring training?

WW- Well, I stayed at home. I held out. In fact, I had to hold out all of spring training until they came back in Florida and I joined them down in Florida. I wanted to talk to McPhail about the contract. And we talked about it and he finally says, "You write down on a slip of paper what you think you ought to get." And I'm going to write down on a slip of paper what I think I should give you. And, we'll just exchange them. Well, I was holding out for eighteen thousand, that's what I asked for. He put sixteen thousand down on his and I asked for eighteen thousand. After he looked at it, he said, "I'll tell you, you are a great fellow to have on the ballclub and I really appreciate that, you know." Branch Rickey said the same thing about me. He says, "You're a great fellow to have on the club to begin with and he says, "I think you deserve it and I'm going to give you eighteen thousand." So that's the reason I got eighteen thousand. That wasn't exactly a lot of money, but then it was a good bit of money.

Yes, it was. But you missed out on some high times in Havana then in 1942. I guess that was quite a spring training. I certainly heard some stories about that.

WW- Hugh Casey.

And Ernest Hemingway in particular. I guess that they had a friendship that carried on over the next several years, is that right? Did they become good friends?

WW- They must have, yeah. That Casey was a ...

Well, he was from Atlanta, is that right?

WW- Yeah, he was mean. He was tough on that mound, though. He'd as soon hit you between the eyes and it wouldn't make any difference to him. We were real good friends, Casey and his wife, and we went up to upper New York, out of New York City a lot of times, to a place up there and played golf on off days and played up there whenever we had off days. We played golf in that country club up there and I knew them real well and I knew her. I guess you knew this, you know what happened to him.

Well, I know that he committed suicide.

WW- He was talking to his wife at the hotel over the phone, and what was her name, I knew them real well, we ran with them. She talked to him and finally he said, "I'm going to commit suicide," and he had this gun and he had it propped up under his chin and he killed himself and of all the people in the world that you thought wouldn't have committed suicide, I wouldn't ever thought Casey, that type of fellow would have ever committed suicide. It was something. I think he a little trouble financially.

I was going to ask about that. Was he a pretty good drinker, too?

WW- Yeah, he drank pretty good, yeah.

Well, you know Hemingway killed himself in a very similar manner about ten years later.

WW- Is that right? Well, if he run with Casey he must have drank.

Yes, I'll bet.

WW- Well, you know, I say that and I say we were pretty good friends but you know that's something I never did do much. I never did smoke, never smoked. And I never drank, very little, in fact, I drank maybe a bottle of beer now in the afternoon. One bottle. I told my doctor, long ago asked him about and says, "Two bottles of beer will probably help you." It does. It gives you a little lift and he says if you get to drinking more than two bottles of beer a day, then you might hurt yourself. Casey would drink that hard stuff.

That's one of the reasons you made it to eighty three, I suspect.

WW- Gosh. But, he sure was. He was a good hearted fellow.

There was another person that had a reputation for being a good drinker on that team. Kirby Higbe.

WW- Oh, right.

I have been meaning to read his autobiography. That's on my list of things to do. The High, Hard One. I've been wanting to read that and haven't got around to it, yet. Have you read it?

WW- No, huhuh. Is that a book that he wrote?

Yes.

WW- You know, he won twenty two games that year. He won twenty two and lost nine and I won twenty two and lost ten.

That's the start of a real good pitching staff.

WW- But, Kirby, the worst thing about him is he'd get out in front and he'd get beat.

He'd let up, huh?

WW- I was just the opposite.

Stan Musial said that when you pitched against Mort Cooper, the first person who'd got a run behind him would be the one who'd win. I guess there were a lot of 1-0 and 2-0 games between you and Mort Cooper.

WW- Oh yeah.

I guess those were great pitching duels.

WW- Every time I pitched against them I had to pitch against Cooper, I don't know why.

I guess they were the greatest pitching duels of the early forties, when you and Cooper would match up. Let me ask you about some of the players you played with. And I guess one of the things I'm hoping to get out of you is there's a particularly interesting story that tells me a little bit more about Charlie Gehringer, for example. Or a particularly funny story. We'll start with that. What's the funniest story that you remember for all of your years of pitching? What's the funniest thing you ever saw on a ballfield?

WW- I have to think, I don't know. You mentioned Gehringer.

Sure, can you tell me any stories about Charlie Gehringer from your years on the club with him?

WW- One story I could tell you about Charlie Gehringer, he's just great. Great hitter. Great fielder. Great fellow to have on a club. High class fellow. I mean he was, in fact I don't believe he could be beat. I say that Billy Herman was probably the smartest ballplayer I ever saw, but Gehringer was the greatest second baseman I ever saw.

Who was the best first baseman you ever saw? Let's talk about some of that. Who was the greatest first baseman you saw in all those years?

WW- Fielding-wise?

I guess I'm going to ask you for your All-Star team.

WW- Camilli was the best fielder I ever saw. I wouldn't necessarily compare him to some of the other hitters. He was a great hitter but he was strictly a low ball hitter. In other words, he could be

pitched too, pretty good, pitch up. But if you got the ball low to him, he'd ruin you. That doesn't mean that he couldn't hit a fastball at all up here. That just means that if he had a weakness, it was the high fastball.

But, he was the slickest fielding first baseman you saw, huh?

WW- Yeah, yeah. By far.

And on second you'd choose Charlie Gehringer. Right? You'd chose Charlie Gehringer for your second baseman. What about shortstop?

WW- I saw so many and I thought they were all good.

I know you played with Pee Wee Reese and you played with Luke Appling.

WW- Appling was great now. He was the darndest hitter I ever saw. He could hit the ball to right field better than anybody I ever saw, for a right hand hitter. He'd wear that right fielder out. We were real close, too. App and I. He and his wife. They were a fine couple. Let's see, it would be hard. Marion was a real good shortstop. Reese was...

He wasn't bad either.

WW- I mean it would be kind of hard, really.

What about around third base?

WW- I can't think of any.

Oh, geez, Marv Owen, Jimmy Dykes. Cookie Lavagetto.

WW- Dykes for third baseman. Lavagetto was a good ballplayer, too.

