

JAMES SIMMONS

Interview 219a

February 22, 2011, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, former Diboll High School athletic director and football coach James (Jim) Simmons recalls his 2 years in Diboll. Coach Simmons directed the athletic department and coached the football team, girls volleyball team, and track team from 1965-1967 during the beginnings of racial integration in Diboll's schools. Coach Simmons remembers about his time in Diboll as enjoyable and talks about the issues involved in upgrading the athletic program, creating a winning football team, and overseeing racial integration. He doesn't recall any overtly racial problems among the football team and credits those students with the smooth transition and winning season. He particularly talks about players Johnny Jones, Louis Landers, and Mack Mitchell. School officials and community members mentioned are Willie Massey, Robert Ramsey, Billy Burt, Gemar Batiste, Jerry Gartman, Minnie Jones, and Arthur temple, Jr.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is February 22, 2011. My name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm here with Coach Jim Simmons. We are at the History Center in Diboll and today we are going to do an oral history interview and just sort of recount some of your experiences, Coach with your time here in Diboll. I believe according to our records, just to sort of set the stage, I believe you were hired in early '65 and resigned about July I guess, of '67.

JS: Right.

JG: One of the things and partly why we are concentrating on this particular interview is the racial integration of the schools and the athletics program and that kind of thing so, maybe just to start if you could just tell us how it was that you came to Diboll. Just describe that process of how you decided to come here and interview and that kind of thing.

James Simmons (hereafter JS): Okay, to begin with I guess to give you a little back up I graduated from SFA [Stephen F. Austin] in the summer of 1955 and I accepted an assistant coaching job in Beaumont under Dick Sheffield. I was the line coach for two years, three years rather and then Coach Sheffield left and went to Jacksonville with Bum Phillips, so I applied for and got the head coaching job for the next six years.

JG: There in Beaumont?

JS: In Beaumont, yes Beaumont High Royal Purple. After that I was out of football for a year and then the Diboll job came open and I applied for it. I had never coached at a smaller school so I was going from the head coach of the top classification then, which

was 4A to one of the smaller divisions which was Class A. I was really looking forward to it and luckily the school board and the administration hired me. I was really thrilled over that, but they didn't want me to...or they couldn't afford for me to come to work until the following fall, of '65. So, I talked to Paul Durham, who was editor of the Free Press then and he said the only person that could help me was Arthur Temple. I had never met Mr. Temple but I called and made an appointment with him and through some different series of happenings then I came on board that spring and got my program started with the off-season program, weight lifting and so forth with the kids and that funded us a little head start for the football season of 1965.

JG: Is there anything particular you remember about the hiring process or the interview process of when you were hired in '65?

JS: Well I met with the school board and laid out the coaching plan that I had that it wasn't just a three month season. It was more like a year round season.

JG: It was more of a program than just a season.

JS: Yes right, and they understood that and I think they appreciated it and so, you know, programs now are so far advanced than what ours was, Jonathan back at that time. But anyway things worked out real well. I've never seen such support that I got the two years I was here in Diboll. The parents were great, the community was great, Temple was great.

JG: Do you remember anything specifically at that time that early on, about the possibility, of course Diboll's schools weren't integrated yet but they were already thinking about it, at least the school board, was any of that ever brought up in the interview process that you can remember?

JS: No not in the interview process but...

JG: The job offer or anything like that? I'll go ahead and let you answer and then I'll tell you a little bit.

JS: Well Temple was active then in sports as well as their high school, over there. So, I recall one of the supporters brought a young man over from Temple.

JG: From the Temple School?

JS: Right, his name was Gordon, his last name was Gordon and this was the time that some of the schools were starting to integrate. And the person who brought him over was Don Wier, which everybody knows Don Wier I guess in Diboll. He was big in insurance etc. Anyway, Don brought him over right when we started fall practice and it kind of surprised me a little bit but the first thing I did and I talked with the young man and he wanted to come over. He was a quarterback and so I called the interscholastic league. I had played ball at Stephen F. Austin with the athletic director then, Bailey Marshall, and

he told me that he would not be eligible then. So, Don took Gordon back over to Temple or his home where they met and crossing 59 he had a wreck but it didn't hurt either one of them but it tore his car up pretty good. But that was the first indication of any integration type thing going on. Then the fellow seasoned it and became fruitful you might say.

