

Bill Clark (BC)

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interviewer Dave Paulson

Hi, It's Friday June 28th, we're in Boston, Massachusetts at the Park Plaza Hotel. This is David Paulson. I'm with the Society for American Baseball research and we're going to interview the scout, the top scout Bill Clark. Hi Bill.

BC- Good afternoon.

This meeting is about a year late.

BC- Better late than ever.

You're a busy man. I understand you're leaving town early tomorrow?

BC- Tomorrow, right after the Awards Dinner, I'm heading to Pittsburgh because the National Weightlifting Championship is out there tomorrow and Sunday and they do seven lifts over those two days and I'm going to miss tomorrow so I've got to do all seven lifts on Sunday.

So, you're a man with several hats?

BC- Yeah, you got it.

Bill, is it OK, this is going to be, we're doing this for research purposes for the Society for American Baseball Research and it may be put on the internet also. Would that be OK with you?

BC- Well, I resent the internet, but you can use it, go ahead.

Allright, fine. About how old are you?

BC- I'll be seventy on August 18th, so I'm sixty nine today.

A working man, still a working man. And where were you born?

BC- Clinton, Missouri, about seventy miles southeast of Kansas City.

OK, and you grew up in Clinton?

BC- Grew up in Clinton and graduated from high school there.

What did your dad do?

BC- Dad was a radio repairman until the Second World War, when you couldn't get radio parts, and he became a custodian at the post office and retired from the U.S. Postal Service.

And how about your mom?

BC- She was strictly a housewife.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BC- None.

You were really spoiled then?

BC- Oh yeah.

First, when did you get interested in baseball?

BC- Well, I like to, I was a player, a Legion player and there was no baseball in my town of about six thousand during the Second World War. Nobody played. And I can remember in 1946 they had a game between the Go Devils and the Rejects. They were a bunch of guys...

4-F guys?

BC- 4-F guys and they played in the spring of '46 basically before anybody had come back out of the service, pretty much. I went to that ballgame and I was intrigued by what was going on and the next year in '47 I started playing American Legion baseball when I was 14.

What position did you play?

BC- I was an outfielder.

Right-handed?

BC- Right.

OK, and how did the team do?

BC- Our team did all right. I guess I played all right. I played three years there. Until I ran out of eligibility. I couldn't hit a fastball but I hit a curveball once in a while so I continued to play.

And after high school, what did you do?

BC- Basically, I went into the Army when I was eighteen.

Was the War still on then?

BC- The war was just getting underway. This was the Korean War.

Oh, the Korean War.

BC- Yeah, the Korean War. It started in '50 and I went in the Army in '51 and I did three years in the Army, a year of them in Korea.

Were you in combat?

BC- Well, it may have been worse than combat in some ways. I drove a gasoline truck hauling high octane fuel up to an airstrip which was not in a combat zone but they continued to throw things at that airstrip.

OK, and after the war, you came back to Missouri?

BC- I came back to Missouri and went to the University of Missouri, earned a degree in journalism. Baseball-wise, before I'd gone in the Army, I'd gone to umpire school in 1950.

You were about twenty then?

BC- I was seventeen. I just turned seventeen. That made me probably younger than just about anybody that graduated from a pro umpire school. It was really unusual in those days because almost everybody there was thirty five, forty years old. The youngest umpire in the big leagues was thirty eight.

So, was there a problem with your young age being with those men? They wanted your money, huh?

BC- They wanted my money and they said, "You come down here. That's fine." They kind of took care of me because I was young and I'll never forget George Barr who had been in the major leagues for close to twenty years. I made a call and somebody was all over me and he said, "Hey, you're big enough to eat a brick without any salt. Don't back down from anybody." I kind of lived by that through the years.

And how long was the course?

BC- Six weeks. It was an interesting thing. We were in that. There were people in that course that had been on the Bataan Death March. They were career military men. That was quite an experience to spend every day with them and they were great Hearts players and they were telling about how they had played Hearts with cigarette papers and I got to meet Bill Klem for a day there.

No kidding.

BC- So, I got a span of umpiring from 1900 all the way.

Were you familiar with Klem's background?

BC- Sure.

Did he have any stories to tell?

BC- Klem? I'm sure he did. I don't remember them now but I'm sure he had plenty of them.

OK, so when you got out of umpiring school did you have a job waiting for you as an umpire?

BC- No, I was too young and I had to go through the military. That's what put me in the military. I couldn't get a job. I was interviewed by two or three; the Georgia-Florida League and I think the Alabama State League or somebody and they said, "Well, we're not worried about your age,

we're worried about losing you to the military." So, I took care of that. I just joined the military for three years.

OK, so after the military, then what?

BC- I went back to journalism school and I went to the University of Missouri.

When you went to journalism school did you have something in mind of being a sportswriter, perhaps?

BC- Yeah. I wanted to be a sportswriter and I also still wanted to be a major league umpire. In 1956, I went to the Central Mexican League and I worked down there about a month.

What were some of the teams in that League?

BC- Central Mexican. We had Chihuahua, Juarez, Aguascalientes, Fresnillo, Satillio, and Durango, I believe it was. There were six teams.

Were you speaking Spanish then?

BC- I'd had Spanish at the university and of course, Spanish in the university and Spanish on the street in Mexico is a lot different. So, the first thing they handed me when I got there was a list of about fifteen phrases. They said, if you hear any one of these phrases, the guy's gone. I often wondered and I carried that list with me and I often wondered if during a ballgame, I heard something, I pulled that list out and went through them. But, you learn street Spanish pretty quick that way.

And any unusual incidents there?

BC- Yeah, I've still got a newspaper. We had a game in Chihuahua one night and it was a tough game and there was a lot of controversy and I don't remember exactly the details of the game but everyone got excited and when the game was over we got out of the ballpark and got back to the hotel. And the next day the newspaper came out and you wondered what in the world are they going to say. They called us "Los empiyo empicables," in other words, the "impeccable umpires" and that may be the only time in history that anyone ever called me an impeccable umpire! So, I really appreciated that.