And you played with some good outfielders, too. Al Simmons. Harry Heilmann, Earl Averill. Of course, on the Brooklyn team, Dixie Walker, Joe Medwick, Pete Reiser, Augie Galen. Paul Waner was there for a while. Of course, he was toward the end of his career.

WW- Did you every hear anything about Paul drinking?

I heard it, yeah, are those stories true?

WW- I don't know as far as him being on the Brooklyn club with me but I heard that he drank. In fact, I heard a story one time about him signing up, he and the general manager got together on some kind of a contract where he wouldn't drink. He got to have a bad year and so he'd go ahead and drink. He'd carry it out on the bench and drink with him. I'd get behind the water cooler. No, I don't know if that's true or not.

Well, it didn't seem to hurt him, too much anyway.

WW- No, he was a great hitter.

What about catchers? Who was the best catcher? Did you have a particular catcher that you wanted to have behind the plate when you were pitching?

WW- Well, the catcher that helped me the most was Mancuso, he was probably the smartest catcher that I ever pitched to.

In other words, he was helping you read the hitters?

WW- Right. Right. And Owen was a good catcher.

I beg your pardon.

WW- Owen. He wasn't that type of catcher. Let's see, who else. Name some of the catchers. I can't think of one.

Well, with Detroit there was Ray Hayworth who caught with them.

WW- Ray Hayworth was one of the best friends I ever had in my life. We were real close. In fact, he came to the Brooklyn club, you know.

Oh no, I didn't know that.

WW- He was a scout. Not playing, scouting, and he was smart. Lived in High Point, North Carolina. He comes down here and I'd go on up there with him and a friend of mine from Cedar Town and hunt with him and we went on a hunting trip together, in Virginia, his wife, she's a fine person.

When you went to the White Sox, the catcher was Luke Sewell. Another pretty good player and then with Cleveland, that one year that you were there, a player I don't know anything about, maybe you can help me this, Frankie Pytlack?

WW- Pytlack.

Can you tell me anything about him? I don't know that name at all but I know that he was a catcher on the Cleveland club that year.

WW- He was a catcher but I can't say that he was the best catcher. I wouldn't say that. He was a good catcher.

And of course, Mickey Owen in Brooklyn. He was the catcher those years and then Andy Seminick with the Phillies.

WW- Yeah, he was a good catcher, too. He was a smart catcher, now. He'd probably help you. I'm talking about being smart as far as calling pitches. That's what I'm talking about, calling pitches. He seemed to do more thinking. He was over at Philadelphia a while.

That's right.

WW- It looked like he ought to have made a good manager.

I thought that, too. I suspect he did some coaching, I think he did.

WW- Oh yeah, yeah. He did, yeah.

What was the best defensive play that you ever saw?

WW- The best what?

Defensive play.

WW- Play?

Yessir! Will you tell me about pitching in Ebbets Field? Did it present any problems?

WW- Well now, a lot of people did. A lot of people didn't like to pitch there. It didn't make that much difference to me. I think if you're a good enough pitcher, you can pitch anywhere.

Well of course, I never saw Ebbet Fields, unfortunately.

WW- Of course, it had that close right field fence.

Pardon?

WW- It had that real close right field fence.

Did you have to pitch a special way to counter that?

WW- About 230 down the line in right field, I mean.

So how did you pitch? Did you adjust your pitching because of that? You were going to let the hitters do any adjusting, if they needed to, huh?

WW- Right. Yeah. I pitched to hitters about the same all the time.

Was there one hitter who was particularly tough?

WW- Just like pitching in the Polo Grounds. I thought it was a terrible park to pitch in, but I never had, it didn't bother me that much. Just about 230 down each line. But, it was like here. It went around like that, you know. I guess that helped. They probably hit a lot of fly balls off me to the center field, right-center and left-center, you know.

They'd die there then.

WW- Of course, I threw my fastball. My fastball carried like this.

Yeah, I've read that. Stan Musial said it was a rising fastball.

WW- Yeah, they'd get under it all the time. The majority of the pitchers today, I'd say, are low ball pitchers. Most of them throw sinkers. And, that pitch is harder to hit for a base hit than a ball up here. Because you see this ball. You're at bat and you swing on a level. You swing like this, up here. Down here, your bat's like that. The chances of you hitting that ball on the fat part of the

bat is better up here than it is down here, but I'm familiar with low ball, boy he (Musial) could hit the fire out of that ball, he could hit it a mile.

Was there a hitter that seemed to give you the most trouble?

WW- The hitters that give me the most trouble are hitters that punch the ball. I like the hitter that swung the bat.

Kind of the all or nothing hitter, the one that you had the most trouble with.

WW- The third baseman for the Cubs, what was his name? Little fellow, not known, he give me a fit.

I don't know, well let's find out. Let's take a second and find out.

WW- What was his name. Lonnie Frey, he didn't swing at the ball hard. He just punched at the ball, just like that.

You mentioned Cecil Travis earlier. He was that sort of hitter, too.

WW- He was that sort but I didn't pitch against Cecil now. I don't know too much about him.

Third basemen, Cubs.

WW- Santo.

Oh, Ron Santo today. I was looking back. Stan Hack was the third baseman.

WW- Stan Hack! Hack!

Santo, Hack.

WW- I had a hard time with him now. I'd pitch a ball outside and I think it was good and he'd just knock that ball into left field just like that, you know. I didn't like to pitch to hitters that didn't swing hard. I wanted somebody to swing hard where I could fool them.

Was there a particularly good hitter that you felt you really had his number? I mean somebody that would tag all of the other pitchers, but he was yours?

WW- Well, they were some hitters, I can't recall them, some hitters that gave me more trouble than other hitters. Off hand, I don't know.

I'd like to hear more about Pete Reiser, if you can. He's one of the players who have fascinated me for a long time. I guess he was just a heck of a ballplayer and it didn't work out for injuries, but it was almost like he played so intensely, he injured himself.

WW- He didn't know where the fence was.

It didn't seem to make any difference. I don't think it would have made any difference if he did know.

WW- No.

He was going to run through it anyway, would you agree with that?

WW- Well, I don't know if he felt that but he run into several.

Well, you were pitching.

WW- He could run so hard and so fast. He could fly.

You were on the mound when he had that terrible collision with the fence in St. Louis. You were the pitcher and he was going after that ball.