JG: Right, right, the fall of '66 and I want to eventually get to that. Where my line of questioning was coming from, which we have the school board minutes and I know that may or may not have come up in your interview but at least the school board was considering the next coach that they hired and their willingness to play an integrated team to put them on the field, an integrated team and even an integrated athletics program and things like that. I just wondered if you could remember anything specifically if that ever came up at the time.

JS: No, not really. I don't remember anything about integration.

JG: We are kind of backing up a little bit but it's still setting the stage for your time here but I want to back up a little bit to your own background, maybe your family, where you grew up and again maybe race relations. You know the schools at least here were segregated but the community had a lot of interaction amongst the races and things. If you could maybe, you know, what is your earliest memories of...I'm assuming you went to segregated schools, public schools, and that kind of thing. So, just comment on that and where did you grow up and what was your family background.

JS: Well I grew up in Nacogdoches County. I grew up outside of Nacogdoches in a little community called Melrose, between Nacogdoches and San Augustine. And we caught the bus every morning and my brother and I played football and basketball and we had a hard time getting home at night sometimes because there wasn't many cars on the road then so we hitchhiked on the way home. Sometimes some of our teammates would take us home but there weren't many kids that drove cars then either. But I played at Nacogdoches High School for four years.

JG: What year did you graduate from high school?

JS: In 1948.

JG: In '48, okay. You graduated from SFA in '55, you said?

JS: '55, yes, I was at SFA twice. I was on a freshman football team at Texas the fall of 1948 and I was at Delmar Junior College in fall of '49. One of my old high school coaches, Jimmy Jones, was one of the coaches down there. That is the reason I ended up down there. In 1950 I came to SFA, was married then and then the war was going on then, the Korean Conflict so I joined the Air Force and spent three years, almost three years in the Air Force, two and half which were in England. And I'm glad you brought the question up because this was my first experience on playing with integrated players.

JG: In the Air Force?

JS: In the Air Force right.

JG: Okay.

JS: That was in 1951, '52 and '53 at Burton Wood Air Force base in England. We had, I don't remember the count, probably 10 or 12 kids that played on our football team. The blacks and whites mixed but I can say this Jonathan, we never had one conflict about integration, about mixed race back then. And in 1952 we played for the...what they called the "You Save It Championship," the Championship of Europe. It was made up of England, Germany, France and the winners got to go and play the championship in Wembley Stadium in London which seated then about 120,000 but, we drew about 30 and it looked like just a handful out there. But anyway, we never had a problem with integration with the kids back then.

JG: You coached then?

JS: No, I was a player, strictly a player.

JG: A player, okay. So, you played in an integrated football team is what you are saying?

JS: Right.

JG: Now, who are the teams that you played? Were the other teams integrated?

JS: Yes, they were in the service naturally.

JG: Okay. But like England did you ever play any...did England even have an American football team?

JS: Not the English people themselves it was just the Air Force bases.

JG: It was just American troops at different bases?

JS: Right.

JG: Okay.

JS: Then we played some Army bases in France, Air Force bases in France and Germany.

JG: Just other military teams.

JS: Especially Germany. We had a regular league in England of about eight or nine teams so we flew everywhere we played. There was some excitement in that. We flew in

a C47 a two engine propeller planes and one time coming back from Germany one of the engines went out over the English Channel so we just had one engine. That was quite exciting back when you are about 21, 22 years old, you know. So we just made an emergency landing and there wasn't any big deal back then. Of course, you are kind of bullet proof when you are young.

JG: Yes sir, or think you are. Again, I know we are kind of jumping around but, I guess you finished up your degree at SFA in what?

JS: In physical education.

JG: You mentioned you were coaching in Beaumont and I lived down there a few years and I heard about all the...what did they used to call it? The Beaumont Super Bowl amongst the two black high schools down there.