The caliber of ball in that league, how did that compare? What would that compare to?

BC- It was a C league. In fact, I opened the season at Juarez there. Phil Pitaw (?) came down, he was the president of the National Association at that time. That was the first minor league game played under the auspices of the National Association.

So, it was connected...

BC- Yeah, that was the first year that they ever had that relationship.

So they were all Mexican teams?

BC- Yeah, they were all Mexican teams and almost all of the players were Mexican. The only guy I ever remember playing in that league was a guy, gee, what was his name, he's in the

Mexican League Hall of Fame. He's was an American and yeah, it was strictly Mexican baseball and I was the only gringo umpire there. I worked with a guy named Emilio Sarda (?), who had played in the Negro leagues here in this country and he was a Cuban. And he was back there trying to make a few bucks. He told me about, there's another Cuban here in Mexican, and he says, "This guy's getting ready to return." And it was Castro. A couple years later, he returned with a bang.

He sure did. So this was in 1956.

BC- 1956.

Did you stay there next year?

BC- No. I didn't finish the season there.

Was there a reason?

BC- Yeah. I wasn't tough enough. It wasn't baseball. It wasn't baseball. It was just the lifestyle and so forth. So, I quit after a month or so and came home and I'd just been married. I suppose homesickness had a lot to do with it. My wife and I got married in '55 and less than six months, seven months later I'm back on the road.

You're out of the country.

BC- Umpiring. She wasn't happy and I wasn't happy and so I went home and went back to the university and picked up some summer course hours and about the first of July I get a call and it was from the Nebraska State League. They said, "We're interested in hiring you out here." So I went to the Nebraska State League, first year of that league, and I finished the season out there and it really looked like I had a chance at pro ball at that point. I had a good year out there and they like me and the guy who was the league president was also the president of the Western Association, I'm sorry, the Western League, it was Class A Western League at that time. It looked like I was going to get a chance maybe to go to the Western League. But, as things happened, my wife got pregnant and she said, "Stay home, take care of your family. Finish the university, get your degree." So I did. I spent the next three years doing just that.

Did you do any writings for any papers?

BC- Yeah, in journalism school I became a sports columnist there.

For the paper at the university?

BC- The University of Missouri has a unique situation. They have a radio station. They have a television station. It's the NBC affiliate there and they have a newspaper that competes in the commercial market. So, when you work at the university's media, you're head to head with the other local media markets.

It's good experience.

BC- It's a great experience. So I did that. I wrote and did a column. I wrote a bowling column, did a lot of things on the newspaper and when I graduated I went to the Lexington Leader,

Lexington, Kentucky Leader and my first assignment down there was to cover, help cover, what they call the Kentucky Squirrel Shooters. They won the NCAA in 1958.

That's basketball, the Wildcats, Alex Groza.

BC- No, they was after that. They won in '51 or somewhere in there. This was guys you never heard of. Johnny Cox and Adrian Smith was the only guy who ever played in the pros.

Adrian Smith, he played for Cincinnati, the Royals.

BC- He played for the Cincinnati Royals. He was the only one who ever stuck in the pros. These were guys that nobody had ever heard of. And they beat Elgin Baylor in Seattle in the finals and I got to be a part of that, that was interesting.

Did you move the family down to Lexington?

BC- Yeah, right. Then I got a job in the newspaper business down in Columbia. I was only there about six months and we moved back and I've lived in Columbia ever since. Worked in the newspaper business there and then in 1962 I got a wild idea. I wanted to go back to pro ball. Once you're bitten by the pro bug, it's tough. And, I should never have done it. That was years of recovering financially but we had three kids by then and I went, I took a job, I went back to umpiring school. Took a job in the Pioneer League.

And what classification was that?

BC- It was a B classification.

So, you're moving up, you're moving up.

BC- It was a B class, and I didn't last a couple of weeks, three weeks, whatever it was. I had ninety six dollars in my pocket and that was it. I had to live on that ninety six dollars.

It wasn't enough.

BC- Well, I could live on it but the problem was, my wife had no money. We owed a hundred and twenty five dollars rent and I had my mother-in-law's credit card which I'd had to use to report on. In those days, there was no reporting money for umpires and no way to get home, so you were on your own. So, expenses were yours. So I quit and I used her credit card and I got back home. The bank actually owned the house where we lived then and I took seventy five dollars down to the bank and said I don't have a hundred and twenty five dollars but here's seventy five. I'll get the rest of it to you and we had twenty bucks to eat on. And, I went looking for a job.

What year was this around?

BC- '62.

'62, OK. So, what kind of job did you find?

BC- Well, I hooked up with three jobs, actually. I would work from eleven at night until seven in the morning at an all-night hash house, slinging hash and beating drunks on the head and what have you.

In Columbia?

BC- Back in Columbia. Then, at eight o'clock in the morning I'd go home and take a shower and go to work in the city as the recreation director, which was a half-time pay but a full-time job. I would also, on occasion, still do some piecework for the newspaper. So, I was holding three jobs and there would be many, many nights when I'd never go to sleep.

Geez.

BC- And just keep on keeping. I got pretty cranky and with that 11-7 shift with the drunks that came in, some of them got hammered pretty quick. Size helps, you know.

Right.

BC- And I did that for a couple of years until we got the family back financially set and then I'd quit the all night job in the restaurant and worked at the recreation department and then expanded, I went basically went on staff at the newspaper as well.

Doing that full time?

BC- Yeah. Basically full time although it was sort of a come in early in the morning and work late at night.

Was it basically sportswriting?

BC- Yeah, all sportswriting. And in the process, after I quit that night job, I went back, I started to become a basketball referee and I went back to refereeing. I spent thirty eight years as an official in football and basketball and ...

Football, too?

BC- I sat down here not long ago and listed everything I'd done in officiating and I actually came out with twenty two sports that I'd worked in at some level between the local and the international level in twenty two sports. That's a lot when you think about where in the world do you come up with twenty two sports.