WW- He didn't think about the fence. Most fellows, outfielders now, you see them feeling for the fence, you know. In fact, they hurt themselves by thinking about it, whether they could have caught a ball and maybe they didn't catch it on account of that.

You think he came back too soon in 1942? Do you think he should have taken the rest of the season out or at least a few more weeks to recuperate?

WW- Yeah.

But there was a pennant race on.

WW- That fellow, he could hit that ball hard. I mean, he swung hard. You wouldn't think that a little fellow like that would have that much power, but...

He did everything all out.

WW- Oh, he'd hit that ball a mile. Of course, if he hit it on the ground, he'd beat it out.

I guess he was hitting about .390 when he went into that wall. He was having a heck of a season.

WW- No telling what kind of year he would have had.

Are there any players, do you watch that much baseball now on television, for example? Do you get to Atlanta to games every now and then?

WW- I don't go to Atlanta too much.

What players of today do you think are most like the players back in the late thirties or early forties, or are there any? I guess what I'm asking, who's playing today that would have been a success back then?

WW- That's hard to say. I'll say this. I don't believe baseball is as good as it was back those days, as a whole.

In what way?

WW- There's one part about the game that's changed more than any part of the game as far as I'm concerned and that is stealing bases. I don't know how in the world they steal as many bases

as they do now. I don't know whether runners are that much faster or whether they get, I see runners getting leads, you know. I say good gosh almighty there is no way in the world he could keep from getting picked off. He just walks back into first base. I don't know if the pitchers don't have the moves but I believe, well, I didn't have a good move but they wouldn't get that far off.

Has the balk rule changed that much? Do you think that's a factor?

WW- Well now that foot coming back over the rubber and you've got to go to home plate. Now I don't know about that. That might bother. It wouldn't have bothered me, though because my foot didn't go that away. My foot went this way.

But, do you think the balk rule has changed, do you think that's helped the base runners?

WW- I don't think there's any doubt about it. I think it did help them, yeah.

Do you agree that a runner steals on the pitcher and not on the catcher?

WW- Oh yeah, he steals on the pitcher. The other night somebody says, "And there he goes." He just walks into second base. The catcher don't even throw. Well, you hardly ever saw that where the catcher didn't even throw the ball. In fact, I can't recall one.

But there are a lot fewer steals of home now than there used to be.

WW- Yeah.

Why is that?

WW- You just get a lead, a running start, I don't know whether it's carelessness or not. If all of the base runners run on us like they do now, that Durocher would have had a spasm.

Was he the best manager you played for?

WW- It's pretty hard to say. Durocher is smart. Boy, he was smart. He'd think quicker than anybody I ever saw. But I think one of the smartest managers I ever saw was Gene Mauch.

Well, he played for Bucky Harris, too. He's got quite a reputation as a good manager.

WW- The biggest thing about a manager, I think, is handling his ball club, I mean, his players.

The psychological end of it?

WW- Getting the most of them. I managed in Atlanta, I wasn't that smart. But I'll say one thing, by God, they always wanted to win for me. I thought they thought that much of me. They played different. They played hard. I never did have to get after anybody. Donovan was the only man I had to get after a little bit.

Donovan, Dick Donovan?

WW- Yeah, and I helped him as much as I ever helped anybody, anybody. In fact, I made him a pitcher. He was hard headed, he wasn't paying attention to anybody. And, I was out trying to show a left-hand pitcher, who was that, he was a left hander from Philadelphia, too. In fact, I was

talking to him about pitching and it had come to rain that day. And, they put the canvas on field, this in Atlanta. They put the canvas on the field and I was out trying to help this pitcher, I don't know his name to save my life. I'll go tonight and I'll stay awake all night trying to think of it. He was a pretty good pitcher but he just didn't, he didn't change speeds. He didn't change speed of the ball enough. When you change the speed of the ball, you make your fastball a little bit faster. I was trying to...

I'm thinking about one pitcher. Wasn't Stu Miller one of the pitchers on the Phillies when you were a coach?

WW- Who?

Stu Miller?

WW- Yeah.

Didn't they say his pitchers were slow, slower, and slowest?

WW- Yeah, he was right handed.

Slow, slower, and slowest.

WW- Right, that's the way he'd pitched. Anyway, I was trying to help this pitcher. Left hander, he was a left hander and Donovan walked up and I was trying to get the left hander to throw a slider. And he says, "Bill," What was his name? And Donovan walks up and he was watching and I looked up at Donovan and he was just looking, see. He didn't say anything. I said, "Did you ever throw a slider?" He says, "No, how do you throw it?" Well, that's exactly the way I threw it, right there. I cocked this finger and I put pressure on the ball here. See, when that ball comes off of your hand, now I hold it like that, see.

With the fingers extended?

WW- Like this. Like that. The ball will revolve like this, see. And that's the reason my ball went up because against the air, it forces it up because you've got to be able to throw hard enough to do that.

It was forced up.

WW- But this way I did that right there and that made the ball come off of this part of the finger, see, like this, slide off. That's what it was. It was the slider. Makes it spin. It don't look like a curve ball. If you can see the spin on it like you do a curve it's not a good slider. But anyway, I asked Dick, I said, "Did you ever throw a slider?" He said, "No. I never did. How do you hold it?" I told him like that. I showed him my hand and he put that in his hand and he says, "I can't get my finger down there." That's something I didn't want him to say, "I can't." If he hadn't of said anything he'd have been better off but I says, "Well, I throw mine just like that, you can try it if you want to." And I want to tell you we went into Mobile and the next game he pitched and I'll bet you that he threw 65% of the balls he threw were sliders. He had the best, as good a control of the slider as Juan has of his screwball and that made him a pitcher. He won eighteen games for us that year.

Can I ask you to describe again how you held the ball for the slider? Can you describe it so we'll be able to hear it? You're doing a great job of showing me how you brought your index finger back.

WW- Well, instead of the ball spinning this way now, the ball spins this way.

It'll spin sideways, in other words, back towards you.

WW- The ball spins this way.

It'll spin sideways, from left to right.

WW- Right to left.

I'm sorry, right to left.