JS: Oh yes, yes.

JG: Now, was that going on while you were coaching, of course the white schools but did you ever go and see some of those games?

JS: Yes, I saw some of those games, but see the Beaumont School district, see we had like seven high schools, Jonathan and Beaumont was only about 110,000 people. Charlton Pollard was the black school and oh gosh I can't recall the name of the black school...Lincoln was in Port Arthur.

JG: And, I'm forgetting.

JS: Jerry Levias played there at the other school and then Willie Ray Smith was the coach at Charlton Pollard and he had sons...

JG: And we are talking about two black high schools near Beaumont.

JS: Yes two black high schools, strictly, yes.

JG: They had a lot of really good talent there.

JS: At one time Beaumont had the most pro players from one city in the National Football League, but all of them came from the black schools. We had Willie Ray Junior and Toby Smith, Bubba Smith and then there were a couple of kids at the other high school across town. The Farr Brothers, F-a-r-r and there were more than that at I don't recall right now, but Beaumont had the most.

JG: So, you were coaching the all white teams?

JS: Right.

JG: But, you did go over on your own and watch some of the two black high school games, or some of their games?

JS: Yes, some of them, yes.

JG: Okay. Were there ever any mixes of scrimmages or anything? Did the white school ever do any of that with the black schools?

JS: No.

JG: Just curious. Okay, well I think we've kind of set the stage for your arrival here in Beaumont here, I mean in Diboll, I'm sorry and what brought you here. Maybe just describe Diboll then as you remember it. You know, you've talked a little bit about your background. You grew up in Nacogdoches and went overseas and saw a little bit of the rest of the world and then was in Beaumont for a while. Beaumont is a lot different than Nacogdoches, but just how would you describe Diboll, the community, the schools, just the whole experience?

JS: Well I grew up, Jonathan, a country boy of course out in the country. But my main focus was on athletics and the football program, basically. I just remember my wife and I and our three daughters came into Diboll here. We bought a house.

JG: So, you had three daughters when you moved here?

JS: Yes.

JG: Were they school age?

JS: Yes, they were school age, yes. Two of them were cheerleaders and early grades you know. I remember very well Mr. Ramsey was the principal. Mr. Pate was the superintendent. Billy Greer was a teacher who was later the superintendent [principal] and Bob McCurry was the Ag teacher and Fred Douglas was one of the teachers and Mrs. Stubblefield was one of them. I remember several of them, but of course I don't remember them all. I mean I was real comfortable in Diboll. I loved Diboll and wished many times I hadn't of left after I did, but that is hindsight and you can't look back. I was just really welcomed here and it really made a big difference.

JG: Describe the athletics program when you came, early '65, and maybe you know, now you are the new man, you're the athletics director, head football coach, you got a new job. What were some of the challenges, what was your vision and what did you try to accomplish when you came?

JS: Well one of the things we wanted to accomplish was get more kids involved in the program. The high school program for example and working with the administration we were allowed to have the last period of the day as our P.E. program which gave us a head start so to speak on our workouts and off season program and so on, you know. One of

the biggest challenges, Jonathan, was that being in a larger school in 4A we had separate junior high schools in Beaumont, but here in Diboll we had to coach the Diboll kids, the Diboll Junior High program also and that was the most fun I believe I ever had. I had never worked with kids that young, but they were so energetic and so interested that you could really sell them on what you were trying to accomplish.

JG: And you started doing that that first full season even in '65?

JS: Yes, and then we had to handle the other sports also, for example, well Gemar Batiste one of the famous Batiste boys was the basketball coach.

JG: And you hired him didn't you?

JS: Yes, I hired Gemar and then I hired Billy Burt. Billy was an outstanding running back.

JG: Now Batiste was he a Native American?

JS: He was an Indian, yes.

JG: Indian background, Indian heritage?

JS: Yes, I remember watching his brothers play basketball when I was in high school at Nacogdoches. They played at SFA.

JG: At SFA, okay.

