

Marty Marion
interviewed by Dave Heller
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Q: What are your impressions of the 1944 World Series against the St. Louis Browns?

A: I remember it very well.

Q: How did the 1944 Series compare to the other World Series you played in?

A: Well, it wasn't any different. The only thing different was that it was an all-St. Louis series and we didn't have to leave town to play the series, you know, no road trips. We called it the Streetcar Series. Back in the old days here in St. Louis, they had streetcars, so they called it the Streetcar Series. The Cardinals won the pennant by a big amount that particular year and the Browns ended up beating the Yankees four straight games to get into the World Series. But the Browns had a very good ball club. We didn't think the Browns had a chance to beat us, but I'll tell you one thing, they almost did. It was a very tough Series. It was a Series that was played at the old ballpark here, which was called Sportsman's Park, and it was a very bright sun. All season long we had nobody sitting in the centerfield bleachers. That particular Series, they filled the stadium, they had customers sitting in the bleachers in center field and they're all white shirts. And we had a heck of a time seeing the ball. And there were a lot of strikeouts in that particular Series and not a great deal of hitting because the background was so bad. But I think the Series went six games and they all were close games.

Q: Do you think you guys took the Browns real lightly going in?

A: No, we didn't take them lightly, although you never take anybody lightly. When you put nine guys on the field you respect them, but we thought we could beat them. You know we were a pretty cocky bunch. It was quite a struggle. I remember my family went home. My wife went home to her mother in Atlanta, Georgia, to have our second child because the baby was due pretty shortly. So I stayed in the hotel room, at the hotel here during the Series. And I had a 104 fever the whole Series. I just had a glass of orange juice every day and I'd go to bed every night right after the game and get up the next morning and go out and play. And I had a pretty good Series. I was pretty weak, but sometimes when you're sick you play better (*laughs*). But it was a Series that a lot of the boys had gone to war, and a lot of people said that baseball wasn't as good as it was because we had a lot of stars in the army, you know. Although everything is relative, baseball is still the same, the caliber of play probably wasn't as good during the time when everybody was playing.

Q: Was it much different as far as pitching, hitting, or fielding?

A: No, no, no, no, that's all the same. There's no difference in hitting and fielding and all that. Three strikes is out, four balls you walk, the bases are still the same, you wear the same uniform, people run just about the same but some of the players, just like today, some players are just a little better than others. But that doesn't really make a difference when you play another team. I remember when we used to play college teams back in the days when we had spring training. There's been known when a college team beat a major league club! So anything can happen during a baseball game. But it was a very exciting series. And it was well played. Good pitching, it was very good pitching, but the pitching was better because of the background, I always said. I could have been wrong though, I don't know.

Q: Makes sense though.

A: Yeah, it does make sense.

Q: I know there were a couple of ex-Cardinals on the Browns team, do you think that affected the Series at all, as far as them strategically?

A: No, no, no, no. You know a baseball player once he changes uniform he's no longer a Cardinal or Brown or Yankee. He's just another guy who's up with another uniform on. His allegiance is gone, he's trying to win.

Q: Do you think that they may have known some of your strategies?

A: Baseball is a pretty cut and dry deal. Three and one (count), you hit. You take on three and oh, and all that kind of stuff. If you have guys that run, you steal a lot, you don't have guys who run you don't steal a lot. Back in our day though we didn't do a lot of running. We had a pretty fast team, but our manager believed in first and third and all that kind of stuff. We didn't do much stealing.

Q: I know the Cardinals also played the Browns every year in the spring.

A: In the spring, yes, it was always when they came back from spring training. They usually trained in either Texas or California and we trained always in Florida and when we come home we'd have a series. I don't recall if we beat them all the time, or if they beat us all the time or if we split even or not. It was always an exhibition game, you know.

Q: Did it mean anything to the players or was it just going out there and getting some work in?

A: No, it meant you were getting ready for the season to start. Exhibition games don't mean a great deal. It's a time of baseball when players are trying to play themselves into shape. No pressure.

Q: In '44 you guys beat them pretty soundly in the spring series.

A: I don't remember about it that much. I remember two series we played we got rained out both games.

Q: I guess the Browns didn't have as good of a reputation as the Cardinals did.

A: No, the Browns didn't have the reputation of the Cardinals. The Cardinals had better players for years and years and years. But in St. Louis everyone talked about going to see the Browns because they were sort of the sentimental favorite. They were the downtrodden underdogs. But everybody mostly went to see the Cardinals play. The Browns didn't draw very well.