WW- It will spin that way. Anyway that you can spin a ball is the way it's going to break. I could never throw a screwball because it would be out there like that see, the wrist comes back like that. Well, I never did try it too much, the screwball. I didn't need it so I didn't use it.

Did you throw a slider when you were with the Dodgers?

WW- Did I, oh yeah. I started throwing it with the Dodgers.

Not too many pitchers were doing that, were they?

WW- I pitched a game against the Phillies, who did I pitch against, oh I know who it was now, Rudy York! He played with the Boston Red Sox and I pitched a game against him and he came up and I threw him my first slider and struck him out. And he asked me after that, what was that you threw me. I says, "I don't know what it was but I think it's what I'd call a slider." He says, "Well, what ever you threw me, you keep on throwing it." That started me throwing the damn slider.

Were a lot of pitchers throwing the slider at that time or was that pretty unusual?

WW- No, huh uh.

It was unusual?

WW- Yeah.

I thought so. Didn't they used to call it a nickel curve?

WW- Blaeholder used to throw one all the time. I don't know whether he called it a slider or not but that's what it was. Boy, dang, if he didn't have a good one, too. He really made me look bad.

Would you describe a slider for me, what the pitch does?

WW- When you throw a curve, you hook it and the ball comes over your hand like this and it's spinning like this, see. You throw it just like this. I'd flip it with my thumb and my thumb like that and when I throw it out I push it, my thumb, and it would come out. Now, I didn't do that to

start with, because if I did, they'd see that, you know, just like they'd did my fastball. I really think I could help any pitcher a little bit by just talking to him. I'd watch a pitcher pitch in Atlanta and gollee, they needed somebody just to talk to them a little bit. That part of pitching, that's part of it. Where you spin the ball, you know, two and nothing, three and one, three and two. I'll bet a pitcher don't even think about that. I know they don't because they'll wind up and they'll throw a good hitter a fastball right down the middle. Then they'll wonder why in the world. I don't know if there's something you learn.

How has the role of coaching changed over the years? When you came up?

WW- Well now, you asked me that a while back, when I was playing with Detroit, we had an old coach, I can't think of his name now. He never did talk to me about pitching. Nobody ever tried to help me much. I don't know of anybody who ever got me out and talked to me about doing this and doing that, you know. The way the ball was spinning, nobody ever did that.

And that's one of the big changes, I guess, coaches now are supposed to help players.

WW- Oh, they do. They get out and you see them talking to them now.

But there were some grand old names who were some coaches when you were a player. Jimmy Austin, Roger Bresnahan, Wally Schang, people like that.

WW- Bresnahan.

Right.

WW- He was a good friend of mine.

Hall of Fame catcher. They say he invented the shin guard.

WW- But he wasn't a pitching coach. He was on the Detroit club, but he wasn't the pitching coach. Can you name another or two? I'd like to think of that fellow's name.

Well, I don't know which, but I'm sure not all of these were with them but Jimmy Austin was one of your coaches, I know that.

WW- Yeah, he was a coach at the White Sox.

Red Corriden was another.

WW- He was with the Dodgers.

Wally Schang.

WW- I don't think he ever coached for us.

Oh, I'd have to look that up. I got it down there someplace. And I'm sure these were when you were with the Dodgers, Chuck Dressen and Clyde Sukeforth.

WW- Chuck Dressen was quite a...he was a good thinker now. I like him. I like Dressen. Burdette and Spahn, they like to play and he (Dressen), he was strictly a baseball man. He didn't

want know no dang foolishness or nothing and I stayed down in the bullpen nearly all the time with the pitchers. He finally come to me one day, he was the manager over there and he says, "Whit, take Burdette and Spahn down to the bullpen when you go." He says, "They are hot-footin' somebody all the time, they're doing something, they're playing all the time." And they were, that's the way they did. But, I'll tell you, when they got on that mound, they were serious.

They got serious in a hurry.

WW- You can't keep fellows from playing some, you know. That's just the way they were.

Of course, Hank Aaron and Eddie Mathews were on that team at that time, too and those were two of the best hitters in the last twenty or thirty or forty years, I guess.

WW- Oh yeah. I remember somebody say, "Tell Eddie Mathews. You just tell him that." You didn't tell Eddie Mathews anything. They didn't want you to tell him nothing about hitting. He was just a good hitter and he just hit that way. You know, don't tell him anything. He was that type of fellow. Now, Aaron, you could talk to him some. Now that Eddie wasn't a good fellow to have on a club. I don't mean that. He was. He was a good hitter. But he had his way of hitting and you couldn't change him. He didn't want you to change him. In fact, he didn't want, like calling the pitches, you didn't call the pitches for Eddie. You cross him up one time brother and that was it. We used to get the pitches from centerfield and the Braves, Adcock, oh how he could hit that ball.

You got the pitches from centerfield. You mean you had somebody out there in centerfield with binoculars? OK. Then, how'd they signal up toward the play to the dugout.

WW- I forget now what I did. I did something.

Oh, it was you out in centerfield?

WW- Yeah. I was sitting in centerfield. They had a little stand out there. Dead center. And I'd raise my hand up. I forget now what we did.

Hand signals, right.

WW- We had signs. Whenever Adcock, boy, he would love to get those pitches better than anybody you ever saw. He'd wear you out if he knew what was coming. Now Eddie, there was just that much difference in the two. You know, you didn't call pitches for him. But, I like to get them.

How good a hitter were you? Did you have a lot of success at the plate?

WW- Not bad, not bad, pretty good hitter.

Did you ever call on you to pinch hit?

WW- I pinch hit in the World Series!

Well.

WW- Wait a minute now. Did I or didn't I? I pinch hit for Brooklyn, yeah. In the World Series, I'm not sure. I don't know whether he did that or not now. I don't believe that's true. But, he sent me up there several times.

Well, some hitters were real good pinch hitters.

WW- Boy, if I knew what was coming, I was a pretty good hitter. I didn't hit that thing too good, though.

The curve, huh? A lot of people had that problem.

WW- Right. I found that out.

What about...