And the rules of the twenty two sports!

BC- Sometimes, you made calls where you weren't sure and that was an interesting part of my life. And, I still work in weightlifting and power lifting as an official. I can't run anymore.

You did some of that while you were doing sports?

BC- Yeah. A lot of nights I'd go work a basketball game and come back and I'll never forget one night, we had a rough night on the basketball court and I came back and the kid would call in the box scores and we had a staff that we'd take the box score. And, I took this one box score, we also said, who were the officials, because we always listed the officials.

It's important.

BC- And this girl student reporter from this high school, she says, "The officials were too fat dummies." That was me!

One!

BC- One.

So, to continue, you were doing this for a few years.

BC- I did that until, oh gosh, until 1968 and at that point, I had started as a bird dog in 1956 when I came back from pro ball, I had started as a bird dog for the Milwaukee Braves, because scouts would see me behind home plate and they would say, "You're always around here. You're always behind the plate. You're always at these good games." So I said, "Yeah." So the guy from the Braves put me on.

There was no conflict of interest.

BC- No, because I was back, after I'd finished that '56 season, I wasn't going back to pro ball at that point. So, between starting with the '57 through the '61 seasons, I was a bird dog for the Braves. I'd get fifty dollars a year, a year at Christmastime.

No matter how many guys you signed?

BC- That's right, a year, at Christmastime. Then, in '62, I went back to umpiring school and signed a contract and I had to leave the Braves. That would have been a conflict of interest. So, I left the Braves and when I came back and became the recreation director, it would have been in the fall of '62, I got a call from a scout named Chet Montgomery from Kentucky who had just signed a contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates as a full-time scout in the Midwest. He was going to run some tryouts.

Had you known him previously?

BC- No, I never heard of him. And he didn't know me from Joe Blow. What he did is he called, Columbia, Missouri is in the middle of the state where the University of Missouri is located, it's right in the middle of the state. And he called and he said, "I was just looking at the map. I don't know my way around out there but I have Missouri and Iowa and Kansas and Colorado. I think Columbia looks like a good place to have a tryout." This was like in November.

November of '62.

BC- November of '62. "And, I'd like to have, maybe next June or July, I'd like to come in there with a tryout. We can set dates later. Would that be possible?" I said, "It could be possible but we're going to have to work out an arrangement."

A financial arrangement?

BC- No, not necessarily a financial arrangement. I just said an arrangement and he said, "What is that?" I said, "You give me a job as a bird dog." He said, "Well, I can't pay you anything." I said,

I'm not asking you for pay." I explained to him that I'd been a bird dog before with Milwaukee for those years and I wanted to get back into it because I enjoyed that. I enjoyed sitting with the scout and talking about players and breaking them down.

When you were with Milwaukee, were you able to recommend anybody, did they sign anybody that you'd recommended?

BC- They signed, the scout that I worked for was named Dick Keely.

I know a bird dog works for a particular scout.

BC- Yeah, you worked for him and probably my value to him was more negative than positive. In other words, he would come in and he'd ask me about a player that he'd heard about. And I'd say, "Well, I've had this guy several times and he's an alibi artist. He takes strikes and tries to shift things and so forth. I wouldn't want him." I may have been more negative than positive but...

That's part of the game.

BC- Yeah, sure. But I recommended two or three guys and Dick didn't sign too many people. I recommended two or three guys that eventually got signed and he appreciated it. He was very disappointed when I left to go back to pro ball. When I came back, he'd been fired.

Oh, so now you're with Pittsburgh.

BC- So, I made an agreement with Montgomery and he came in, well, I didn't make it then, but he came in with his wife and they drove though and they were talking to people and learning his territory and he said when he got home his wife said, "You better hire that guy from Columbia, Missouri because he seems to know more about the Midwest than everyone you've talked to put together." So, I signed a recommending contract with him and I worked '63 and '64 and probably '65 as a recommending scout and did recommend some players that got signed there including one named Isaiah "Fireball" Jackson, who we signed out of the Kansas State Penitentiary. I got him out assigned to me...

How old was he about?

BC- He was actually twenty four but we called him twenty because we figured that he'd been in prison since he was seventeen, he hadn't aged that much yet. He didn't have any bad habits. He couldn't get any booze or cigarettes so he was twenty. And, if we had a radar gun, he'd have thrown over one hundred miles an hour. He was a legend in semi-pro ball in Missouri and Kansas and they wouldn't let the scouts in to see him. So, I scheduled a weightlifting meet with a bunch of kids that I was coaching in weightlifting and we went in and I said, "When is Fireball pitching?" and the recreation director said, "I figured there was some reason you were up here!" So, he let me see him and he was eligible for parole and I was able to work a bi-state parole with him and get him out. He went out to the California State League and I think the record will show, if I remember right, that he led the league in wins, in losses, in innings pitched, in walks, and in strikeouts.

A real workhouse.

BC- He worked every third day primarily, nine innings a day. And like I say, he probably would have thrown a hundred plus and he also led the league in holdups and he left the ballclub and

came back home over Labor Day. I loaned him twenty bucks to get him through. He had jumped the club. The season wasn't over and he jumped the club and had enough money to get back home on the bus. I loaned him twenty bucks and he used that twenty bucks to buy a revolver and robbed three cabins in Kansas City and he's still in the slammer. My wife would tell you he's a pretty good artist. We take care of his artwork, so we've had a forty year relationship with him. We still remain very close friends.

He couldn't get that out of his system.

BC- Yeah, so anyway in '66 probably, I think it was, I'd spent two year then, at least two years then, as a part-time guy.

So, you're advancing up. You started bird dogging and moved to part-time.

BC- Right. And I'm getting five hundred bucks a year, that's pretty good cash. I wasn't getting anything with Pittsburgh. That was back with Milwaukee. So, I've getting five hundred bucks a month and at the end of the '67 season, Bob Howsam is over at Cincinnati and he hires basically the whole front office staff of the Pittsburgh Pirates plus a bunch of their scouts. They had to do it very delicately then.