Q: I think people looking back say the Browns made it in because of the war.

A: Yeah, they do say that. But do you know what? If you look at the Browns and look at the Yankees and everything during that particular time, the Browns had a pretty good ball club. They had a very good ball club. And let me tell you something. We had a good ball club too in '44 and they almost beat us. Although anything can happen in a short series. I'm glad it didn't.

Q: Was that one of the more memorable series for you?

A: The first World Series you're in is always the best, particularly when you win and we beat the great Yankee team in 1942. In St. Louis here, the Browns series was talked about and built up

bigger in St. Louis than any other series I was ever in because both teams are from St. Louis. And quite a rivalry. Among the townspeople, not among the ballplayers too much.

Q: They just wanted to win, I guess.

A: They wanted to win. They wanted the winning check. Back in our days, you know, we didn't get very much. I think the winning check, I think we only made \$3,000 for the winning share. There was no television back in those days. So it was a very small share. Sportsman's Park had a capacity of what, 32,000 people, so it wasn't a very big stadium.

Q: I meant to ask you how you got your nickname.

A: Which one, I had so many?

Q: Slats, I guess, is the most famous one.

A: Slats is because I was so skinny. You know what a slat is? You ever go to a sawmill? They would take a slab off the side of a tree, a dead piece of wood. They called that a slat. I tell you who gave me that, Burt Shotton. The old man who used to manage the Dodgers? Burt Shotton. He gave me that when he used to work for the Cardinals. My first year up with the Cardinals was 1936 with the farm club, in Huntington, West Virginia by the way. And I played with them my first year. And he was the manager of the Columbus Redbirds, which is a Cardinal farm club, and he gave me that name 'Slats.' And also there was a comic strip back in those days. He was a real tall skinny guy who was a hero for this comic strip and it just meant that he was real skinny. I was skinny. I played 6-foot-3 and I weighed 165 pounds.

Q: Didn't you lose any weight when you had that fever?

A: No, not in a short time. I didn't have any weight to lose. But I was awful weak, but I had a good series. That was the year I won the most valuable player in the league. It's a pretty nice award. I didn't think it meant much in those days. It means more now and everybody talks about it now. I didn't think a thing about it in those days.

Q: They didn't make a big deal out of it back then?

A: It wasn't a big deal back in those days. Now it's a big deal. Really big deal. But back in those days it was just another thing.

Q: So which means more, the World Series ...

A: The World Series. Everybody wants to get in the World Series. The number one prize of every player, number one ambition I suppose you call it, is to be a participant in the World Series. Just like they talk about the Super Bowl — all they want is a ring, you know. Well, I got four of them. Three of them really, but someone gave me his. Our trainer gave me his when he died.

Q: It's hard to talk about now, but if the Browns had beaten you guys ...

A: We would have left town (*laughs*). Well, it would have been embarrassing to tell you the truth. They weren't highly regarded, but they were that year. They were the Cinderella club, you know how those things happen. But everybody was pulling for the Browns. We beat 'em.

Q: Were they pulling for them at the ballpark, were most of the fans cheering for the Browns?

A: Yes. The crowd wanted the Browns to win.

Q: How did that feel?

A: It was a mixed emotion.

Q: What other nicknames did you have?

A: Octopus. They used to call me the Octopus. I used to have long arms and long legs so I looked like an octopus. But one time somebody sent me a letter from New York, it had no name on it or nothing, just a drawing of an octopus. It was all done in color. I got it at the ballpark, it was delivered to me. No address, no name, no nothing. Just an octopus was drawn on it when I got the letter. Anyway, they called me Slats, Skinny, they called me Octopus, Mr. Shortstop and all those kind of things. That's the one I liked the best, Mr. Shortstop. I was kind of proud of that one.

Q: Do you remember anything particular about the Series or any of the Browns?

A: You know they had a hell of a shortstop with the Browns that year, his name was Junior Stephens. He was a heck of a ballplayer. Matter of fact, they were always comparing us during the season. Was Stephens better than I was? Well, Stephens was a lot better hitter than I was, he was a heck of a player. I was a little bit better fielder, I guess, but he was a lot better hitter. And he was a heck of a player. They didn't have any honky-tonk players, they had good players. ... I was the last manager of the Browns, you know. I was the last manager of the Browns and we didn't have much of a ball club when I managed them. I worked with Bill Veeck and that was the last year they were here because Anheuser-Busch bought the Cardinals that year and Veeck said he couldn't compete with Anheuser-Busch here in St. Louis, money-wise you know.

