

Joe DiMaggio (JD)

[February 7, 1980, having lunch with Joe DiMaggio, Rudy Rabino and Nick Grossi.]

Joe, you were down here before, somebody told me, during World War II for a Bond Rally, is that right? Were you in Wilmington for a Bond Rally? Soembody said it was at an armory. You don't remember?

JD- It's possible, but my mind is a little bit blank at this point about being there. I know I was here, but for what reason I just can't judge it. You still know.

Did you ever play at the ballpark? Somebody said to bring up the fact that you played an exhibition game.

JD- I kinda did. I played in an exhibition game here. Was it with the Yankees at the time? It was like on a Monday. I guess we had an off-day after a series in New York and I remember possibly traveling somewhere else and they had this exhibition game booked. I really don't have that recollection. If you don't have a recollection of being here after so many years have passed, you must have had a bad day. You remember every good day, you know?

You don't recall this guy, he was before your time, but I did a story on him for Sporting News, a guy named Whitey Witt. Remember him?

JD- An old Yankee?

Well, he was before you went through, right?

JD- He was before me and Earle Combs.

Right, he played with Babe Ruth and he played in the outfield. I went out to do a story on the guy and he said that he used to cover his territory and Babe Ruth's territory because Babe wasn't fast enough and would be on booze too much and have hangovers. He'd cover both areas. He showed me pictures in his scrapbook.

JD- He's not from around here?

He lives in New Jersey.

JD- That's right.

On a farm. He lived not too far from Goose Goslin. I went over to see Goose Goslin, too.

JD- I know Whitey.

Do you? He lived by himself in this big farmhouse. Goose is dead.

JD- Yeah, he played in many an old-timer games.

That's right.

JD- You'd get to know all these old-timers, like Home Run Baker and you can invite all these fellows up there. During the time I was playing, and of course, after.

Is there one of those things Joe, that you collected from your baseball career that you cherish the most? It could be just a little gadget, a little glove, anything at all. Like Whitey showed me a baseball glove about the size of a winter's mitt in his garage.

JD- I wish I could have mine. It would bring back memories. Unfortunately, it was something like his, but it's lost. I had that thing sewed by a shoemaker at least a dozen times. And, it was technically a rag and I wish I had that, but I could never find it. I don't think that anybody would want to steal it. If anything, they'd want to throw it in the rubbish!

Does this come back from where you were a kid, like sandlot days?

JD- No, this one was...

When you played with the Yankees?

JD- Yes, I played sandlot...

With that glove?

JD- I played sandlot. I played in the Coast League and I brought it to the major leagues with me.

The same glove?

JD- Um hum.

But, you can't find it today? How does it compare with gloves today with ones you can trap with about twenty times larger than you had. Cripes, you got these big gloves. Wonder how you can miss. With the webbing and so forth.

JD- There's no question that the things today are big. You know my last days with the Yankees, as a matter of fact, I had a glove that was pretty big, almost similar in size, almost, not quite that what they use today. But you need something like that for AstroTurf infields, because the ball gets by there awfully fast.

Where would you rate Billy Martin, Joe, on a scale of 1-10 as a manager?

JD- As a strategist? I'd have to say that he's as good as anybody that's managing today. I have to put him at the top of the list and if anybody tops him, they'll have to be even.

You know him on an intimate basis, you know him very well?

JD- Oh sure. He's a friend of mine.

You know, Joe DiMaggio is always remembered as an All-American guy, a real nice guy and so forth. Joe DiMaggio is pretty rough and has a different kind of image behind the background as any average kid and so forth, no? How would Joe DiMaggio like to be remembered? When the history of baseball is all written, so that when they remembered back to Joe DiMaggio? How would you like to be remembered?

JD- As it has been going right now. As it has been going in the last twenty-eight years, that I've been retired. Nice to know that people remember you. Kids come up and ask for an autograph and have all heard of me from reading books. Families, grandpas and their fathers talking about me. Being well received wherever I may be going. It's nice. That's the way I'd like to be remembered. As it's been going.