Had he been with the Pirates previously?

BC- No, Howsam had not. But he came in there and he knew these people and he wanted them. A bunch of them had been with St. Louis and so forth. He knew who he wanted. As he said downstairs a while ago, "I wanted to build my own program" and he went after these people. Joe Bowen was his brother and they took Chet Montgomery, my guru, my leader and when they did that, that left the Midwest open for Pittsburgh. So, I took that job and it was my first full-time baseball job.

Do you remember about how much that paid?

BC- Yes, I do. It paid eight thousand dollars a year.

That's a step up. That's a big step from what you were getting before.

BC- I was making about sixty five hundred as a recreation director.

But, I was thinking from the scouting.

BC- Well yeah. It was sixteen times from what I was making.

You had to give up the recreation.

BC- But I stayed on at the newspaper. In those days you were around home from the first of October to the first of March, you didn't go anywhere. So, I refereed and officiated and worked for the newspaper full-time during that period of time and at the end of the year a fellow who had been the scouting director at Pittsburgh got fired and he had promised me a raise. It didn't happen. And Seattle came into being.

The Seattle Pilots.

BC- Seattle Pilots came into being.

It must have been 1970 then.

BC- This would have been in 1969. Their only year of existence was 1969. And a good friend of mine who had been a sportswriter at home, named Art Parick, he worked for one paper and I worked for the other and we'd been friendly rivals. Both of us writing the same card, both of us turn in mileage to our respective papers. But anyway, he had gone into pro baseball in the front office and he had been Finley's last farm director in Kansas City and his first farm director in Oakland. As everyone else did with Finley, he eventually got fired. Then he became the farm director with the Seattle Pilots and I called him to give a guy, a friend of mine in Wichita, a job as a scout. He said, "I'll think about it." And he called me back in a couple of days later and says, "When's your contract up?" I says, "It doesn't make any difference." He says, "Yes, it does, because we're going to hire you and not your friend." So he said, "We'll give you a three year contract, ninety five hundred dollars a year." Well, that's fifteen hundred bucks more than I'm making over here. That's about a fifteen or twenty percent raise and I said, "Fine!" So, they got me, I didn't renew with Pittsburgh because in those days that was a problem. You didn't go to another club unless they fired you. You just didn't say "I'm not going to sign with you and I'm going to sign with somebody else." That was a no-no. But Seattle was new and Parick was an outlaw so there wasn't any problem so I went to Seattle and of course, they went bankrupt after one year and they were sold over to Milwaukee and Bobby Matick became the scouting director over in Milwaukee and he didn't care for me and I still had another year on a contract at Milwaukee.

In other words, they honored that contract.

BC- They had to honor it. I worked at Milwaukee for a year and then at the end of my second year with that organization, first year with Milwaukee, my old friends came into play here. Chet Montgomery and people that now had been for the last three years at Cincinnati called and said "Is your contract up?" I said, "No, it's not." "Would you care if we called Milwaukee and asked for permission to talk to you?" and I said, "They'll pay for the call, I'm sure!" And we did and I went from Milwaukee at the end of the 1970 season, I was there in Cincinnati for the 1970 World Series.

With the Orioles.

BC- And I stayed there through the 1988 season.

With Cincinnati.

BC- With Cincinnati.

Now, up until this time in your scouting career, did you have like any kind of mentor or help that you sort of picked it up when you were around them?

BC- Well, as I said today in a meeting in a scout's panel we had downstairs, there were basically three people that I had tremendous respect for in baseball. The first one was Chet Montgomery and he and I forged a relationship that went far beyond baseball. It was a family-oriented friendly relationship. He was, and still is, he's working as an advisor with Atlanta right now, we developed a very, very strong relationship. He was totally influenced by Rex Bowen (?) who was been the number one disciple of Branch Rickey and who now was working for Bob Howsam.

Montgomery brought me into the game with Pittsburgh and he eventually made sure that I got over to Cincinnati and we talk all the time today. It's been a relationship that's just been, it's life-long and far beyond the sport of baseball. He was a guru in that he was a disciple of Rex Bowen who was a disciple of Rickey and today as a scout, I'm no different. If a guy can't run or throw, I walk away from him. It's just there. In today's pumped-up power age, I'm sort of a dinosaur but I notice that San Diego keeps wanting the players that I bring in to them because they can run and throw. And the other person was, of course, Robert Howsam. He was that absolute perfect general manager and he had nothing but great feeling for the people that worked with him. Of course, then after I left there I ran into what had to be the best, the most feeling scouting director in the history of the game was Paul Snyder. And I guess I've gone along through the last fifteen years or so, I find that I've become a role model to a lot of other young scouts along the way. I've got probably a dozen guys that are working in baseball, some of them as far as I as general managers that I brought into the game as bird dogs and part-timers and full-timers and scouting directors and everything else now. So, this thread that started with Montgomery has gone through not only me but through Larry Doty, who has been in and out of baseball hierarchy as a scouting director, and was a Pittsburgh GM for a while and so forth. Montgomery was a huge force to the two of us.

Paul Snyder, he's with the Braves?

BC- He's still with the Braves. He's been with the Braves since he signed in 1957 as a first baseman.

After Cincinnati, did you go directly to San Diego?

BC- Paul hired me. No, no. I went to Atlanta. Marge (Schott) had decided that it was time that several of us move on at Cincinnati and we moved on.

She was a tough person to work for, I guess.

BC- She had more faith in her dog than she did in the humans that worked for her.

Did you have any direct dealings with her?

BC- Oh yes. She made a mistake. She said "My door is always open. I'm always willing to listen." Well, that was only half-right. Her door was always open but she wasn't willing to listen and I unloaded on her pretty good and she wanted to fire everybody but we had guaranteed three-year contracts and she couldn't do it so when our contracts were up we knew where we were all going: out! So she let us all go and I knew we were all going to go and I'd already made an arrangement with Paul Snyder. I talked with several clubs.

