

RUBEN “JELLY” SAMUEL

Interview 160a

February 05, 2001

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, Mr. Rueben “Jelly” Samuel reminisces about playing baseball for the Diboll Dragons and the Diboll Eagles, the black community baseball teams in the 1940’s. He recalls their car trips to play other teams around the state of Texas and in Louisiana, his teammates, and the reason the Dragons split up and became the Eagles after a manager swindled them and took their money. Mr. Samuel also talks about his love of peanut patties.

Transcriber’s Note: Mr. Samuel’s wife, Ruby is present at the interview. You can hear her in the background a few times.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today’s date is Feb 05, 2001 it’s 4:15 and I’m at the home of Ruben Jellie Samuel in Lufkin, Texas. I’m interviewing Mr. Samuel today, an oral history interview about his baseball playing in Diboll. Mr. Samuel when were you born?

Ruben Jellie Samuel (hereafter RJS): On 1919.

PC: 1919. And where were you born?

RJS: Holey, Louisiana.

PC: Holey?

RJS: Holey, Louisiana.

PC: And when did you come to Diboll?

RJS: I came to Diboll in July 1940.

PC: July 1940, O.K. And where did you live when you came to Diboll?

RJS: I lived on the pipeline.

PC: On the pipeline.

RJS: Yes, that was a part of Diboll then.

PC: O.K., Did you move here with family or friends?

RJS: No, they came up there to play ball and they beat us and I come on back with them to play ball with them.

PC: The baseball team came up there, the Diboll Eagles?

RJS: No the Dragons.

PC: The Dragons came.

RJS: To Louisiana to play ball, to Shreveport, and they beat us and I come on back with them to play ball with them.

PC: You wanted to be on the winning team! (laughing) And the name of the team was...

RJS: The Diboll Dragons.

PC: The Diboll Dragons. Did you work for Southern Pine when you moved to Diboll?

RJS: That's right, I went to the planer from '40 to '50. I went in the army from there and come back and went right back to work there.

PC: O.K. When you played baseball for the Eagles team where did the team go to play their games? Did they just play in Diboll or did ya'll travel around?

RJS: We traveled around and we went to Pineland, then we went to Livingston, New Williard, Longview. We played a whole lot of places, Shreveport...then we went to someplace in Louisiana and played, Houston, just all around.

PC: Just all over. O.K. And how did you travel?

RJS: By car, we didn't have no... couldn't get no bus, everybody that had a car we would take two or three of them.

PC: Just pile up in different...however many vehicles it took. Do you remember some of the Diboll players that you played with - some of the guys on your team?

RJS: Yes all of them. C. P. Griffin, Red Randolph, all of them played right along with me.

PC: Were there any rivalries among the team? Did ya'll all get along really well, just good friends?

RJS: We all got along good and well, yes.

PC: O.K. Were most of the players from Diboll or did ya'll recruit other members like yourself from out of town?

RJS: You see uh, Massey Lee and Smokey came out of Louisiana the same as I did. All the rest of them they got down there were homeboys.

PC: From Diboll?

RJS: From Diboll, yes. And O'Rea Hubbard and them, they came from Arkansas. We got them from Arkansas.

PC: O.K. How was the team supported financially?

RJS: Just by us playing. We had to do it, you know.

PC: Ya'll were self-supportive then. You just put money, gas money in the car and traveled to go play.

RJS: Yes.

PC: So you didn't have any sponsors?

RJS: No sponsors, one time when we had....wasn't a sponsor, we had a man over us called himself running the team. He messed up. That is the reason we changed from the Dragons to the Eagles. He messed us up. We played a team out of... some all-star team we played from up the country. And we played in the white park. We raised \$600 and this man who was over us was a schoolteacher there. I forget his name now. And he told us he didn't raise but \$300 and that is when we split among ourselves then.

PC: Was that a black teacher?

RJS: Yes he was the principal there in Diboll back in them days.

PC: And he was being the coach?