WW- The reason I got DiMaggio out as well as I did, I got him out easy. I say easy. I never threw him too balls in a row the same speed. I threw him the slider and the next time I faced him, I took something off of it. If I threw him a curve, I'd take something off of it, the next time. Fastball the same way. If I threw him a fastball, the next fastball I threw him, it wouldn't be hard like a change-up, but it wouldn't be as fast. Just change the speeds of the ball. He never did bother me.

Try keeping him off balance?

WW- Yeah, that's right. Timing. That's what hitting is, timing.

Who was the best all-around ballplayer that you saw?

WW- Oh, I saw some good ones. Gehrig wouldn't be far from it.

Because he could beat you most any way.

WW- Boy, he just played ball all the time the same. Nothing ever bothered him. He just beat you all the time. Now Babe, he was more of the showman. Of course, he could hit, too.

I came across something interesting. It was interesting to me the other day. Kirby Higbe said that the 1930s were the Babe Ruth generation. I'm been trying to figure out what he meant by that. Do you think it was because of all those long ball hitters in the thirties? Ruth, Gehrig, Foxx, Simmons. You haven't mentioned Jimmy Foxx. I'm sure you pitched against him, didn't you?

WW- Yeah.

Do you remember any at bats with him?

WW- Well, I knew Foxx, after I started coaching, I learned more about him than when I was actually pitching to him. I don't believe I pitched that much against that club.

Jimmy Foxx was a coach when you were a coach, is that what you are saying?

WW- Well, let's see. Wasn't he a coach at one time?

Probably was, I'm not sure. I wouldn't be surprised. Who were some of the coaches with you at Philadelphia and I should say Milwaukee and Atlanta?

WW- Well, you named one awhile ago. Red Corriden with the Dodgers.

Red Corriden.

WW- And we just got through talking about him. Charlie Dressen, he was a coach.

I have down here that Jimmy Foxx never was a coach with anybody. That may or may not be right. I would have thought he probably would have been, huh, how about that. It's interesting that when I've asked you about particularly good ballplayers, you seem to be leaning towards the American League.

WW- I saw a lot of ballplayers.

What about in the National League. Who was the best ballplayer in the National League?

WW- That I pitched against or that I played with?

Well, ...

WW- Or that I coached with?

Well, if that's three answers, I'll take all three.

WW- All-around, let's see.

I mean you could say I suppose, that when you were coaching and when you were pitching the best player was Stan Musial. And, if you said that, I wouldn't disagree with you or if you're talking about the best player that you played with, you might say Pete Reiser. I don't know. I'll accept any of those answers.

WW- Well, of course, the majority of players, if you picked them you'd pick the players that you played with the most. With, I'm talking about, on the same club. Because you see them every day, now. Camilli at first base, well, I don't think you can ever get a first baseman better than he is. And Herman. Coscarat was a good fielder, but he wasn't a good a hitter as Herman. Herman, he'd hit and run and he'd do some many more things. Coscarat was my roommate. He was a fine boy and a good ballplayer but he wasn't that Billy Herman type. All we did when we was at Brooklyn, we wanted Herman to get on second base. I guarantee, he'd got on second base and he'd see the catcher give two signs. He had the pitches. He had a sign with us, like that. If you stepped like this...

Left foot over right, that was a curveball.

WW- If he went this way, it was a fastball.

Right foot out.

WW- I'll tell you right now, we wore, I know pitchers wondered a lot of time how in the world that you'd hit them so hard.

Helped the batting average, didn't it? Who was the big RBI man on the club at that time?

WW- Camilli was pretty close.

Camilli, huh.

WW- Yeah. Lavagetto was a pretty good hitter. Dixie Walker wasn't bad.

Right! I've heard it said that that 1942 club was probably the best second place club in history.

WW- What?

The 1942 Dodgers, the best second place club in history.

WW- Probably was.

It was probably the only team ever to be above average at every position. The only ballclub that you could ever say that about. That's an interesting thought. Here's a question. Do you think that the Cardinals intentionally tried to bean him (Medwick) when he went over to the Dodgers? Remember, he had that terrible, I guess was his skull actually fractured by the pitch, because he was hit in the head awfully hard. Do you think that was intentional or just one of those things that happened?

WW- I think it was one of those things that happened. I don't think it was intentional.

What, leaning in for a curveball when it was actually a fastball?

WW- They might have known something about him not liking to be pitched high inside to him. They might have known that. In fact, I think it bothered Aaron. They didn't do it much. So the best thing, that's one of the things about pitching, if you're pitching to good hitters, don't do anything to wake them up. You know, they are going to hit so much anyhow.

No sense asking for more trouble.

WW- I remember involved with Hank a little bit. I remember telling him someplace, now where in the world did I tell him, that they understood that if you didn't like pitchers to pitch high and tight to him, you know, he let them know it, which is the worst thing you could do. The best thing is don't say anything because if you let them know, they're going to knock the heck out of you, sure enough. And I told him that. I said the best thing is to don't say anything. Don't let them know that you don't like it. Maybe that was after I came to Atlanta and I was talking to him and I remember it, we knew that, he didn't like to those pitches. That's what we did!

You mentioned Spahn in particular as being one of the great pitchers that you saw. Are there any other pitchers that come to mind as being the very best that you saw?

WW- I saw so many.

Of course, you were on some teams with some great ones, with Feller for one.

WW- Feller had the most stuff for a pitcher that I ever saw. I wouldn't say, he's not a Spahn pitcher at all. He overpowered you. Gosh, boy, you can't believe the difference in the stuff he had and Spahn had. Spahn had pretty good stuff but not that kind of stuff. George Earnshaw used to be a good pitcher. Earnshaw and Rommel and Walberg. I can't remember all of them. Walberg wasn't a bad pitcher.

Monty Stratton was a teammate of yours with the White Sox. That was before he had that hunting accident.

WW- He didn't come around until after I left.

Oh, alright.

WW- But, he was a pretty good pitcher, yeah.

I was interested in seeing how many of the pitchers on the Brooklyn staff were from the South, You know, Hugh Casey and you were both from Georgia. Kirby Higbe was from South Carolina and Bobo Newsome was from South Carolina, too. That's all within a pretty small area, all to be on the same pitching staff. The only one who wasn't really was Freddie Fitzsimmons.