Was this around 1990?

BC- At the end of the '88 season. Then I went to work full-time.

Did you have pretty much the same territory?

BC- Yeah. I had anywhere from six to ten states in the upper Midwest. Everything varying from Arkansas to Saskatchewan, Manitoba in Canada, and even as far as eastern Tennessee and Kentucky and West Virginia even at one time. So, through those years, through the twenty-five plus years I worked in the United States, I worked probably in ten or eleven different states. You

have to know them all pretty good and then at Atlanta, Paul got moved sideways by Schuerholtz when he came in. The guy I trained named Chuck Lamarr became the scouting and farm director over there. All of a sudden, one of my trainees is now my boss! I'm not too sure I did a very good job here so, of course, Chuck now...

You train them too well.

BC- He now is the General Manager at Tampa. I was having trouble with my knees and hips and joints were going bad and I was having trouble running tryouts and fungoeing and so forth and I told Lamarr I can't continue on the field down here. I'm dying down here on this field trying to do things the joints won't allow me to do. I was saying, "Let me out of this contract. I want to go someplace else." Well they decided at that point to start an international program at Atlanta. So, we talked and they decided to make me the international director.

How would this differ from what you were doing previously? I know you were going to do traveling but how would your duties, how would they differ?

BC- Well, I would no longer have a territory within the United States. My territory would be the rest of the world, except for Puerto Rico.

Well, that's going to make it harder for you, isn't it?

BC- Yeah, but I wasn't going to do tryouts. That was understood. I wasn't going to do tryouts. So in the twelve years that I've been doing international work I average about forty five tryouts a year. You figure that one out.

That's almost one a week.

BC- That's right. There are times when I do three a day. What I don't do anymore is fungo. So I become like the great Buddha sitting up with my clipboard.

Now, do you do this by yourself or do you have an assistant? When you go up to these international tryouts.

BC- When we started this international program, it was a hit and miss proposition. I didn't know where I was going. I know what countries they play baseball in. The Braves only had people involved in the Dominican and to a small degree in Venezuela and the rest of the world was not, they had nothing. What I would do is I'd look down at a place like Panama and I'd say, "Ooh, a bunch of players coming out of Panama like Sanguillen, Rod Carew, and a lot of people so I'd just call up the federation and they'd ask me and I'd say, "Does anybody speak English?" If they didn't I'd say, "Oh," and I'd hang up and we'd go. But, over the next three years I put together a staff. It took about three years to really staff Atlanta through hit and miss and trial and error. But you had to find a good baseball person who was bi-lingual and in all these countries I would find that. We had recommending scouts, part-timers or full-timers at Atlanta in about sixty countries. I'd personally had been to fifty of them. When we'd run, you asked about a tryout, all I would do is show up and I expected these people to have the best players available, the ones they wanted me to see. I still worked on the field but I didn't fungo. I'd always go down and do the sixty yards and stopwatches and sometimes I'd sit in behind home plate and behind the screen down on the field and grade pitchers and so forth. The physical stress was gone. I didn't have to fungo a thousand times a day and so forth. So, that worked. That worked.

Were the Braves the first team to do this international?

BC- No, no. By the time the Braves got into it there were at least a half-dozen clubs that were ahead of the Braves. I'd like to feel when I left that I had taken the Braves to the top three. I don't think anybody really questions that because we were one of the first clubs to put one individual in charge of the world out there. I had Latin America, I had Australia, Europe, you name it. Canada was all mine. Other clubs like LA would have a Latin American guy, a Mexican guy, somebody who would be covering the rest of the world and they would wind up sometime, some of the clubs would have four different international guys. But Atlanta was one of the few that had one person who handled it all and it worked better that way. So I stayed there until we had an agreement to disagree at the end of the 1999 season.

So, you were there about ten years?

BC- Over eleven years, eleven seasons. Then I came over to San Diego and they had even less to start with.

Did someone recommend you? Did San Diego know? San Diego knew about you?

BC- When I got fired they knew about me and then I had a fellow named Billy Bryk, B-R-Y-K, who I had put on as a recommending scout about 1973 or 4 for Cincinnati and Chicago. I had Chicago for about twenty years and he was a young ex-player and now coaching at a junior college. And I put him on as a recommending scout. And it helped him get into pro ball as a manager and so forth and then later on as a scout in the business. He had been the special assistant to Cam Bonifay at Pittsburgh and at the end of the '99 season San Diego hired him. Bill and Kevin Towers were good friends and they hired him and Bryk had told me, "Don't be too quick to sign with anybody. That's tampering, but we're not going to worry about that! But, don't be too quick to sign with anybody because there may be a place out here in San Diego. We're going to change things in San Diego. Right now, I'm going there." So, when I got fired, it made it easy. I got fired in August, the day after my birthday in August and so it was easy to make the change. Really, I was sixty-seven at the time and nobody wants a sixty-seven year old. I didn't get many offers. So, they weren't interested. But San Diego never did understand my age. No one had thought about it. So that was the only offer really that I had. So that's where I've been since.

Now, how many miles a year would you say you travel?

BC- Excuse me, when I was traveling in the Midwest, I averaged about fifty five thousand miles a year driving, which is more than a lot of people did but I always had a fairly good size territory.

People average around twelve or fifteen thousand.

BC- Well, even for a scout, scouts usually run thirty to thirty five, something like that. I'd almost doubled that.

You had a big territory, too.

BC- I had a big territory and I chose to drive rather than fly and in fact, it is tough to fly in the Midwest because you go someplace, you're going to go to Superior, Nebraska, and the nearest airport is almost back home so you might as well not bother to fly. Since I started in the international world I really never have kept track. I do know that I still drive from twenty five through thirty thousand miles a year through Canada and doing things for people in the United

States, going to spring training and all these things. I still run up pretty good mileage in the car and somewhere between three hundred and four hundred thousand a year in the air.

You get a lot of frequent flyer miles, I bet.