JS: Real good athletes.

JG: Okay, so you hired him and then you hired Mr. Burt.

JS: Hired Billy Burt, yes. And, so we all scattered out and Jerry Gartman was already here and I talked Jerry into helping us with the football program and of course he was a real good baseball coach too. He had lot of good success in baseball and then I ended up, I coached the girls volleyball team. And I didn't know a lot about volleyball but those girls if they weren't playing good they would say, "Coach you need to chew us out like you do the boys," you know. So that was probably the biggest challenge was coaching the girls.

JG: You mentioned girl's volleyball and I'm kind of jumping down to the bottom of my questions, but now is as good a time as any. I wanted to ask you about, I believe again according to the school minutes you had wanted to begin a girl's basketball program in '66.

JS: Basketball?

JG: Basketball, yes sir, did that get up off the ground then?

JS: Oh gosh, I don't believe we had girl's basketball when I was here Jonathan.

JG: Okay, well I think you didn't. I think that was what was in the minutes that you had requested maybe they pursue that. I was just wondering if maybe it didn't get off the ground if you don't remember. That was something we kind of wondered about too because like Minnie Jones, for instance, when she was at Temple School before integration I think there were many games she scored 70 or more points a game. Then when they integrated the schools there wasn't already a white girl's basketball team so she couldn't play basketball. And there a few other examples like that when the schools integrated it kind of shaped up that way. I was just curious because there was something in the minutes where you had requested a girl's basketball program be initiated.

JS: Yes, but...now we had to size track pretty big, tried to get as many kids in track that we could and so we had two outstanding track participants. That was Louis Landers, who is on your staff here. Louis ran the 880 and qualified to go to regional but barely missed out on going to state. And Johnny Jones who was a black kid was a real good player on our football team, was all district and everything. Johnny was just a wonderful young man and he was in Korea and Vietnam War and Johnny got killed over there. I'll always remember him. He was a wonderful young man.

JG: I wanted to ask you a little bit more about him a little bit later. But, when did the integration process start as far as the athletic program? I know that fall of '66 was...

JS: Well that was it.

JG: ...was that the beginning of it? So it was the football program that really initiated, so track and all that came after that.

JS: Yes.

JG: Okay. Describe how that came about the black players coming over and working out and then ultimately being allowed to play. How do you remember that working out?

JS: Well, I just remember that it was approved by the school or the Interscholastic League that we could be integrated and I think the first year, which was '66, wasn't...I don't think all the students came over that year, maybe just the athletes or part of the kids.

JG: Right just a few.

JS: I recall that after our fall workouts we had five kids that made the varsity and those five were Johnny Jones, Vertice Hardy, Otis Scott, Charles Moses...

JG: And, of course we have them.

JS: You have all those?

JG: We have all those but, anyway so those players made the team I guess?

JS: Oh yes, and they were good players. We had another one that made the team but he quit after the first or second game. He was a real good player too. There was one more I didn't mention out of those five was Harold Phipps. He was an end. Harold was a real good player and a good basketball player too as well as Johnny Jones.

JG: So, how did that work out? What do you remember as the coach just seeing white players, black players getting together and practicing?

JS: Well you know, there again we never had a problem. We...I was a strong disciplinarian and we worked those kids real hard, real hard. But we never had any fist fights or anything like that or during practice or in the games.

JG: What about parents? Do you remember anything about parents, white or black?

JS: No, but I visited with the parents. I'll tell you a story about Mack Mitchell later. You've probably got him on your list. But we just didn't have any problems that I was aware of. Since as many years as it's been since I was here I've never had any of the kids mention anything about any problems with the black players.

JG: Okay.

JS: I guess, you know, in a football program or specialized program that is voluntary it's something that kids want so, I guess a lot of the things that would bother a normal student body wouldn't bother kids that are trying to excel in football or band or orchestra or choir or anything like that because their goal is to become as good as they can in whatever activity they are in.

JG: I guess too with it being a team effort...of course teams are made up of individuals and you know a good team is made up of good individuals so it might be a little easier that way.