RJS: Yes.

PC: Ok. And so at that time is when they split?

RJS: That is when our team broke up and we went to the Eagles then.

PC: Changed the name to the Eagles?

RJS: Yes we bought new suits and things then. The old man on the Eagles team, he is the one that got us the new suits.

PC: So you got new uniforms when you became the Eagles team?

RJS: That is right.

PC: Did you have uniforms when you were playing as the Dragons?

RJS: Had Dragons uniforms, yes.

PC: Did ya'll buy those yourself or were they furnished by someone?

RJS: No we got them, they had them when I come there. I don't know how they got them but they had them suits when I come there.

PC: O.K. And then when you went to the Eagles team ya'll got new uniforms.

RJS: New uniforms.

PC: And how were those bought?

RJS: We had to buy them ourselves.

PC: Did you have new equipment when you became the Eagles team, or did you just have the old equipment?

RJS: Well see we had all...everything from the Dragons. So we didn't have to buy nothing but suits 'cause we already had shoes and you know, gloves.

PC: Did most all the players go ahead and stay with the Eagles and ya'll just got a new coach or did the team actually split?

JCS: They split up. Most all them you had on the Eagles team, that was all of them. The rest of them left and went to California and round about.

PC: O.K. So some of them did leave and move to other places and some of you stayed and formed the Eagles team and got some new members.

RJS: Yeah.

PC: O.K. And who was your coach then when you first formed the Eagles team? Do you remember the coach?

RJS: Where your picture at – the picture of the team?

PC: This is the photograph that was in the Diboll calendar, the 1999 calendar.

RJS: Here he is right here.

PC: Ok.

RJS: What is his name?

PC: Let's see.

RJS: On the first row up there.

PC: Smokey Barnes?

RJS: No on the first row.

PC: Willie Trimble? Oh right here.

RJS: On the first row up here at the top, right here.

PC: Ok. It says Herbert Allen, Willie Trimble, Smokey Barnes, Otis Spikes.

RJS: Otis Spikes.

PC: He was the manager?

RJS: He was the manager then.

PC: O.K. Do you remember an interesting story you would like to share with me about your baseball playing years?

RJS: Yes. I told you when this schoolteacher messed us up. We all broke up because of that, 'cause he messed us out of all our money.

PC: And where did the money come from that you're speaking of?

RJS: Well see we sold \$300 worth of tickets at the gate. And at the Slippery Hill they sold \$300 worth of tickets for us. That made \$600. But he didn't come up but with \$300. That broke the team up right there.

PC: You don't remember the coach's name or the teacher? There is...one of the coaches, but this was for the H.G. Temple High School team was Coach Kenyon, Professor Kenyon.

RJS: That is him!

PC: And there was a Coach Walter Greer who coached the Temple Tigers.

RJS: Well that is in the white neighborhood, cause we never did have but two...

PC: That was the high school team, the black school.

RJS: Yeah, that's right. Yeah that was the high school team.

PC: That was for school. But the Dragons and the Eagles was just a community team?

RJS: Right down there in the colored quarters.

PC: So you are speaking of Professor Kenyon? He was the coach?

RJS: Yes, he was our coach when we broke up.

PC: When you broke up. O.K.

RJS: Yes.

PC: Was the relationship between the black baseball players...the Eagles team and other teams that ya'll played, was it a good relationship amongst the team players?

RJS: All the time. We never had no trouble, fights or nothing.

PC: Everybody got along.

RJS: Everybody got along.

PC: Ok. Did ya'll ever play against the white teams?

RJS: One time.

PC: And where was that?

RJS: We played in the white park. We played the white team. I don't know what their name was.

PC: Was it the Millers Park in Diboll?

RJS: That is the only park they had there then.

PC: That was in Diboll.

RJS: Yeah, the white one.

PC: And who won?

RJS: We won! (laughing)

PC: Ya'll won. (laughing) That is a pretty good memory for you isn't it?

RJS: Yeah.