BC- Yeah, I've got a few, if my kids don't take from me. They're always, "Dad, we want to go to Holland" or someplace.

How many kids do you have?

BC- Five.

Who would you say are the top five baseball people you signed over the years?

BC- Top five that I've signed. Andruw Jones, gee whiz. Probably the hardest throwing pitcher I ever signed was Bruce Berenyi. Two more, gosh, without looking at a list of who I've signed... Bruce Chen, who's in the big leagues now, he's been with about five different clubs now. He's always the guy they want in a trade and then no one ever keeps him. He's out of Panama, he's a pretty good pitcher. I've had fourteen guys, something like that, play in the big leagues. That's four. That's a bad question, I can't remember!

That's OK. So, you mentioned, what you basically start with when looking for a prospect is if he can run and he can throw.

BC- Right.

You can take it from there.

BC- Right, those are God-given tools. You can improve them but you can't put them in a person. You either have the genetic makeup to run and throw or you don't have it. The genetics took care of that. Mom and dad took care of that or grandma and grandpa took care of that for you. They're in there. You can improve them and even if you're a bad runner and thrower, you can improve what you've got but you'll never be a prospect. Then, if that guy can run and throw and he's a good athlete he's probably going to be a fine defensive player someplace on that diamond. Then, if he hits, he's worth good money. And if he hits consistently with power, then you pay a lot of money for him. But to me, a prospect must be able to win the game without the bat. He has to be able to do something without the bat, either his running speed, his arm strength, his defensive ability, take a Gallaraga for instance. You think of him as a great home run hitter or a good home run hitter but he's also the best first baseman in the league. He makes infielders better by playing first base. He make poor infielders into decent infielders because he can pick up everything that comes over. So, Gallaraga to me is a much more important player than a Mark McGwire, who has no tools once he lays the bat down. So, a fellow has to be able to win the game without the bat. If he can't, you go back to the Rickey theory, he can't play. Speed never goes in a slump.

Now, when you have a prospect, first, are you able to sign him yourself or you have to get an OK from the front office?

BC- Right now in the position I'm in in San Diego, I don't have to have any permission to sign anybody. When I go to Latin America, when I go to Australia, all I do is simply call up and say, "We signed this guy and he's going to report." Whatever. I have a signing bonus cap and that cap, once I reach that cap I couldn't sign Babe Ruth after that. I've used that money.

That's a cap for a particular player?

BC- No, that's a cap for signing bonuses. Total, for the year. At the beginning of the year, I'm handed two budgets. One of them is an operating budget. I've got, and we've got a staff of twenty two part-time or full-time scouts.

That are under you.

BC- That are under me. And I have to regulate their expenses so that they're each of them has a budget limit and I monitor that so that the end of the year, the bottom line is, we want to have spent less money, slightly, than the budget that we were handed. I also have a second budget and it's called the bonus cap. So, I'm allowed x number of dollars to spend on bonuses in a given year.

And this can vary, depending on the player?

BC- They don't care whether I spend all of it on player or spend it all on a hundred players.

On a hundred players.

BC- And last year we signed thirty eight players.

Is there money left over?

BC- And actually I had about seventy five thousand dollars left over at the end. So that's where we end. San Diego doesn't have any idea who's out there. That's my staff. I deal primarily with Ted Simmons, who's the director of baseball operations and with Kevin Towers, who's the general manager.

Do you deal with the other scouts, other than the ones who are under you?

BC- No, that's domestic scouting and it's a separate department and have international and we're one of the, we may be one of the top, not top, one of the two or three organizations in baseball that has a total separation. Most of the places, when I was at Atlanta, it was all a part of scouting, domestic and international were under one head. Over here, no so and I think it really works better that way because I have x number of dollars. I go out and see a player. I don't have to call somebody and say, "Can I have fifty thousand dollars?" All I've got to do is look down at my running budget and if I don't have fifty thousand dollars left, I can't sign him.

Now, the players you look at, let's say you're interested in a particular player to sign him, are they usually pretty receptive to the amount of the bonus that you offer? Is this a problem?

BC- Yeah, it's always a problem. Money rears its ugly head on almost everybody. You almost get to the point of insulting each other but Paul Synder told me something when I went to work for Atlanta. If you like the guy, sign him. If it's too much, don't worry about it. In other words, if he wants a hundred and twenty five thousand and you only want to give him a hundred, hey, it was a mistake at a hundred so it might as well be a mistake at a hundred and twenty five. Let's sign him and get him out of here. And I've kind of followed that same policy. At San Diego, I know how much money I've got and I know how much if the player costs too much money, and it's going to jeopardize signing another player or two for less down the road, I probably will simply walk

away from that player. I'll let somebody else sign him. At the price he wants even though I don't think it's too high. So, you have to negotiate in your mind whether you want to go to the limit on that guy. They've all got a price and we've got a minimum or a maximum and sometimes they just don't match up.

Now, in your work, I guess you run across competing scouts.

BC- Oh yes.

That can be tricky and touchy. How do you handle that? In other words, you've got to keep that in mind?

BC- Yeah, in the international world where there is no draft, if you see a player today, if you have a player that will work out today or you see a guy in a ballgame today and you like him and he's old enough, you go home with him. That's it. We're going to sign now. And there may be two or three or four other scouts waiting to do the same thing at a ballpark in the parking lot right along beside you. You hope that your scout in that country has a better relationship with that family that the other people have.

So you have to make some quick decisions?

BC- So, yeah, you see a kid, I've spent the time in the last two years in San Diego where I don't have to call and get permission on anything, we have a kid in a workout. Never see him in a ballgame. We just simply work him out. If he shows the tools that's got to play down the road. And he's sixteen, seventeen years old and you say, "Alright, this guy's gonna play." And do you think now, "How much am I going to give him?" And you make your decision and you go home with him and if you get him out of the ballpark and to his house before the other scouts do, you've got a chance to sign him. If you don't, you either sign him or you know somebody else is going to. When you leave that house you better have a contract or you're not going to get him. Somebody else is going to come in and top you. Of course, with the draft you still compete but it's not on a face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball situation.