JS: Right and we had, we had several kids on that JV, junior varsity, and I can't name all those but Jesse James was one of them, Bobby Jones was another, Levias was another, you could just...seems like it was twelve or fifteen of those kids. Another Moses was a real good prospect as a running back.

JG: Okay.

JS: But, we didn't have a problem with them either. I remember we played Jasper toward the end of the year and that was my junior varsity team, they played Jasper junior varsity team and we beat them like 42 to 14 and unbeknown to me that was who I was inheriting over at Jasper when I went over there as head coach.

JG: When you left here in '67?

JS: A class A school beat 3-A school.

JG: Talk a little bit about the teams you played. So, Diboll fielded an integrated team that fall of '66, how many teams were already integrated that you played or weren't integrated? And then maybe describe when you traveled with an integrated team and you might have stopped off in that town's fast food place, you know, just interaction with the community. Now you are leaving Diboll and you are now in the public interacting with an integrated team.

JS: Okay, the best I remember we were about the first team to integrate in our district and we never had a problem as a team like eating a pre-game meal or something like that. I never had that. Now, in track season Billy and I took Johnny Jones and Louis to...we stopped at a place I believe in Nacogdoches, but I'm not sure, but they wouldn't serve Johnny and...well Johnny primarily.

JG: Being a black player.

JS: Being a black player, so we got up and left. We wouldn't...you know, that was the only thing to do. There wasn't any options on that, you know.

JG: Any other experiences like that anywhere else?

JS: No, I'm trying to think Jonathan. I told you we had six players that made the varsity that year and we had another player that was a real good running back and I can't call his name right now. But seems to me we played...I don't remember if it was Elkhart or Trinity maybe but, seems like a lot of their kids ganged up on this good running back and after that that is when he decided not to play anymore. I felt like that had more to do with it. They might have been calling him names or whatever after that.

JG: On the field, this is during the game?

JS: On the field.

JG: This is during the game?

JS: Yes, but after this long my memory is not maybe what it should be but I always felt like that is why he left the program.

JG: Okay. What about around town here in the community both like fellow teachers, fellow faculty, any talk or discussion about...you know, what you were doing was something new playing integrated sports program, any talk?

JS: No, not really, not really I can't remember.

JG: Anybody who particularly was a help to you in doing that or even a hindrance? Any opposition to it or somebody who really touted it as being something, you know, this is really what we need to be doing or anything like that?

JS: No, no.

JG: Okay.

JS: I might have missed one of your points when I first came to Diboll, if I can back up a minute.

JG: Sure, sure, go ahead.

JS: We had the small field house down at the old field right behind the Center here but there wasn't any coach's office or anything to watch film or whatever. Of course, we could have watched it in the classrooms but Lee Baker who had the sons playing in the program he was in construction and he came down and made an addition to the field house and made an office that we used as a coach's office which was a real big help back then. So that's just an example there of Mr. Baker and not only him but a lot of other people helped in various ways to try to help out the program and help out the school and help out the kids.

JG: Right and you mentioned some of the administrators and that kind of thing. What do you remember about Willie Massey being over the school at Temple?

JS: Yes, I remember Willie and I don't remember spending a whole lot of time with him but he was instrumental too in getting the kids to come over and you know, representing their race back then. I hate to mix that up, just them and us; you know what I'm saying.

JG: Well essentially the Temple School, the black school, lost its athletic program in that transition period.

JS: Yes, right they did.

JG: And there was some other factors involved too. I think they were having low numbers of students anyway so it wasn't necessarily a contributing factor but certainly part of the equation I guess. But I just wanted to ask about him because he was so instrumental with the black school.

JS: Yes, he was a great administrator and meant so much to the kids over there, you know. I'm sure the smooth transition we had, had a lot to do with Willie, you know, and his contribution.

JG: What about, maybe just to again refresh your memory, did the churches play any role that you know of in white and black and helping to...and again, that is more of a

community thing but if any of that was ever any knowledge to you that the churches were helping to accomplish integration or anything?