PC: O.K. And when you played your games in Diboll, where did ya'll play?

RJS: We had a park of our own.

PC: Of your own.

RJS: Over there where the school is now.

PC: Where the H.G. Temple School was?

RJS: You know where the school they got in the colored quarters now?

PC: Yes sir.

RJS: That was the baseball park right there.

PC: You played right there.

RJS: uh-huh.

PC: O.K.

RJS: Where the school is now.

PC: O.K. And did you have another coach under the Eagles team other than Mr. Spikes?

RJS: No that is all.

PC: So you played under him.

RJS: Under him until the team broke up. See all the.....you know.

PC: And what years did you play baseball for Diboll?

RJS: See I went there in '40 and played up until '44. Went in the Army and come back in '46 and played from there to '50. Then we broke up in '50. Eagles broke up too; we didn't stay with the Eagles about a year or two years.

PC: That is when the team broke up in 1950?

RJS: Broke up, yeah.

PC: Do you remember anything about a traditional Easter Sunday baseball game?

RJS: Easter Sunday? We played every Sunday!

PC: Every Sunday.

RJS: See we worked, everybody worked. We couldn't practice 'till before the game because everybody worked the planer and the mill. We couldn't practice until time for the game. 'Cause some of them worked at night and some of them worked in the day.

PC: So you had to wait 'till before the game started and practice before...

RJS: Practice before the game all the time. And couldn't nobody hardly come there and beat us.

PC: (laughing) You had a good record.

RJS: We was hard to beat.

PC: So all of the players for the Eagles team, were they Southern Pine Lumber Company employees?

RJS: That is right. All of us, right there. Herbert Allen, Herbert Allen and one of them there was schoolboys. They was coming up, they were going to school there. They'd come to us, you know. We had little schoolboys playing with us 'cause they was kinda big. They went to school there.

PC: Do you remember playing a team from Minot, North Dakota in 1950?

RJS: That is the one we beat. That is what broke the team up right there, the North Dakota All-Stars. We played them and beat them one to nothing that night. That is when Kenyon took the money. We were playing the North Dakota all stars. We beat them one to nothing right there in that park. And they said we had been playing all the year. And we had only played there on Sunday. We played them at night.

PC: I was just reading that article this week, last week and... they also came back and played a second game.

RJS: The second game that is when they beat us 'cause we had done broke up and we were picking players from, you know to come in and help us.

PC: So you didn't have your main team?

RJS: Main team, no. After he beat us out that money that night they come back the next week. I don't know where they went and played but they come back the next week and we played them here in Lufkin. At the big park here in Lufkin.

PC: That is right.

RJS: That is right.

PC: And they beat ya'll.

RJS: They beat us then 'cause we didn't have but just about 4 of us on the team.

PC: Of the original players.

RJS: The original players 'cause all of them quit. That is when they quit. That is the reason we had to get the Eagles 'cause all of them quit and left and gone on. Wasn't many of us stayed there. You see what is on the Eagles team that stayed there. (referring to the photograph)

PC: So that was the split of the team was that game and some of the players left and some of you stayed and then you formed a new team, The Eagles, under coach Otis Spikes.

RJS: The Eagles, under Otis Spikes, that is right.

PC: And how long after that did you continue to play?

RJS: Until '50, we played '49 and '50 as the Eagles.

PC: O.k. That was April 1950 when that game took place so you didn't play but just probably a little while after that game.

RJS: After that game we near 'bout broke up you know.

PC: So after they formed the Eagles they didn't play much longer.

RJS: No.

PC: Until it was completely...

RJS: No we didn't play much longer then.

PC: And then that was it.

RJS: That was it.

PC: No more ball playing for all of you guys.

RJS: No more ball playing.... They tore the park down,down there then.

PC: Now were you a single man then or did you have your family? Were you married?

RJS: Oh yes I was married. We went to Louisiana and one of my boys was born. We went over there in the cars and come back that night and I had a baby born that night when we got back, me and my wife.