WW- Kirby had more stuff, I'd say more stuff. He had a better curveball than I did. I wouldn't say he threw as hard as I did. Maybe. He threw hard enough. Kirby should have been, I mean he should have been a great pitcher and a lot of other things might have averaged into that, too. He didn't take too good care of himself.

What about control? Who had the best control on the staff?

WW- That's another thing. He wasn't a fine pitcher. In other words, to be a good pitcher, you've got to be able to be able to throw a strike any time you want to with any pitch you got. Like three and two. I'm changed the speed of the ball on good pitchers, three and nothing. And, you've got to know what you're doing, when you're doing that.

A lot of confidence.

WW- Three and nothing. Right, you've got to have a lot of confidence to know that you can throw a strike. I believe at times I knew I can throw a strike anytime. I didn't want to throw one any time but I could if I got behind.

In other words, you'd waste a pitch every now and then.

WW- Huh?

When you say you didn't want to throw a strike every time, you would waste a pitch every now and then. Right?

WW- Right.

To set up a hitter for something?

WW- I'd try to pitch a little bit outside and a little bit inside. I'd pitch more. I got lefthanders out good because I pitched outside. That was my alley. I could pitch good outside and fine. Now I'm

talking about fine outside. Sometimes when I'd go to pitch inside to a left-handed hitter, I might get the ball in too far, too good.

Yeah, over the plate a little bit.

WW- Out here. I could really hit that corner.

Did you try to think ahead of the hitters?

WW- That's the reason I got left hand hitters out good.

Did you try to think ahead of the hitter, two pitches, three pitches? How far ahead of the hitter does a good pitcher try to think?

WW- I don't think you can be behind and ever be a good pitcher.

No, I'm talking about thinking. In other words, throw a ball to set up another pitch. What goes through a pitcher's mind when you've got a hitter up at the plate? Let's see, I suppose it all varies on the situation. Let's say you've got a runner on first and one out and a good right handed hitter. Is there a pattern or something you've got in mind how you are going to approach that hitter or are there other variables?

WW- Got a man on what now?

A man on first and one out.

WW- I wouldn't. In other words, if you've got a man on first and nobody out or one out, what you actually want him to do is have hit him the ball on the ground, if you can.

To try and get a double play.

WW- Yeah. You can't get double plays with high fly balls, you'd get in double trouble. I'll tell you there's really a lot more science to pitching than the average person even has any idea. Why did it take me that long to learn how to pitch? It took me eight years to learn how to pitch. But I knew as well when I went into that hotel that night. I knew as well, I said well by golly, I have finally become a pitcher. Nothing bothered me after that.

Well, we've covered a lot of ground. Have I missed anything that I should ask you about?

WW- I'll tell you what to do. If you be sure and get that piece back to me. You take that and take it and read it.

I promise you I will.

WW- Because I'll tell you, that's a lot of my career right there.

I certainly will.

WW- In fact, there's things in there I had forgotten. Of course now, it's been so long since I've done this, it's hard to remember all the things that I'd like to be able to remember and tell you.

Well, I sure appreciate your time. You've been very generous with your time. I've enjoyed this immensely.

WW- I like to help anybody I can help. Like my wife says, "You'd give everything you've got away if it was left up to you." But, I like to give. I'll tell you what and I think that's the reason I've gotten along in life as well as I have. I kind of think of the other person a little bit, not just myself. I want to tell you, there are two or three things in my life that I think if I was going to die tonight, it wouldn't bother me one bit. I'd hate to die because I love to live. I can sit right here and watch those birds and watch the trees and get a kick out of it. I love nature that much. And, I'm going to tell you, I have never beat a fellow out of a dime in my life and I have made a lot of trades. I've always given a little bit more than they asked. If you ask me today who do you dislike, I couldn't tell you one person in my lifetime that I dislike. I told some lady here over the phone not too long ago, Louise Mabry, I said, "I don't know of a person I dislike." She said, "I'll be damned if I can say that!" I knew what she'd say. She used to live across the street from us. That's the reason I knew. Something has always come along and the good Lord has always taken care of me. The other day, like I tell you, I missed the pension plan. Of course, I got thirteen years in the pension plan as a coach, actually, a pretty good pension out of that. In fact, I don't mind tell you what. I got about nineteen hundred dollars. It started off getting about a thousand, eleven hundred and they kept raising it a little bit and now I got up to where I get nineteen hundred but where I get nineteen hundred now, these ballplayers that have played, they get five and six thousand dollars a month. Pension. I get nineteen hundred which I think is a hell of a good pension myself. I was looking through my mail the other day and I come across the letter and I opened it up and you know what it was? It was a check for fifteen thousand dollars. It was the Baseball Players Association. I thought they'd made a mistake. They don't need to give me no fifteen thousand. They did. And I went on through my mail and picked up another letter and they have raised my nineteen hundred to thirty five hundred.

Wow!

WW- Isn't that something?

Yes it is!

WW- What they had done, they'd gone back retroactive and picked up some of these old players. Some of the old players weren't making a hundred, a hundred and fifty dollars a month. I'll tell you, that was a disgrace with the money they had. They had all kinds of money up there. And, they went back and picked them up and of course, if they picked up them, they picked up everybody I guess. So that's the reason I got the fifteen thousand and the thirty five hundred and some dollars, I forget.

Oh great. I think I've read.

WW- Isn't that something?

I think that's wonderful. I think I read...

WW- I think that now I'm not going to live long enough to enjoy it!

Well, I hope you figure out a way to enjoy most of it, at least. I think I heard recently that the minimum major league salary is now a hundred and five thousand. That's the minimum. Boy!

WW- Some player wrote me the other day and said Whit, says, "If you'd have had the years now that you had with the Dodgers, you'd be making about two million a year."

Yeah, sure.

WW- You think that that can last?

I've been surprised a lot in my life. I don't see how it can last. What did they say? The Braves, the salaries for the Braves players this year is over twenty two million dollars.

WW- Of course, I know what's done it. Television.

Television. Sure and I guess CBS took a beating on it last year.

WW- What?

CBS lost a lot of money last year on that last year, I understand.

WW- Well, how can they keep on doing that though?

I don't know. Well, of course, CBS gets it from the advertisers. So, I guess that's where it all does come from, the advertising for the stuff that you and I are supposed to buy.