You put on a lot of mileage, don't you Joe? Traveling around?

JD- Yeah, quite a bit. I've been going for six weeks on this trip. I started in Springfield. Ed met me there.

Your home base is actually San Francisco, is that right?

JD- San Francisco.

Did you leave there six weeks ago, you say? Where have you gone since then, now?

JD- I've been to Springfield.

Massachusetts, or...

JD- No, Springfield, Illinois. Chicago. New York. Canada. Montreal. Back to New York.

In a business capacity?

JD- Some business. Some appearances. Some golf. Some friends, close by. Instead of going home for three days.

You say some businesses, what else?

JD- Golf, some appearances, some golf, and some friendly people I'd want to see that are close by. Different functions.

Do you have anybody in Delaware that's been very close that you've known over the years, a very close friend like, I remember when Primo Carnera was tops, there was a guy here at Ralph's, Tribiani, he was a boxing promoter. They were really close to him and Rocky Graziano's would always stop here, you know, eat here and stop here. Do you have anybody like that, real close?

JD- I have close friends in New York, mostly. I have some in Chicago, too. Where I've played in some of the cosmopolitan cities where I played ball in, I have good friends.

Joe, you've got thousands of accomplishments. Is there any one little thing? Some would say your hitting streak, maybe somebody would say something else. What achievement do you personally cherish the most, that you're most proud of? Maybe it happened in high school, maybe it didn't even happen in the majors.

JD- It's pretty hard to think back on all those years. I can only think possibly of my later years with the Yankees. There are so many things that you can think about. Just one thing to pinpoint, it's very difficult. As for achievements, being on ten championship teams or ten World Series, I should say. Nine World Championships during a period of thirteen years. That to me is one of the most outstanding things. To be on championship teams. You know, some fellows play a whole lifetime without even smelling the roses. So that's quite an accomplishment to be with a bunch of guys that were able to perform and bring you home with all these pennants and World Series. But there's so many things, you know, one day things, and things of that nature. Three MVP's.

Did Joe DiMaggio ever get thrown out of a ballgame in his major league career? Did Joe DiMaggio ever get involved in a fight backstage we never heard about, any brawling?

JD- Not really.

Is that right, your whole career? Never? Did you ever get in any kind of argument with the managers or players or teammates?

JD- Nope.

Joe, during your career you were always mobbed in the locker room after games, after World Series games, and so forth, what question really galled you that reporters would come to you and ask you about? That you'd hate for them to ask, maybe it's repetitious?

JD- During the time I was playing, we didn't have that type of a person that you'd have today, you're talking present day, but we had fellows like Sid Mercer, Joe Williams, Ipe Igoe. We had Jimmy Cannon. You know, these fellows did their homework. We had so many guys that knew their work and they didn't ask any embarrassing questions. OK, shall I say it? Stupid questions. No, these fellows were the top writers of the time. I'm not meaning to take some of the things they say. I guess writers of that time, too, they'd look

for little things to try to make them newsworthy, but to me I think they reported more of the game than they do today.

Today, today is more personal.

JD- More on the personal side or try and get another angle. It's completely alright, it's changing times, you know the world's changes, the whole changing times is one of the reasons. Things change. I'm talking about the public. Every ten years there's something else.

Even clothes change for that matter, you know, styles and clothes. Styles, dislikes, TV, and so forth.

JD- Some people enjoy reading something else besides a statistic or something. I don't know. I can only tell you what happened during that period compared to what they do now.

What's really unusual, really great is the fact that you've been able to maintain a national or even an international reputation, an image, even though you've been out of baseball more so than some guys who are still competing, which has to be a great thing in your favor.

JD- I'm grateful, too.

Too many guys, after they retire from baseball, they stay a few years and they are still popular, and then the level drops, and it seems like you just keep going higher and higher. I mentioned Joe DiMaggio's name and here the place was sold out immediately.

JD- You're not going to run?

No, I'm going to stay for awhile. At your invitation, Joe.

We have a little something to present him.

(restaurant chatter, introductions to DiMaggio, autographs, etc.)