Say you sign fifty guys, what is a good percent that you would hope. I know it's hit and miss, but...

BC- We used to follow the rule of thumb in the United States where you signed a lot of filler players and so forth. If one out of twenty that you thought was a prospect, you signed him as a prospect, if one out of twenty became a full-time major leaguer, you had a good year. And that's a batting average of .050.

Five percent.

BC- Five percent. And you would never sign a player who hit oh-fifty. That's the scouts average. Internationally, it's a little better than that because what we're doing is we're signing players that we think are going to play in the big leagues more than just fringe guys.

What are some of the countries that you've been in in your travels? Some that maybe the average person wouldn't think.

BC- How about San Marino? That's a city-state in Italy not far from Rome, near Rimini. In fact, Rimini is here and just down the road a few miles is San Marino and I've been, they have a

ballpark there, in the mountainside. I've been in there and I've been to New Zealand and of course, Australia, Guam.

How about the Philippines?

BC- I haven't been there but I just talked to a guy yesterday who is my bird dog in the Philippines.

Because there is certainly an American influence there.

BC- Baseball there is not very good. The American influence is gone there now. Just like it is in Panama. But I've been through Chile and run tryouts, Argentina. I was just in Ecuador last month. Peru.

Greece?

BC- Only for weightlifting.

You know there's a SABR player, a SABR member on the west coast, I forgot his name but he has dual citizenship and he's going to be playing for the Greek baseball team in the 2004 Olympics.

BC- Greece qualifies as being the host. They're going to be hitting meatballs over there.

In your work, do you have any dealings with agents?

BC- Agents, yes. In fact, I have a lot of dealings with agents. When I was in the United States, I refused to talk to an agent. I just absolutely hated them. Because I thought they were destroying the game which basically I think they are.

They are, they are.

BC- In Latin America in particular, I've become pretty friendly with the agents and they realize that I want to sign Latin players. So we can talk pretty good. Yesterday, I missed a committee meeting in this SABR meeting because I was on the phone with an agent. Maybe I've mellowed as the years go by but I also find that some of these agents are very, very honest people. Some aren't. And I've told two or three of them to get out of my life and stay out of it and don't ever call me again. And others, I'll actually call the agent and start a negotiation with them.

Now, what kind of changes have there been in scouting because of the draft?

BC- Well, prior to 1965, a scout ran his own world basically. He saw players, just like I do internationally. I see a player, I try to sign him. Prior to 1965 you did the same thing in the United States. You tried to sign the player. The clubs with the most money got the most players. At least, that's the reason behind the draft. The draft was supposed to put everybody on an even playing field. Consequently, scouts became record keepers and judgments probably meant less because if you had a high draft, a kid that was going to be a high draft, you'd have five, six, seven opinions on this guy. The territorial scouts, for all purposes, become nothing more than a bird dog, to lead him and the cross-checkers and the scouting directors and the general manager to see that player. That's unfortunate, because it really, when I was a territorial scout, I'd go two or three years sometimes without getting a draft. But my records would be just fine. I'd have everybody in the proper draft order and the scouting director would look at that and say, "He's doing a good job,"

but I got no players. And that's the way it's always going to be. Now they want to put in a world-wide draft. I've told myself that the day they put in a world-wide draft is the day I quit. Because I don't want to go back to that again, working year around and hope that I get somebody on draft day. Most of the scouts today have never worked any other way than that. It's an easy way of life for them. You go do your work, and you see all the players in four or five states and you list them in the order you like them and the high ones, the cross-checkers come in to see, and you wait for draft day and you think, "Geez, I hope I get somebody."

You might not.

BC- And if you get somebody high, you say oh what a great scout he is. Oh, he wasn't a greater scout or anything else because a guy would be born in your territory. You didn't have anything to do with that!

Now I guess, you're probably on a salary, I would imagine.

BC- Yeah.

Do you get any kind of bonus or commission if guys make it or anything like that?

BC- I'm the same as the guy carrying a lunch bucket to the steel mill.

OK, how often do you keep in touch with your boss? There are two of them. Do you do it weekly or monthly or just when something comes up?

BC- It's governed by necessity. Every time I go someplace, I file a report back. I've been to Australia and I'll update you on the Australia Pacific area here and I might do that. I go to Australia two and three times a year and he'll get, the boss will get three written reports. Written reports. I may never call unless I need to.

Now, when you're looking over a prospect, I know you've got this gut instinct, but do you have like a form or something you fill out that helps you?

BC- Oh yeah. Every ballclub has its own forms and various things. Running speed, arm strength, arm accuracy.

Height and weight.

BC- Yeah, height and weight. They have all of these details and the grading system. Each club has its own grading system and you put all these grades in and so forth and usually a physical description and what have you. You do that but here once again, where I work in the international world, we seldom write reports. Don't need to. We saw the guy play. We go sign him.

You've got to act quickly.

BC- Yeah.

OK, with other scouts, do you ever actually talk to them about other players that you've looked at?

BC- Oh yeah. We sit around.

But you might not give honest opinions.

BC- Yeah, a lot of times you do. There's no... what you do if you've got a guy out in the bullrushes some place, you don't tell anybody about it. But when you're taking about a first-round draft or any one of the first ten rounds probably in the draft, there's probably not a lot of secrets there. Sometimes you actually share a little information about the guy's injury, if it's known he got an injury. You say, "Hey, you better check the guy's knee or something." You know, you don't let your buddy get hung up for something that everyone else knows. If nine scouts know a thing and he doesn't, help him out a little bit.

When you were a territorial scout, did you ever have any disagreements with the front office when you felt somebody should be signed and they...

BC- Every day. Mr. Howsam is a good example of a general manager who would listen to the territorial scouts and it's the cross-checker and the scouting director would say, "Oh, we don't think that guy is worth that much money." If Howsam talked to you and you felt he was worth that much money, he at least compromised. That happens every day. No one agrees on money no matter where you are.