WW- It certainly can't get any worse.

A lot of it seems to be an ego thing, too. So and so is making more money than I am now therefore I need to make more money. That may or may not be right.

WW- I need to get paid as much as that second basemen, first basemen, whomever it might be.

And this even occurs for people who've got multi-year contracts. You sign four years for three million dollars a year and then after two years, so and so is making more money than I am now, I want to renegotiate my contract. Was there much renegotiating of contracts in the forties?

WW- Lord have mercy. You were lucky to get one. But, I never made a lot of money but I guess I could have made more money if I had been a better trader, maybe, I don't know. But, what's the difference if you're living and you're happy and you're getting along all right. That don't bother me. Money don't bother me one bit in the world. I got enough to pay my bills.

That's important.

WW- I want to tell you. I don't owe a dime to nobody.

I've tried to follow that philosophy and it works, doesn't it?

WW- It sure does. Now, my son is just the opposite. When he's making good money he's not putting it away. He's spending it, living high on the hog. Now, he hasn't got a job and he's crying.

One of the things that I must do is I've got to talk to my wife's brother. He was a pilot for Eastern also. I wonder if they knew each other. Could be.

WW- Maybe. Did he fly out in Atlanta?

He flew out of Chicago and then out of Boston, but I won't be surprised if they know each other and I'm going to be sure to ask. He's got a job now. He's flying for Midway.

WW- John, he's got an application for Northwestern if they make that deal in Atlanta.

Which looks kind of iffy right now. Fifty fifty chance at the most, I think.

WW- But, I can understand why they would want another airline over there.

Sure.

WW- Delta. Wouldn't they be sitting on top of the world if they don't get another airline over there?

It's expensive to fly in and out of Atlanta right now.

WW- Well, I feel sorry for John but I don't think I can help him out. I will help him if, you know, it comes down to it.

I understand.

WW- You don't know that but I'm not going to tell him. My daughter is the same way. Everything they make. Go all the time.

Well, you're lucky. You had two children?

WW- We had three but lost one. We had another girl but we lost the girl.

I'm sorry. Well, you're lucky that the other two are still in the area and you can get to see them. Fairly recently.

WW- Yeah, they're fine. John is a fine boy and Ellie is a fine girl. They just don't know. It's kind of like pitching. They just don't know how to save.

Well maybe they'll go to the hotel?

WW- I want this. I want that. And they get it. They'll go borrow money to get it. Then when hard times come and you haven't got any money to pay that money back, then you are in trouble.

Well, maybe they'll go to a hotel one night and wake up and figure out how to do it like you did.

WW- John, I talked to him not long ago and I know he and Suzanne makes ninety three thousand dollars the year before last. I know that last year he didn't make as much, he made good though. I says, "John," I was asking about his house, One thing about it he said he was sending his kids to school and he sent them, too good. He give them everything they wanted, three kids. He got one going to Auburn now, he's got two more years. Two girls already graduated and doing well. Now he's been married about twenty six or seven years and he says, "I owe twenty nine thousand

dollars on my house.” What in the world do they do with all that money all the time? I didn’t ask him that. Maybe it isn’t any of my business. But, I can’t live like that.

Well, we owe money on our house, when I say we don’t owe anybody a dime, we still do owe on a house. And there’s no getting around it. We’ve owned that house for nine years and I’ll guess we owe about twenty thousand dollars on it.

WW- How much?

Twenty thousand dollars. Because I say we’ve lived there for only about nine years.

WW- Does your wife work?

She works some, yes.

WW- Dad blame if it don’t take two people working today to make a living!

I’m afraid it does. And we live...

WW- That’s one thing, my wife never did work a day.

We live well. We don’t live extravagantly. But, we’re comfortable, we must admit.

WW- Tell you the truth, I didn’t mind working. I think I would tell anyone today if I was talking to kids, I’d say now if you don’t mind working and you’ll do half way right, you know what I’m talking about. Nobody is perfect like I told those ballplayers that year. I didn’t know what the thunder to tell them. I says I don’t expect you to be perfect but use a little common sense with what you do, how much you do, and where you do it. And I’ll bet you there’s never been another ballclub in the world that they haven’t heard one bad thing about a club. I didn’t hear one bad thing. And Earl Mann never came to me all year and asked me and says, “Well, so and so was out this way.” I know they run around some. But they just used a little common sense in doing it. And they appreciated that. I wasn’t perfect myself. I tried not to be...

Not to be foolish about it.

WW- Not to be too bad. Like drinking, I could take a drink but I could leave it alone, too. It don’t bother me that much.

Do you remain in contact with some of your old teammates? Do you get together with them, do you talk on the phone? Exchange letters?

WW- I talk to Hayworth every once in a while. Or golly, I can’t think now. You got me at a bad time anyhow. I think, that kind of worries me.

I think you’re doing great. I really do. You know, this is the fiftieth anniversary of that 1941 Dodgers team. Are there any plans to get together?

WW- I don’t know of any. I couldn’t go anyway.

Why?

WW- Oh, I've been asked to come, not long ago. I couldn't go. They just called me and they begged me to come. Says we'll have a rolling chair here and we'll take you...and I said, "Well, gollee! Get to Brooklyn in a rolling chair!" I had a hard enough time getting along up there on two good legs.

There's going to be a get together of former ballplayers in Ringold, Georgia in the first weekend in May.

WW- I'm invited to that every year.

Are you going to go?

WW- No.

Jim Greengrass invited me to go and I hope to make it for at least a day. I'm looking forward to that. That should be a lot of fun.

WW- Oh yeah, it would be great but the way I am now it would just be an effort and I mean a big effort. I can't stand up. I can't walk hardly. I can walk some. I managed to get out and get in the car. We got on this place right here, this is unusual. I hadn't told you about this. I sold it to John Benz in Atlanta. He's a real estate man. Have you ever heard of him?

No, I'm afraid not.

WW- I sold it to he and eight other fellows here about fifteen years ago. They in turn kept it about eight years and sold it in a fifteen year deal. And they kept it about eight years and decided to let me have it back. No, huhuh, that's not right. They decided they was going to sell it and they called me and asked if me if I wanted it back and I told them no. Says well we got a fellow that we're going to sell it to and you know who they sold it to? Turner. Ted Turner. And he and his kids got the biggest kick out of coming out here. They were out here all the time. He's an unusual fellow, too.