JS: Well, I don't remember the churches being integrated back then.

JG: Right, maybe not the churches themselves but just church leadership, involvement with the school integration is what I was getting at.

JS: Not that I remember. It wouldn't be a factor I don't think, as far as I remember.

JG: Okay. This is just something we ask a lot of the administrators. Do you remember any role or even a non role that Arthur Temple, Jr. played in the integration process? Mr. Temple...

JS: You talking about Buddy?

JG: Buddy's dad, Arthur.

JS: Buddy's dad...well...

JG: You mentioned him earlier when you came to work here but that wasn't necessarily directly connected with integration. I'm just saying once integration started was he ever involved or not?

JS: Well yes, he was very involved and I guess the way things worked back then, if I needed anything I would go to Mr. Temple, you know, and he was always receptive to what our needs were, the schools needs were etc. And I remember one evening sitting on the front porch me and my wife and he and Lottie and so, I told him we sure could use some new uniforms rather than the raggedy ones we had. And so, anyway, what he did I think he made a donation to the school and the school used the money to buy the uniforms. Which made it legal, anyway, he said, "Coach, we need to look good out of town too, so we need to get both." But, that is just an example.

JG: Visiting uniforms as well as home uniforms, yes.

JS: That is just an example, you know.

JG: So, did that come up in casual conversation or did you ever approach him with a particular thing in mind or it would just come up in a visit?

JS: Well I think I approached him with that particular thing about the uniforms, yes. And then we didn't have money to buy weights either. The weight program was purchased through contributions from Temple.

JG: From the Company?

JS: Yes.

JG: Okay.

JS: But, it was you know, Temple you could talk all day long and not get half way through what all they have contributed to schools and organizations, individuals, whatever, you know. They are such a great organization.

JG: Still are doing it. That is why we are here.

JS: Yes, touched many people.

JG: Yes sir! We mentioned Buddy I know he was on the school board maybe not while you were hired but maybe that next year. Did you have much involvement with the school board once you were here? Do you remember much involvement directly with the school board? Who did you report to?

JS: Well really I reported to Mr. Pate.

JG: Mr. Pate, okay. Yes, that makes sense.

JS: And Mr. Ramsey.

JG: The principal and the superintendent.

JS: Yes right.

JG: There was just an occasional mention in the minutes where you would come before the school board for this or that. Like the girls wanting to establish a girls basketball team and that sort of thing and a few other issues. Coaching, I think the early days you had some difficulty getting some assistant coaches. There was a fellow you had hired, I was looking back the other day in some of the newspapers and I guess you hired him from Beaumont. I don't know if he actually came or not but it was only a month after he accepted and then he went back to Beaumont.

JS: Yes, I hired one of my ex players, yes, Tommy Odium. Tommy ended up as the head guy with McNeil Laboratories, a big pharmaceutical company. Tommy said he was coming and they never actually came, but I had a house up here that he was going to live in. So, anyway years later when I would see him at a Beaumont High reunion I would tell Tommy that he really missed his calling, that he could have been famous if he would have come to Diboll. Then there was another coach that I hired also from down around Baytown somewhere and he and his wife actually moved up here. It was on the right side of 59 right outside of town here before you get to the barbecue place on the left, Baskin's. Was it Baskins? What is the name of that barbecue place up there on the left?

JG: The Brisket House.

JS: Yes, the Brisket House. There was a house across the street. The house is still there, but that was the house. Anyway, I go down, I don't know if Billy went down with me, or Gemar or whatever, but we moved this guy up here, worked ourselves to death because you know how moving is probably and we get up here and he wasn't up here anytime and he took a job somewhere else. He was gone.

JG: Well I think you had a friend in Paul Durham at the newspaper because there were several articles where he would write "Again another Coach left Diboll because we are not able to pay him enough." Or that you weren't allowed to pay him enough and stuff like that so, I guess that is where this line of questioning is coming from. How close do you remember working with the school board and things like that? Because formally that was the decision the school board was going to have to make, the salaries.