Are scouts thought of, highly thought of by general managers and the owners?

BC- Owners couldn't care less about scouts. They have no feeling for scouts. They are simply no different than corn fed to hogs. General managers vary. The Robert Howsams of the world lived and died with their scouts. They were as much a part of the organization as the big league players. Other general managers couldn't care less and they, I could name a few, I won't here, but some of them are atrocious in their relationship with the personnel under them.

How many scouts does San Diego have, approximately?

BC- We've got, this is kind of off the top of my head, we've got a couple of guys that work the big leagues, I think three, actually who work the big leagues and we've got about five who work all the rest of professional baseball; Triple A down. And we've got about, I would guess between fifteen and twenty would be my guess on the domestic side that are full time. Then, we've got eight or ten part-time guys around. I have, in the international world, almost a staff that big. I've got five full-time people and about seventeen part-time people.

Excluding the international, is San Diego comparable with other clubs?

BC- I think so, more or less. Yep.

What are some of the plusses and minuses of scouting right now? I guess being away from home quite a bit is a minus.

BC- I'll tell you what, when I first started, I'd been married thirteen years when I first started full time. Yeah, you're still a young man, you're still eager to get home and visit with momma a little bit. And there would be times when you head for home, probably if you're going to a ballgame, those things are a problem, you know. Better to take them home or not. But as you stay out in the world, it's easier to travel now. My wife and I have been married forty-seven years.

She's a good woman.

BC- Yeah, and she said the only thing I'm interested in now coming home is your paycheck. But yeah, it takes a woman, but not only the wife but a family that understands what your job is and one of the good aspects of it is I do a lot of bird watching and wildflower photography. I'd had a chance to build a bird list of twenty-five hundred species around the world. I've never counted them up and I've got probably ten thousand slides of wildflowers that I've taken and I never get a chance to get home and get them logged properly. Some of them I don't have any idea where they came from.

So you take your camera with you when you travel?

BC- I do a lot.

If there was a Hall of Fame for scouts, name five.

BC- Larry Sutton from the pre-World War I days. From the period between the wars, gee whiz, Wish Eagan. The two Yankee guys; Paul Kritchell, Phil Essick. The name escapes me; he signed Bob Feller. Huh, that's too bad. Old age is setting in. I've lost that name. Since then, since the Second World War, you've got guys like Hugh Alexander, Rex Bowen, Howie Haak. Back to that between the years deal is Joe Cambria, who brought the first Cubans in.

Yeah, Clark Griffith with the Senators.

BC- Yeah, just a huge amount of people.

What's your funniest experience as a scout, or a funny one?

BC- Good land, that's a tough one. I don't know. I'll have to think about that a little while.

What advice would you give for a young scout, or somebody coming into the profession?

BC- At this point I'd tell him, don't do it. Several reasons for that. One, as a profession, unless it gets representation, which is another word for unionization, I wouldn't suggest any young man who has a family, a young family, to get involved in scouting. There's no guarantees, there's no security whatsoever. I've been fired twice because of people who come into the front office and their only interest is to bring their friends in. People who are in a position that their friends would have, have to go. Look what happened in Montreal and Florida this year in the big leagues. Wholesale move and if a guy decides he wants to get in this racket and he refuses to listen to common sense, I guess I'd tell him to learn Spanish. That's number one. Really, truly, and become totally computerized because that's the way it's going. I've told a number of guys, don't do it. If you're an older guy, fine. But, stay away from this game. Stay away from scouting, at least. I can almost say that about being a minor league coach. Stay away from it. The security is brutal where young people, young family men is concerned.

Who would you say is the best judge of talent you've run across in scouts?

BC- The best judge of talent? Paul Snyder was a pretty good one. Howie Haak. It's hard to say. Some people can sit and look at a ballgame and it depends on where you are. Jim Russo, who worked with the Orioles for fifty years, I think, and Jim Russo would sit in a big league ballpark and could make deals all day long. Put Jim Russo out in the free agent field, and he used to live in

St. Louis, and he'd get involved with some of the local players down there and he'd make mistakes. I say, "Jimmy, that guy can't play that good!" It depends on where you are. I probably would be a very poor pro scout, I mean, as far as looking at the professional skills. But I like to think that personally at the level where sixteen, seventeen, eighteen year olds, I can project that kid out. I can see that kid five years from now. I'd like to think I've got the feeling for a kid that age. I've got the feeling for a sixteen year old. I can look in his eyes and I can shake his hand and I can feel, this guy, even though he might not even be able to speak English or never been more than thirty miles from home, I can feel that he's going to be successful.

It comes from experience?

BC- It comes from experience. Yeah, it comes from experience.

You mentioned the Baltimore Orioles. Did you happen to know Walter Youse?

BC- I never knew Walter Youse. I know him by reputation. He ran a semi-pro club and scouted and all these various things. He's a legend.

I interviewed him a couple of years ago. I think he was eighty six then. He was still part-time and he was having trouble with his legs.

BC- I think you sent me that interview, sure. Yeah, well. One of the reasons I answered the question about what's the recommendation to a young scout is that no one is particularly interested in your experience today and the feeling that you develop for people. It's now all a number. It's a number that goes in a computer. A computer computes back to you that this guy's worth this much money. I tell people you can have a radar gun and you can put in the velocities on a piece of paper but it doesn't tell you about the life of that fastball which destroys the hitter. The velocity...

Or the heart of the hitter in the heart of the player.

BC- Yeah. Great heart and great desire only take you so far, you've got to have tools. But great tools won't take you any further than the guy who had only had great heart. You've got to have both. Measuring that heart, that's going to be around a little while.

OK, well I think on that note we'll conclude and I appreciate it very much.

BC- OK. There we go.

It's only a year late but we got it in.

BC- I enjoyed it.

Thank you, Bill.

-Transcribed by J. Thomas Hetrick, July, 2007.