I'll bet he is.

WW- He's not unusual when it comes to making that money though. My wife said someplace that he was worth over a billion dollars. A billion!

That could be. He's worth a lot more than I am. I know that and it could easily be a billion dollars. He's a big name in Atlanta certainly.

WW- They stayed over here all the time. Jay and his wife, they separated. She stayed over here all the time. They'd be over there and she'd be over here. And when they'd start walking, they'd walk from here over to there and he'd walk, oh, fifty yards ahead of her. I mean, it's just kind of a strange situation.

That's sort of funny.

WW- Both of them aren't even nice, if you know what I'm talking about. I can't understand how people live like that. Then when I talked to my nephew, well, he come to me I believe and he said, "You reckon Ted would sell that farm?" I said, "I don't have any idea." I wouldn't have sold it to anybody if I had his money because you won't find a place like this anywhere in the state of

Georgia. I'll tell you why. I went down to have my hip operated on and I knew his secretary and I wrote her a letter asking her if they would be interested in selling the farm and that we would like to keep it in the family. Which would be the family. Of course, she thought about it and I went to have the operation and before she got my letter she called me and asked me if I would be interested in it. That's the way it was. I wrote her and before she got my letter she called me and asked me if I was interested and she would sell it back to me because they kind of felt like I'd like to keep it in the family. Then, I went to her. That's the way it was. I knew he had some money. I knew he might be interested. "Yeah, I'd be interested." Well, that's what you told me. He says, "Well, you call and ask her what she'll take for it," and I called her. They said, "Well, how you going to pay for it?" I said, "Well, I can't pay for it." He said, "You can pay with cash or whatever." Six hundred acres. With house and five lakes. So I called him and told him and she says, "Well, what do you think?" No, Harold says to me about the price and he says, "What would you give me?" I said, "If she offered it to you for a thousand dollars and acre, he says, you tell him, it's sold." So that's what they did and that's what she offered it to me for it and I says, "Well you just say it's sold." So he bought it just like that. He wouldn't take three thousand dollars an acre for it right now. First thing, he don't need the money and he likes it. His family stays out here and they come out here every day.

Well, you said that there's no farm land like this in the state of Georgia and you were going to explain.

WW- The main thing is the hunting; turkey, deer. I took my sister out here about a month ago at night. I feed them every day. I took my sister out here and rode around at night. We counted fifty seven deer.

Wow.

WW- Just...I'm going to ride you around it, before you leave.

OK, good.

WW- I got them now where they follow me down the road. I mean, you can't believe it. And last year a fellow from Atlanta was down here. He was an old writer and we was sitting on the porch right there and I'll tell you.

The only name I can come up with is Furman Bisher.

WW- Oh no, I know Furman pretty well.

I figured you did.

WW- Furman, Jesse, and Peg could tell me. She has to do all my remembering part. And I told my son, he was sitting on the couch out there and he was just back to class and I says, "Turn around and you're going to see something that you've never seen before in your life and you'll never see it again. There's twenty four wild turkeys out there under the tree eating, where I fed the birds. Two of them come up within that close to the door. He turned around and he couldn't say a word. We've got turkeys and deer. There's not another place in Georgia that has the deer that this place right here has.

Well, I noticed as I drove up, at about every fifth or sixth fence post has a birdhouse on it. Did you put those up?

WW- I like to do that. Somebody come in. But that's the reason we like it. I feed them five gallon of corn a day.

No wonder they come around.

WW- Crack corn. Shell corn, not crack corn. Shell corn.

Well, that should bring them around then.

WW- They know when I holler at them, I holler at them and talk to them. I say, "Come on." They know just exactly who it is.

Well, my guess is we probably talked about as much baseball as we ought to try to do this after noon.

WW- Well, I wish I could have told you more. You take that thing though. If I thought that you would like it, I'd give you those, what I made, those whatchallits?

The cassettes? The record rather. Oh, I'd love to hear that. I'd love to hear that. I did have a couple of other quick things I wanted to ask you. Is there any memorabilia around the house that you'd like to show me? Photographs or baseballs.

WW- I can take you out here and show you all the pictures.

I'd like to see that. Let me turn those of since we're going to leave. I'm thinking of Bob Allison as the only outfielder I can think of.

WW- He's from South Carolina. I get to arguing. When I'd do it, argue with the umpire, they'd say to me, "Good night, skipper. Don't say anymore or you're not coming back!" And I'd turn it over to him and let him manage it, see. And two or three times they came from behind and won it, came back from six or seven runs behind. He kind of got to where he thought was a pretty good manager. So, I even let him pitch for me some once in a while. He's wasn't a pitcher. He was a first baseman and center fielder. Right hand hitter.

Jim Lemon? I can't come up with the name, unfortunately. When you got thrown out of those games, you mentioned getting thrown out of a couple of games, what did you do? You were complaining about something, I suppose.

WW- I'd say something to them that wasn't nice.

And they let you know.

WW- Get out of here! Anyway, he got to where he thought he was a pretty good pitcher, so I went over to Birmingham one night and Junior Wooten.

I don't know that name.

WW- W-O-O-T-E-N.

I'm sorry, I don't know that name, huh!

WW- He played for Washington a long time.

Well, I'll research him. I'll find out about him then.

WW- I put him in Birmingham one night and he was having a hard time. I didn't want to change pitchers that night. I didn't want to use another pitcher because we was going into Nashville and that dang ballpark up there, you're liable to use ten pitchers in a night. Sulphur Dell, it was a short right field fence and it was just a bandbox, is what it was, and I didn't want to use any pitchers. And I sent him out there and he wasn't getting it, so I went out there and talk to him. I said, "Junior, you think you can get them out?" That's the first time I heard him say, "I don't know." I told him the reason I didn't want to change and put somebody else in because I just didn't want to use another pitcher. I was going up there, you know. We were battling for the pennant and he finally got them out but he was really a corker. A smart ballplayer.

Well, I'll look him up. I'll find out about him.

WW- A good boy, real good boy.

-Transcribed by J. Thomas Hetrick, April-June, 2007.