PC: So you were becoming a daddy and you were on the ball field. (laughing)

RJS: On the ball field – went to play ball over there. (can hear his wife in the background laughing and saying “On the ball field”)

PC: And did he turn out to like baseball like his dad?

RJS: No, he plays football right now. Glen, that is when Glen was born Ruby.

PC: I read an article about a ball team called the Timberland Trojans, was formed after the Eagles ceased playing in July of 1950.

RJS: Well see I wasn't there then. I left in 1950.

PC: You had already left. O.K.

RJS: I left there in '50. I forget what the money was, and moved here and went to work at the Texas Foundries.

PC: So you never played for the Timberland Trojans.

RJS: No. When I left the Eagles I went onto here and all the rest of them quit then too. Even Smokey Barnes, he quit. He went to Pineland to work and I come here to work. Smokey did.

PC: Smokey went to Pineland.

RJS: Went to Pineland and went to work.

PC: So were there any of the team that maybe went on to play for other teams and went on to play professional ball of any sorts?

RJS: Wasn't but one wanted to play professional ball and that was O'Ree Hubbard. The Dodgers come to look at him. He was our pitcher, a left-handed pitcher. He was good. And they said they would draft him but they never did come back and get him. But the Dodgers come there and watched him pitch that game.

PC: Ok. What about an O'Ree Brazil? I read a lot about him.

RJS: Well that is him.

PC: This is the same...

RJS: We didn't have but one O'Ree on the team. That is him.

PC: That is him. O.K. Do you know a guy by the name of Big Jim Hall?

RJS: He was on the main team. He was on the...

PC: The Dragons?

RJS: That is right. He was our catcher on the Dragons.

PC: He was your catcher. And you played with him?

RJS: That is right.

PC: Now did he go on to play professional ball?

RJS: No he went to California and come back here and died. He went and stayed in California a long time, come back here and died.

PC: Ok. When you were living in Louisiana, who did you work for?

RJS: In Louisiana?

PC: Yes sir, before you moved to Diboll.

RJS: They couldn't get me to work at all when I was in Louisiana. (laughing)

PC: That is why you were able to come and play ball for Diboll.

RJS: That is right.

PC: That is why you could just get on that bus that night and come to Diboll.

RJS: My momma put me on the job I'd walk off. That is right, couldn't get me to even stay. I come down here and stayed 2 years and didn't see my momma. Playing ball right here in Diboll...

PC: Well my goodness.

RJS: ...before I went back to Louisiana to see her.

PC: Now when the ball team busted up and you quit, did you say you moved to Lufkin and quit working for Southern Pine then?

RJS: Yes.

PC: And you moved to Lufkin?

RJS: Went to work at Texas Foundries.

PC: O.K. So you came to Diboll particularly...specifically to play ball?

RJS: To play ball with Diboll. They came to Shreveport, Louisiana and beat us right there.

PC: And when that disbursed well, you left Diboll and Southern Pine and came to Lufkin?

RJS: Came to Lufkin, stayed right here.

PC: Well Mr. Jellie is there any other interesting story that you want to share with me today about your baseball playing days with the Eagles and the Dragons?

RJS: I used to be good!

PC: You used to be good.

RJS: I used to...back in them days I used to eat peanut patties. And I remember one of the games I was stealing second base and my peanut patty fell, fell out. I went back and got my peanut patty and got throwed out the game (laughing). And boy them boys carried me about that. Back in them days I used to love peanut patties. Somebody would...ever time I hit a home run they'd give me a peanut pattie. And I had slid into second base and my peanut patty come out back yonder. I was safe but I went back and got my peanut patty. They throwed me out. Boy them boys raised sand with me! (laughing)

PC: The peanut patty was more important than the run.

RJS: Than the game with me. (laughing) Oh I used to love them peanut patties.

PC: Mr. Jellie I sure appreciate you speaking with me today about your baseball playing years and this concludes our interview.

END OF INTERVIEW