Q: Was 1953 the only year you managed the Browns?

A: I was a coach for one year and then I managed a year and a half. When they fired (Rogers) Hornsby, they made me the manager and I finished out that year and I finished out the next year.

Q: So you were there for all the Eddie Gaedel stunts and all that?

A: No, I was with the Cardinals when that happened ... I tell you who the manager was then, I think Zack Taylor was the manager then.

Q: Anything else from the 1944 Series that you can remember that would be helpful?

A: Other than the fact that it was a pretty tough series, I don't remember any instances except that it was a pitchers' series. There were a lot of strikeouts. There wasn't a great deal of hitting going on in the series. It went six games and most all of them were very close and could have gone either way.

Q: Your team played in '42 and '43 also, some people just say the Browns were just there because of '44. Was the quality of those three years about the same or did they decrease every year?

A: The best team I ever played on was the Cardinals of 1942. We had a great ball club. And that particular team, if the war hadn't come along they would have won a lot more World Series.

They won enough, but they would have won a lot more. But certainly, a lot of the stars were gone and baseball wasn't as powerful as it was in those years, but it came back pretty quick after the war was over. All the boys came back home and it started off again.

Q: What was it like playing with Stan Musial in his prime?

A: Just another player. Guys playing with each other don't think about it like a fan does. He's just another player. It takes 25 of 'em to win a pennant. Back in those days, we played 154 games and you had to have a lot of pitching, a lot of good teamwork. I remember when Stan Musial came up, he didn't even play against left-handed pitching. He was platooned. Can you imagine that? Stan Musial sitting on the bench while left-handers were pitching, that's hard to believe. But that didn't happen too long. That happened about one year, I think '42 was the year that happened, that was his first year up. See, I was up about a year and a half before Stan got here, see. I was an old-timer when he got here. I treated him like a rookie. He was the nicest kid you ever met. Stan has a great personality, and everybody loved him. Other than being a great baseball player he's a great person. Good ol' Polish boy.

Q: During the war were you 4-F?

A: 4-F. I was two things, 4-F and I was limited service.

Q: What was limited service?

A: Limited service, they didn't take you unless the army was on our shores. It was the last step ... if they take limited service people, they wouldn't take you for not fighting, other services in the army doing like bookwork or whatever you wanted to do.

Q: Do you remember why you were 4-F?

A: I had a broken leg in my right leg when I was a kid. It was broken when I was 9 years old. It grew back an inch and a half shorter than it normally was, so they had to rebreak it when I was a kid, and I got 48 stitches up my right thigh right now. They had to break these wires together. The doctor, I remember, I was living in South Carolina at the time (and) they took me to Fort Jackson to be examined. Three different times they wanted me to play baseball for them at Fort Jackson. Well anyway there was one colonel who examined me, and he says, "Marty, you can play baseball, you just can never walk. Your leg is not that strong where you could be in battle like that." So he put me in 4-F, and they sent me back again, and he said to me, "You back again? I'm putting you back in 4-F." Then the last time they brought me up there, they said, "Well, you go ahead to spring training, and if they want you for limited service, we'll call you back, but don't wait for it." And not long after that, I went to spring training, and the war was over. I never did get to serve like some of the boys did.

Q: Did it affect any of your ballplaying at all?

A: Oh no, oh no. Since I've gotten older, I have a plastic knee now, and that's all because of that ... in my later life. During my baseball career, I had a very bad back. I always had trouble with

my back. I was always going to chiropractors and things of that nature. And I was always having to wear certain braces for my back. But my back was my big trouble in baseball, not my knees or legs. I was always skinny, but I did have a bad knee when I was playing baseball in college. My knee would come out all the time. I'd fall down, they'd jerk it back in, and I'd go on playing. So I had a good time. I had a good career and a good time, and I'm very thankful for baseball. ... I've lived in St. Louis ever since I came here, from 1940 on. I recall when I first came to St. Louis in 1940, to show you time changes, when you go out to look for a house and they found out you were a baseball player, they didn't want to rent to you. Baseball had a bad name back in those days. Now they're thought of being as real high-class people. But back in those days, my grandfather, who was a Methodist preacher, he didn't want me to play baseball. He thought ballplayers were bad (*laughs*). See how times changed?