JS: Now, some of these minutes I may not know about, you know. (laughter)

JG: Okay. But, you don't necessarily remember then direct contact with the school board?

JS: Well no not directly that much because I realized they didn't have a whole lot of money, you know, the school itself.

JG: Okay, let's see, well I've jumped around so much now. I didn't want to miss Johnny Jones. I kind of cut you off awhile ago and I wanted to talk a little bit about something else. But, let's go back to Johnny Jones and maybe even some of the others. We have heard from others that Johnny Jones was just a real special individual.

JS: Oh he was, yes.

JG: Regardless of his race, but especially being black and that he was maybe helpful in the process of integrating and Louis has talked favorably of him a lot, they were really good friends.

JS: Oh yes.

JG: Anything you want to add about him?

JS: He was a special person that he had a great attitude, Johnny did. I never saw the kid mad or anything like that, but he gave everything he had every time he went on the field, whether it be football, basketball, track, whatever, you know. Just a wonderful person to be around and I'll never forget him. I'll never forget a lot of these kids that I see occasionally, you know.

JG: You don't ever remember maybe having a conversation with him about his race or anything like with the event that you thought maybe in Nacogdoches, you weren't sure,

but like the eating? You know, you go into a restaurant and you weren't welcome there and then you leave, is it something you just didn't talk about?

JS: We just didn't make an issue of it, you know. A lot of times the less you say about something the better it is.

JG: Right, okay. Let's see here. This is more just again trying to help jog your memory I guess, we've talked a little bit about...and your specific experience is with athletics and PE, Physical Education and things, but and I'm just trying to think of the best way to ask it but, essentially the question is what were some of the issues involved with integration? I know for a while from the school board standpoint the state and maybe even some of the Federal Education Agencies and things would come down and do inspections and they would make recommendations about numbers of classrooms and they were looking at numbers and things like that but were there anything along those lines just being an issue with integrating the athletic program?

JS: Well basically athletics, we never had any issues that I remember as far as directly related to race. I'm trying to think and I'm not...

JG: Just something that happened I guess, is that what you're saying?

JS: No, nothing in particular happened except seems to me that the only unconscionable thing would be at a school functions where you would have a gathering where the students were mixed and everything. Something like that and I don't, you know, I don't remember any certain instance you know per say.

JG: What about when...now you are playing an integrated team on the field and you have got black players playing with white players at the formerly all white stadium or at least the participants on the field were all white, how was the audience? I know you are coaching and you probably didn't turn around look very much but, can you remember anything about the fan base? You know, now we have an integrated audience watching the home town team which is now integrated. Anything come to mind about that experience?

JS: No, I can't remember any incident.

JG: You were just worried about what was going on on the field being the coach. (laughter)

JS: Right. And, we didn't have...I don't think we had that many blacks in the stands so to speak besides the parents, you know.

JG: Right, I was asking Louis one time...

JS: I guess we had...let me back up...I guess we had a lot of younger players watching the games too, you know, the ones that were not on the varsity.

JG: White and black is what you are talking about?

JS: Yes.

JG: I think I remember talking to Louis, I guess it would be before integration but, he used to go, you know, as a white person he and some friends would go over and watch the Temple Tigers play because they usually had some pretty good teams over there.

JS: Yes, I think they did, yes.

JG: He said it wasn't that common for whites to go over and watch the black teams play. Let's see, what were some of the other issues, and you talked a little bit about it, we have kind of focused on integration but, now not necessarily just over all any issues? What were some of the other issues at the time? You mentioned some rag tag uniforms... you needed better uniforms, you know, you were bringing a new athletics program getting everyone to think of it more as a program and not just okay here is the football, here is the track, here is this, and anything else along those lines when you came, other issues that were facing the athletic program and maybe you as a new head of the athletics director coming to a new program? Any other issues going on at the time that you can think of? Anything that I'm missing that I haven't specifically mentioned?

JS: No, I was just going to add something about Mack Mitchell. Of course Mack had a good career here. He was a freshman my last year here. I know I spent four or five times over at his mother's house trying to get her, to convince her to let Mack play football. She was afraid he was going to get hurt. He was the biggest kid in school and the fastest, you know. Of course, he went on and had a good college career, pro career and everything, you know. But, as far as any other issues Jonathan I don't recall any major issues we had.

JG: And by issues I don't necessarily mean a problem but just any other thing that took a lot of your time, you know, since you were here at a critical moment I guess you might say. But also I'll just add for the tape that first year that you had the integrated team was I think the best record the football team ever had to that date. I think they went 6-3-1.

JS: Yes, for that date yes.

JG: What was the record you remember your first year here when it wasn't integrated?

JS: Yes, I think it was like 3-6-1 something like that. You know, regardless of how good a coaching job you do, if you don't have the personnel you are not going to win. However if you don't do a good job and you got great players you might not win either. But anyway the kids that I had that first year I've never seen the effort from any team I've ever had that put forth more effort than the kids here in Diboll. I had a 125 pound guard, 130 pound backs, the biggest kid on the team then was Butch Howard and Butch weighed about 200 and that was about the biggest, no John Halsell was the biggest. John weighed about 280, but besides him Butch was the biggest but the rest of them were

small kids from 155 to 60. But they really put forth the effort; of course we emphasized that, you know, conditioning and all that. So the credit goes to them, they are the ones that did the job out there, you know.

JG: What about...I was going to ask you a little bit about the naming of Pop Jordan Field. I think you had some part to play in that.

JS: I don't remember how that originally came up, but I do remember it. Paul Durham might have come up with that. I am not sure. I just don't remember or maybe the school board came up with it. I don't know.

JG: I think you had some part in it. You've done so much you can't remember.

JS: I might have had a small part. (laughter)

JG: And I don't want to leave Diboll all together, you know, because we may think of something here as we talk a little bit more, but I wanted maybe with your experience leave Diboll. I want to go because I remember something you told me the first time I met you about when you left Diboll. You were just here I guess two years, two full seasons anyway with the football program especially.

JS: Right.

JG: So, without me putting words in your mouth tell what happened. Why did you leave? When you left Diboll you mentioned earlier you went to Jasper and why did you leave?

JS: I guess it was just another challenge more than anything else.

JG: Was it more money? I'm just curious.

JS: Oh definitely more money, yes, definitely more money. I've never known many rich football coaches unless they are in the pros or unless you are Mack Brown at Texas.

JG: Or coach for Lufkin. (laughter) Well, we normally don't do this in oral histories, but I remember the first time you and I met and without me even really bringing it up you just mentioned and again I don't want to put words in your mouth so you correct me if I'm wrong.

JS: All right.

JG: But I remember you saying something along the lines of you often wondered how it might have been different if you hadn't left. Certainly not when you did though, because you had just gotten here and just got it going and you spoke very favorably of the community and the schools and the people. The people especially being the students, you know, the integration process went, you know, you credited a lot of it with that.

JS: Sure, yes.

JG: And then you always just wondered, because I think you had shared something along the lines that you didn't quite find that in other places that you went afterwards. It was a little different; of course every community is.

JS: I only coached 13 years, but this experience in Diboll was by far the best coaching job that I had ever had, bar none. That takes in everything, the community, the parents, the kids, the backing, the support, the whole nine yards.

JG: Okay. I'm surprised we did it in a little over forty minutes. Usually we always think of something else to ask but, is there anything, I just want to give you the opportunity is there anything that I've missed that you wanted to add or anything?

JS: Boy I tell you, you covered it real good Jonathan.

JG: Okay, we certainly appreciate having you here and I just didn't want to miss this opportunity.

JS: I couldn't answer a lot of your questions because I didn't have that many problems here, you know.

JG: Okay. Well it's not necessarily, you know, that is why I wanted to clarify when I say issues a lot of time people think that is something negative or challenges, you know. It could be something along the line of a challenge instead of a problem. But anyways, unless you can think of something else we can just wrap it up.

JS: I've enjoyed it, Jonathan. Very much.

JG: I thank you very much and we will conclude the interview.

JS: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW