

JOHN “HONDO” HUGHES

Narrator

KIM HEIKKILA

Interviewer

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**TRANSCRIPT—JOHN “HONDO”
HUGHES**

Interviewee: John “Hondo” Hughes
 Interviewer: Kim Heikkila
 Interview Date: February 3, 2026
 Location: Highland Park Library, Saint. Paul, Minnesota
 Length: 01:31:19

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Kim Heikkila: This is an interview for the Oxford Community Center Oral History Project. It is Tuesday, February 3, 2026. I’m here with John Hughes, also known, and perhaps better known as Hondo, which is his professional and performing name, which we may get to here a little bit in a few minutes. My name is Kim Heikkila, and today I’ll be talking to Hondo about his involvement at Oxford with Bill Peterson and the rest of the crew at Oxford. So thank you so much for coming and for being willing to share your Oxford story.

John “Hondo” Hughes: Thanks for having me.

KH: So if you could just start off by telling me a little bit about who you are and where you grew up.

JH: Well, I grew up in St. Paul, born and raised. Grew up half a block north of the campus of St. Thomas College, in what we call the Midway area, and went to this little Catholic grade school called St. Mark’s. It was really a bustling school at the time. We had a coach named Joe Meyer who was a very good coach, hard coach, occasionally a mean coach, who won a lot of championships. We won those championships; a lot of the reason we won them is because we didn’t want to deal with him in a bad mood.

I’m telling you this because it leads into what I have to say about my Oxford

experience, but this particular coach, he kind of motivated out of fear. You feared him. It was an old school method used by people like Bobby Knight and Woody Hayes. It was kind of what parents and teachers did in the '50s and '60s. They ruled by authority.

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JH: Anyway, when I was 16 years old, I was going to Cretin High School. I was going into my sophomore year, and I was a baseball player and a basketball player, and all my buddies always played on teams somewhere in the summertime. Well, we were all aware of Attucks Brooks and the Winfields down at Oxford, but we lived a few miles to the west. But that was where a few of my buddies and I said, "Well, let's go try out." That was when I first physically went into the Oxford environment and met coach Billy Peterson. And that's how it all started for me.

KH: Okay, I'm going to back it up a little bit just to learn a little bit more about you. So you said you grew up north of St. Thomas?

JH: Just north of St. Thomas. Dayton and Cleveland Avenues.

KH: And how many kids are in your family?

JH: There were four children. I was the second oldest. I have an older sister. Then it was myself and two younger brothers.

KH: Okay. And were sports important to your family as a whole?

JH: Well, my father went to St. Thomas College, and he was on the tennis team, and he also played some basketball. As kids going to our grade school, all the boys played sports. You went out for something. It became our mantra, that's the wrong word, but our pastime in the summer when you don't have school, we would go over to St. Thomas. My best friend growing up, Steve Klein, and I would go over and we'd bring our baseball gloves and bats, and we'd hit balls to each other and chase them down.

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JH: Back then, it was very unstructured. But, yes, there was a very high interest in sports. We even had a hockey rink in our yard during the winters and would go skating, and you'd take your hose and flood it in the winter. But that was how it all started. In those days, parents, unlike today, it seems, had no structure with their kids. We'd say to Mom or Dad, "What's going on today?" "Oh, just go get lost. Be back for dinner," or be back for something or other. So we'd just go and we'd figure it out. Now everything is structured, but then, we figured it out on our own. Kids would go out in the alley, all the kids in the neighborhood, and we would formulate our own pickup games.

We would play kick the can and kickball, and we'd play softball or stickball out in the street on Dayton Avenue. When traffic would come through, we'd have to stop. Of course, we were upset with the traffic because they're interrupting our game, like we had the right of way, but that was life back in the early '60s.

KH: And what year were you born?

JH: I was born in '52.

KH: And you said you had one sister?

JH: I have a sister a year older than me, Patsy. She lives out in Arizona, and she's single. I'm single. Neither one of us has ever been married. I have a brother three years younger, Jim, who also played at Oxford for Attucks Brooks under Billy P. (Bill Peterson). Our last name being Hughes, our nicknames as kids, were all called Howard. Our grade school coach, Joe Meyer at St. Mark's, every kid had a nickname. Because there was this famous recluse, rich guy named Howard Hughes, all the Hughes boys, there were three of us, we were all Howard. All our buddies from back then still refer to us by that nickname. You can always tell what era of time that you knew somebody by the fact that they refer to you as they did back then.

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JH: So, yes, I've got a brother, and then I had another brother who's no longer with us 10 years my junior, Mark, who succumbed to drug and depression and alcohol, and so on. He was also an athlete. I don't think he played for Bill though. I don't think he played at Oxford. But he did follow in our footsteps at Cretin High School, played sports there. So we're three kids in our family now. We're down from four to three.

KH: Did your sister play sports?

JH: Not really. I don't think so. She was at Durham Hall. Back then, female sports were very less prevalent than it is today. There was some basketball, and they had different rules where you couldn't go across the center court. Three ladies, three girls, would be on this side, and you had your forwards and your guards. It was a different era.

KH: It was pre-Title IX.

JH: Pre-Title IX, absolutely.

KH: And now, St. Mark's was that a K through eight?

JH: It was K through eight. Catholic grade school on Pryor and Dayton Avenue.

KH: And you said you played baseball and basketball?

JH: Right.

KH: Other sports as well?

JH: Well, I played some football in grade school. Then I actually went out for the football team my freshman year at Cretin High School. Funny story, I was a small person. I was like five-foot-seven maybe and weighed maybe 100 pounds. And I wasn't a real fast runner. I had good hands. I was quick, but I wasn't fast and so I didn't have a position. We're out there in practice, and they put me on the line going against this big fellow on the other side of the line named Bill Jones, who later became, I think, the chief, if not the chief, real high up in the Minneapolis Police Department. Bill was one of the few African American classmates I had back then.

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JH: I'm up against him, and he kept flattening me. On every play, I'd go down, I'd go down. Finally, I figured it out. I said to him, "You don't even have to hit me. I'll just go down. I've seen this movie before." So, after practice, we had a young coach named Mal Scanlan, he called me over and he said, "Young fella, do you play any other sports?" I said, "I do." He said, "What do you play?" I said, "I play baseball and basketball." He says to me, "You know, you could really get a head start on the basketball guys, if you started working on that right about now." And I said, "I think I know where you're going with this." That was the last I ever played football. So that was his comedic way of saying, "You're not a football player."

KH: Go do something else.

JH: Exactly. He later became a very well-known coach in St. Paul as well and is still active, Mal Scanlan.

KH: But baseball was your main favorite sport?

JH: Well, baseball was my best sport back then. I later gravitated toward liking basketball just as much. Your favorite sport was the one you were playing at the time. So during baseball season, baseball was my favorite sport. During basketball season, that was my favorite sport. Interestingly enough, and this probably says more about me as a person in terms of what I get motivated by, I was better at baseball, but I wanted to get better at basketball. I wanted to get my basketball up to a par on my baseball.

I probably worked harder on basketball because I wanted to prove to myself I could do it, which was also part of the motivation for why I ended up making a career change into being a professional magician. I was drawn to the idea of, can I do this? Can I pull it off? I think that's one of the big attractions in sports is that you want to perform. And you want to perform not only to please your coach and your teammates, but yourself.

I did some coaching myself in my teaching days, and I often said the greatest satisfaction one can get in life is not impressing somebody else, it's impressing yourself, because you should be your own honest critic of yourself. So I was drawn into personal performance, wanting to be as good as I could be. And that's how I align so well with our coach, Billy P., down at Oxford, because he had that attitude and so we were on the same wavelength.

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KH: Yeah, that's just what I was thinking as you were talking about that. Well, no wonder. No wonder you had this good and long relationship with Bill. That makes sense.

JH: Yeah. He's a very special person.

KH: He is.

JH: I get emotional when I talk about it because there's very few people in your life that can make a huge difference, and you're lucky to have at least one. Not only me, but so many of my friends, they all benefited from that experience and having that man in your life.

KH: Yeah, so we will definitely talk about Bill in more detail here in a minute, but I want to ask you to describe the neighborhood that you grew up in.

JH: The neighborhood I grew up in would be what I would call a white middle class, not upper, not lower, pretty much middle, and it actually had some less than middle, some a little more than middle because we were in that area where you had very modest homes that had big families and small houses. In those days, the Catholics primarily had huge amounts of kids. But if you went a few blocks to the north, like up on Iglehart Avenue, there were some big homes. If you went a couple blocks to the west down by Cretin Avenue, and in Exeter and Montrose, there were some big houses down there.

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JH: We grew up in an apartment building, a fourplex. My father owned a fourplex

on Dayton Avenue just west of Cleveland, and we had one of the four units. When I was 10 years old, we decided to move because we needed a slightly bigger place. So where'd we go? Across the alley to a house on Cleveland Avenue, literally 10 paces across the alley, so it wasn't a big geographical shift. It was just moving into another house. But the neighborhood was a very white, middle class neighborhood. Pretty modest, I'd say mostly a Democratic kind of environment back then.

KH: And did most of your friends go to St. Mark's then?

JH: They did. Now, it was a very Catholic area. If you didn't go to St. Mark's, there were a couple public school alternatives, but I wasn't that aware of them because all my friends were at St. Mark's.

KH: And what did your parents do for work?

JH: So my mother, she stayed in the home and did what mothers did back then. She had a couple side jobs. She worked at St. Thomas College in an admin job for a little bit. But her primary role when we were kids was doing what was popular for women at that time, a full time job at home. My father, his main job, he worked for the Small Business Administration, and he became their chief loan officer. He would drive to downtown Minneapolis for that particular job. His job was overseeing a team that would approve or not approve people who were seeking loans from the Small Business Administration. It got stressful for him, because he was a nice guy and he didn't like to say no to people, and sometimes you had to say no if they didn't qualify.

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KH: And did he have a college degree, either of your parents?

JH: Yes, my father and I went to the same grade school and same high school. My father was a class of '34 at Cretin. I was class of '70. He then went on to St. Thomas College and was class of '38 over there. Then he went into the service in World War II,

and he worked for the IRS for a while. He actually learned how to prepare tax returns. Every year during tax season, my dad and my mom would sit at the dining room table and have all these pieces of paper spread out with ledger sheets, and my Dad's buddies would come over, and he would do their tax returns.

As a kid in grade school, I'd be watching this, and my mother had the typewriter, the old fashioned typewriter. She'd type up these tax returns. It was quite a tedious task, but it was just something that back then people did. I don't know if you'd call it a side hustle, but it was something supplemental that he could do.

But yeah, like I say, he played sports at St. Thomas, and when he went in the service, he came back from that and that was when he met my mom. They got married in 1950. And the first daughter came in '51, I came in '52. Actually, the only daughter came in '51, I came in '52, my brother Jim in '55, and my little brother Mark in '62.

KH: Okay, thank you. This is helpful to kind of paint a portrait, so to speak, of where you came from. So now let's talk a little bit in more detail about how it is then, coming from this side of town, the St. Thomas area, going to St. Mark's how you end up at Oxford.

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JH: Well, yeah, we were familiar with Oxford because when we were at St. Mark's, St. Mark's would play sports occasionally against the teams down from Oxford. So we were well aware of the athleticism and the fact that, by and large, the kids from Oxford were better athletes than we were, at least in terms of natural athleticism. We wouldn't beat them all the time, but occasionally. But we respected and we were enamored in a way by how much more gifted many of the kids from Oxford were than we were. We were schooled in fundamentals and, so we could compete, you might not be as good physically, but if you can perform functionally, you got a shot.

But, like I said, the way that I've discovered Oxford, I think I was either in eighth grade or ninth grade, and somehow we ended up going down there to watch some kids we knew who were older from our community that were already playing for Attucks Brooks and Oxford. We'd go down and watch those games at Dunning, it's now called Toni Stone Field, but it was Dunning Four. When you had a game at Dunning Four, that was like you're going out to the Metropolitan Stadium or Midway Stadium. It was the third biggest real stadium you could play in and had stands and it had dugouts, sort of, and it was kind of fun.

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JH: But we would watch. And this guy was coaching third base, this big burly guy who had hair coming out of his shirt, looked like a bear, like a turtleneck of hair coming out. I said, "What's with that dude down there? Is he some sort of human exhibit of evolution? What's going on?" It was our coach, and I didn't know him, but he had a big bark. Man, he could yell. You could hear him. His teams hustled. Boy, they really played hard. We just knew that when it came our time in the summer to go play somewhere, there really was no discussion. That was the only option, so we just went down there. I'll never forget the first time I met him. That was quite a story.

The first thing he says to me is, "Who are you?" I told him, and he goes, "What do you play?" I said, "I infield, mostly. Third base." And he says, "Can you hit?" I said, "Not very well." [laughs] And he said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, my grade school coach told me, don't lose your glove, because if you lose your glove, you're going to be writing a letter home to your mother saying, you got to come home. You can't play." And he goes, "Well, let me be the judge of that."

He had me go up to the plate. He starts throwing some batting practice to me, and I start hitting these line drives out into the field. I must have hit 10 in a row that were just

perfect and he stopped it right there. He says, “Come here.” And again, I get emotional, but he said, “You’re a great hitter. Don’t let anybody tell you’re not. He. I just saw you hit 10 line drives in a row.” I said, “Okay, great. I’m a good hitter now.” I became a good hitter just because someone believed in me. I joked with him later that he found the one spot where my bat happened to travel through the batting zone, and he put 10 in a row right there, so he made me look good. But he was a master at motivation and a master at getting you to believe in yourself, and so that was an epiphany for me. He didn’t know me from Adam or Eve, and he convinced me that I had value that I didn’t even think I had.

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KH: On your first meeting with him?

JH: Yeah, yeah.

KH: And you started off, you were talking about your coach at St. Margaret’s, right?

JH: Joe Meyer, Yeah.

KH: And how his coaching philosophy may have been a little bit different, that he kind of coached through fear and intimidation.

JH: Right, both coaches were very demanding. Both coaches were sticklers on the fundamentals. They knew their stuff, but they had different styles of managing kids. Where Joe was an authoritarian, and he could be mean if you didn’t do it the way he wanted you to, or if you made a mistake, he could ridicule you. I remember one time, vividly, playing a game at Dunning Field, not the stadium field, but one of the adjacent fields in grade school. I’m on defense at shortstop; I might have been in seventh grade. It was a bunt situation where we did a shift, our defense did a shift to counter what he thought the offense might do.

He explained the whole thing, and I kind of was confused. He looks out to me, and

“Now you got that?” I didn’t want to say no, because, you know what? If you say no, I don’t get it, then you’re going to get called out for being an idiot and get in trouble. So I just said, “Yeah.” I hoped that the play wouldn’t involve me. I was rolling the dice. Well, the play did involve me, and I screwed it up. I didn’t do what I was supposed to do. He came out and with one hand, picked me up by the throat, by the neck under my thing here, and carried me off the field. I just remembered, man, that’s harsh, but that was part of the method that he used.

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JH: Whereas Bill, on the other hand, if you made a mistake, it got called out, but he wasn’t going to hurt you physically. You know what I mean? One of the best lines I’ve ever heard Billy P. say is that the secret to coaching, and I assume it could be parenting or any kind of leadership, particularly with kids, he says, “You’ve got to learn how to do two things at the same time.” Those two things he used to say is, kick them in the butt and hug them. And kick them in the butt, he never did that. But that’s kind of the verbiage. But, yeah, as a kid, you knew that he had your back.

You knew you were going to be driven to excellence, and you were going to be held accountable, and you were going to get better. You were going to beat teams that were better than you simply by playing smarter and harder and with more intensity. It was an incredible learning and life experience just being at Oxford. Our practices were more fun than our games. A lot of kids, they slough off at practice. They don’t pay attention. You know, oh, I got to go to practice. They just want to play games. Well, we knew that you play the way you practice, and if you don’t do your practices right, you won’t be ready for your games. So the way we conducted our practices was like it was a game. If Bill was throwing batting practice, and you’re all out there in the field and one of your teammates hits a ball out to center field, Bill at the pitching mound would stop and he’d

turn and he'd say, "Third base." Then if there wasn't a cutoff man, you'd hear about that, so the shortstop would have to be the cutoff man.

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JH: If that throw went over that cutoff man's head, that wasn't good, because your throw has to be able to hit the cutoff man, and the cutoff man has to be in the right spot. So if the third baseman says, "Let that ball go," he's going to get it in the right spot. But maybe the throw would be coming in and he'd say, "Cut two." Now, if there's no second baseman at second base, he's got no one to throw to. So all these moving parts were occurring. On not every hit, but on many hits from the batting practice, he would create a game situation. If we messed it up, or if the mistake was a crucial enough one, he would stop the practice, and in his booming voice, "Everybody up." Then everybody would sprint to him, and we'd all be there in a circle, and he'd point to someone. It could be me or it could be someone. And he'd say, "What did you see there that went wrong over here?" And you had to tell him.

It got to a point where we were being educated on how to not only play the game more intelligently, but we were being educated to the point of holding one another accountable so that it didn't always have to come from the coach, because we got tired of him saying, "Everybody up." We didn't want to come sprinting in every time we screwed up. So amongst each other after practice, we would joke or tease or get on each other and say, "Hey, dude, when are you going to get that figured out? We're tired of you getting called out all the time on that." So we would coach ourselves.

I think one of the things I learned is that one of the best things a teacher or a coach can do is get your pupils or students or players, get them to the point where they don't need you anymore. Get them to the point where they can do it. I've never been a parent, but, pardon the pun, it's apparent to me that a parent's job is getting their kids to the point

where they don't need the parent.

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JH: So I was always fascinated by that whole psychology of overseeing human performance, and not only the performance, but the psyche, the heart and the soul of a person. So you got the heart and the soul of the individual, then you got the heart and the soul of the collection, the whole team. And we were a family down there.

KH: And so, I mean, listening to you talk about Bill and then the distinction between him and Joe Meyer, and this is not to diss Joe Meyer, but I mean, Bill he had high expectations. He would point out mistakes. But he would do it, it sounds to me, without the shame that Meyer sometimes inflicted.

JH: Exactly. I don't know if that came up in your interview with Bill, and I don't know if I've ever asked him this, but where did he get that? I have to believe that a big part of that came from his experience in the Marine Corps, where we all know boot camp and the physical demands of the Marine Corps. It's also a mental thing. You can't perform the physical challenges that are presented without a certain mental strength. So we understood how tough he was.

Quick story. He's pitching batting practice to our Legion team before one of our games. The game was at the big Dunning Field, but we were taking batting practice at the adjacent field down below the hill on Marshall Avenue. Bill had a cast one hand because he had hurt his finger doing some carpentry, or something like that. So he didn't have a glove. He could pitch. He had another player who would catch the balls and hand them to him.

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JH: So he threw this pitch, and Tom Keys, a good classmate and teammate, hit a line shot right back at Bill. Bill instinctively put his hand up where normally you'd have a

glove, but he didn't have a glove. So the ball ricochets off this cast right in his nose. Blood starts spewing out, and we think he just killed our coach. We're going, oh, my God. There was a pause for about 10 seconds where Bill had his head down and blood was coming out of his nose and we're all sitting, standing there in shock.

He kind of comes up, and kind of brushes his nose off. He looks around at all of us, and he starts laughing and he goes, "Continue on." And then he just continued on and he threw. Well, meanwhile, his nose is still bleeding, and he couldn't get it to stop. At the end of our little pregame session, he walks across Marshall Avenue, up onto the lawn of a random house where there was a hose connected. He turned the thing on, and he sprayed his face down with this hose, and he coached the game. So, I mean, talk about tough. That's just an example.

But back to the psychology of kids, he knew how to manage your mind and manage your body, and he never asked you to do something that he couldn't do. In other words, one day we were going to practice learning how to headfirst slide. So the whole team is at home plate. And he says, "Now here's the drill, and I'm going to demonstrate." He runs full speed to first base and slides headfirst. He gets up, runs full speed to second, slides headfirst, does it to third, does it to home. He does the whole thing in less than 16 seconds. He says, "Any questions?"

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JH: We're all looking at each other, "Oh, shoot, we've got to do this?" So then we all do it. I remember coming home from practice that day, and my mother looks at me and sees my clothing. She goes, "What the heck happened with you today?" I said, "Well, we were working on our headfirst sliding." I mean, you came home really dirty and muddy. You know, it was hot, it was humid, it was summertime, but that was what we did. We'd have run through a wall for that guy and it's why we won. We liked winning, and we liked

playing to the best of our ability. There were times where we weren't very good, but we would play and beat teams that were better simply because we did the little things correctly and we knew we had a higher baseball IQ than any of the other teams. So it was a fascinating experience that, as you can tell by my voice and my stories, has stayed with me my whole life and helped to get me through some challenging times.

KH: So you said that when you were at St. Mark's still, before you were playing for Bill or with Bill, that you knew what was going on because you would play against the teams that he was coaching over there. How would you describe, if there was one, the view of Oxford and the kids who were playing at Oxford among your community that wasn't part of Oxford or Rondo?

JH: Well, when I was at St Mark's and before I had ever gone to Oxford and I didn't know any of the kids from that community, our St. Mark's coach would prepare us verbally for what we were going to be encountering. I'll just say it straight. He knew that the Black kids were faster and jumped higher and stronger. He would forewarn us before a football game. He said, "Those guys are going to run circles around you. Good luck."

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JH: He would just tell you flat out, "You got no chance." It was his reverse psychology. He was doing that to just see if you could prove him wrong. That was just one of the things you learned quickly in sports, and I'm not being racist when I say this, there's truth to the fact that some people just have, innately, a greater gift for being good at one thing versus another thing. We just knew that, boy, this is an experience. You're going to be encountering some speed. I can't explain it. It just is what it is, but it was beautiful to see.

It taught us reality. It taught us as kids, people can say what they want to be politically correct, but you're out there and you're experiencing it yourself. It's real life.

You know what I mean? So we accepted it and we felt that this is a good challenge. Then later, when we became teammates of the Winfields and the Kevin Burns and Frank Adams and so on, Steve Scroggins, man, we were now blessed with being a part of and could play adjacent to that level of greatness.

KH: So when your coach was telling you, “Get ready, these guys are going to run circles around you,” was his focus only that? Just this is how they are as athletes, they being the teams at Oxford, coming out of Oxford, Attucks Brooks. This is how they are as athletes. Was there any hint of, let’s call it straight, any hint of racism in that?

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JH: Well, there was definitely inappropriate language being used. Now, I cannot say anything about intent because I don’t believe Joe Meyer was a racist and anything like that. But, again, a sign of the times was that language you wouldn’t use today was being used then. Now, he never used the N-word that I could ever recall, but he had some other words. We didn’t think two cents about it because we were kids. We were in grade school. We weren’t politically minded in terms of filters on appropriate language, but I don’t think there was ever an ounce of racism in him. It was just, he was a realist and he just told us, “These kids are more athletic than you are, and you’re going to find that out.”

KH: Now, thinking about the views of Rondo and that African American enclave that was Rondo at the time, from your neighborhood, outside of school even. I don’t even know how to ask the question, was there any kind of particular view of Rondo from your neighborhood?

JH: In my youth, there really wasn’t. The only view we had was that there was a stereotypical fear of, oh, you don’t want to get caught in the Selby-Dale area. You don’t want to be down in that neighborhood. That’s the Black neighborhood and bad things can happen, and you can get hurt. You don’t want to be down there. I never experienced any

of that, but that was what your parents would say.

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JH: We never hung out down there when I was a kid. Now, maybe you would drive through to go to see another team you were playing. I think in those days, wherever you lived and grew up, that was your focus and that was all you knew. I mean, we knew nothing about the Rondo area as kids other than the fact that it was there and it kind of got chopped up when they put in the freeway, I-94. And we knew that was the Black community in St. Paul, but I never, ever thought of St. Paul as having a ghetto. I never thought of it as being a bad situation. It just wasn't part of my thinking.

The thing that you might hear from an adult about, oh, don't get caught in that neighborhood and so on, they were always telling us where not to go and where not to get in trouble. That was the motivation back then, was don't embarrass your parents. Don't do anything stupid. Don't get caught. I mean, think about what kids get away with today. Back then, if you got caught stealing a candy bar from a store, you were in big trouble, so I never did. So, yeah, I'm sorry, I don't have a better answer for our awareness of the Oxford Rondo area at the time.

KH: No, that's the answer though.

JH: I mean, Central High School. We all knew about Central High School. That was where most of the Black kids went. Not all, because you had Highland. I can't remember exactly when it happened, but there were some things that went on with the schools where there was more movement of students from various neighborhoods into various schools.

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JH: But we were pretty sheltered. We were pretty cloistered in our little conservative, safe, little middle class, white Catholic area. Even when you'd go to church,

not only was Joe Meyer a stickler and a hardliner, so were the priests. I mean, I remember one time my dad and I went to church, and we were about five minutes late or something like that. We walk in and we sit in the back, and we'd get called out from the pulpit by the priest. Oh, you got to be kidding me.

KH: So it's partly just generational?

JH: Yeah, generational. And the teachers, we had nuns, we had a lot of sisters that taught us at our school. They'd hit you with the rulers and you'd get knocked around. I remember doing a stupid prank in third grade in Sister Camillus's class where we were talking about stations in the cross. I guess I picked the wrong time to take a crayon and draw a cross down my nose and across my eyebrows. She took me out into the hallway and gave me a fist in the middle of my back. And I said, "Holy mackerel." Then she made me stand in front of the classroom and just stare at the class for five minutes to just make a fool out of me. So, for every story I've got, my buddies all have their stories, too. So it was a sign of the times.

KH: And that's a good segue into a broader conversation about the times. So you were born in '52. When you're kind of actively participating on your school team, it was what, mid-60s? Early to mid-60s-ish?

JH: Yeah, exactly.

KH: So the freeway is kind of being constructed. Do you remember that?

[00:40:00]

JH: A little bit. Our grade school didn't have a football field, so we would practice at Merriam Park Playground. You'd have to go through the neighborhoods to get over there. But, yeah, I vaguely remember on occasion when our family would be driving close enough, you could see the big machinery that was digging out the area where they were going to put the freeway. I can't remember the year, was it '62 or '63? I can't remember

exactly when that freeway came in.

KH: Well, I mean, it was under construction for a number of years. I think it opened in '68 or '69, but it was being built.

JH: That late? It took a number of years.

KH: Yes. And, again, I ask this, knowing that you were a kid doing kid things, do you recall any conversation in your family or in your community at school about the freeway coming through and what it was doing to your neighborhood?

JH: We showed no concern over what it was doing to our neighborhood, because I guess we lived far enough away from it in terms of the freeway was a good half a mile to a mile north of us. [recorded announcement in the background] As kids, we never ventured up that way in our playing circle of movement, because to get up there, you had to cross Marshall Avenue. Well, Marshall Avenue is the street that was about a block north of Dayton Avenue, where we were.

Marshall was a busy street. As kids, it was sort of a line of demarcation. You don't go across Marshall. My mother was always worried we were going to get hit by a car or something. Of course, we'd just go sprinting right across it in between cars because we liked the challenge. I actually got hit once. I was real little. I don't remember it. Marshall would run straight down to Oxford Playground. So, later, that's how we would get to practice. If you didn't ride your bike, you'd hitchhike. I would hitchhike many, many times, Marshall Avenue all the way down to Oxford.

[00:42:00]

JH: Back to the freeway, so for that reason, it didn't impact us, but I can see where it would, Rondo, because it went right through the heart of that community. In our case, we weren't up that close to it. Now, obviously it impacted transportation and my parents, in terms of when we would go traveling for family stuff, because all of a sudden, instead

of having to take city streets to everywhere you go, you can get someplace a little quicker.

KH: I was just going to ask you something based on what you were just saying.

Now it's gone. Perhaps it will come back.

JH: It'll come back to you. You were talking about the mid to late '60s.

KH: Yeah, the context. So you're at St. Mark's through eighth grade and then you go to Cretin.

JH: Right. Graduated in '66 from St. Mark's. Then when it came time to decide where to go to high school, there really was no decision to be made because you just followed in your father's footsteps and he went there, and so I went there.

KH: Okay. So you are in high school then, and even your elementary, junior high combo school, when there's a lot of stuff going on in the country.

JH: Big time.

KH: Civil Rights, the war, student movements, all kinds of stuff going on at the time. Was any of that landing on your radar?

[00:44:00]

JH: Yes, because my high school was an all-boys ROTC military high school. So we wore uniforms. We had to take a military class. Like it or not, you were in the high school version of the military. The most vivid memory I have of that experience is that every year in May, there was a thing called federal inspection, *federal*. So you would have people from the United States Army, who were the overseers of the high school ROTC programs, that oversaw the high school. [recorded announcement in the background] They would do a review and we as students had a day called federal inspection where we had to come with our shoes shined, our belts buckled, our hair cut properly, and we were going to be inspected. *Every* student. Now we had maybe 1,200 students in our high school at the time. We're out on the south field at Cretin, all in our ranks, and they come and literally

you stood there at attention for hours. If you got lucky, you could do what they call at ease and spread your feet and so on.

But, yeah, it was hard. That was how I learned I had a weak lower back because I could hardly stand. Anyway, they'd come around and check you out. So this is the military thing. Well, because of the Civil Rights and the war going on at the time—the war, primarily—more than one year, they showed up, the protesters, and they would walk around with signs. [recorded announcement in the background] So the protesters would come. It looked very much like what we're seeing on TV with this ICE thing, where people, not that large, but we had 40, 50 people out there picketing with signs.

[00:46:00]

JH: The signs [would] say, “Cretin kills.” They were basically protesting the military's involvement in Vietnam, but we're just innocent kids. We're just students going to school here. I'm basically agreeing with them. I'm agreeing with the protesters, and I'm one of the guys they're protesting. I'm not a war kind of guy. I don't like it. I'm one of these guys that figure there's got to be a better way. Anyway, that was what we lived through, and every year we had to do that. So that was the Vietnam piece of it.

Now you have the Civil Rights piece, and you have what happened in '68. You have Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy. It was very, very tumultuous times. You had the hippie movement, the sexual revolution. You have young people saying, “Hey, we don't want to live our life under the firm hand of a Joe Meyer,” my grade school coach. “We don't want to be told that's how we have to live. We've got our own minds. We can make our own decisions.” I mean, the power of that whole generation standing up to authority and saying no. Eventually, they were right.

However, and I'm getting off on a tangent, but many of those people who were at the heart of the protests, then as they get older and they get into the professional world.

They start making money and they realize that the system rewards you for being a conformist and kowtowing to the leaders in the business world. Now, all of a sudden, people compromise their principles for profit.

[00:48:00]

JH: When you compromise your principles for profit, you are a part of the problem of what we have now. The haves and the have-nots. And land of the free, home of the brave. Well, yeah, as long as you don't mess with the people who are in charge, who want to subtly, if not sometimes not so subtly, control everything. Obviously, you can tell where I'm coming from. But, that said, I still believe in the power of the individual to be successful, no matter the situation, if you have the luck that I had to play for people down at Oxford and Coach Billy P., where you can make it. You can make it against odds if you pay attention to the right things.

I've had a lucky life that way, even though, I don't know if we talked about this, but my first career, I was a high school math teacher and a coach. So before I ever became The Amazing Hondo, I was a guy who got out of college in Winona and gravitated toward my one subject that I was good at in school. My main subject was mathematics, so I became a high school math teacher. But, again, I'm kind of going in all different directions here. I apologize.

KH: No, no worries. We'll get back to that part of your life. Before we do though, here's a question for you. What was it like for you as a white kid, shifting your athletic playing time and experience to Oxford, given the context that we were just talking about?

[00:50:00]

JH: Right, exactly. Well, we knew that there was tension between whites and Blacks around the country, but we were so lucky that sports, by and large, has been one of the things that has always survived racial differences, in that sports puts your race

secondary to what you're there to do as athletes. Some of my best friends became Black folks that I met through sports in high school and in college. It was never, ever a problem for me, not once. Never had an issue personally, because I respected the hell out of them and I wanted to get to know them. I wanted to see life through their eyes. I'm a guy that asks a lot of questions, sometimes I can push the envelope. But I've always been fascinated by, how do you see this? In fact, the divisions that exist today in the world, I wish more people would ask each other not only how you see it the way you see it, but why do you see it the way you see it, and how can two people look at the exact same thing and see something different? That blows my mind. Like the stuff that's been happening in the streets recently with these killings. It's like, I mean, you're both looking at the same thing. I use an analogy.

I follow sports to this day. I was watching an NBA game on TV last night, and sometimes the coach will call for a replay to see if the guy stepped on the line, let's say. And so, then you're watching the replay, and, yeah, it shows that the guy stepped on the line and, of course they made the call. But my analogy is, can you imagine, you have a video and they show the guy stepping on the line, and one guy says, "Yeah, you can see he stepped on the line." And the other guy's, "No, I don't think he did. He didn't step on the line." Well, the video shows him stepping on the line. The guy says he didn't step on the line, and he believes it because his boss told him.

KH: It's crazy making.

[00:52:00]

JH: Yeah. So I can't take it. I can't take it. Now I go back to our coach, Billy P. Fairness. You have to be fair. You can be firm, but you have to be fair, and he was. So you were asking me about the relationship between white and Black down at Oxford, there was no white and Black, even though it was Black and white, because our coach was

white in a primarily Black neighborhood. I'm thinking, hey, if this guy can not only exist here, but be running the show, there must be something about the stereotypes that are wrong about Blacks, that you can't trust them, there's got to be something wrong with that, because I'm seeing the opposite. It's working wonderfully.

Now, why? Well, because Bill, he was a tough guy. He wouldn't back down from anything, but he was fair and he was motivational, and he was your biggest challenge as working hard, but he was your biggest fan for telling you did a good job. When you finally got what it was he wanted you to learn, you felt like a million bucks, because he really praised you, so he used positive recognition. Before self-help books were even in vogue, he was doing it naturally. Just naturally.

KH: And what kid doesn't want that?

JH: Exactly. And you know what? We got from him what we weren't getting at home. My father was working and, I say this in all sincerity, he didn't have time for us in the way that a guy at the playground has time for you. So he's trying to provide for the family on a very modest income, and we're just trying to make ends meet. In those days, every family was trying to make ends meet.

[00:54:00]

JH: But you weren't getting the personal attention, at least in our family, from our parents that you're getting from your coaches and your teachers. So I think a firm reason that I became good as a student and good as an athlete is because I wanted and needed adult approval that I wasn't feeling at home. I was too young to know why I wasn't getting that at home. I just knew that I wasn't. So kids know what they feel, but they don't know what's causing it. Then you get it and you find out what you're not getting at home. You don't blame the situation. It is what it is. But you feel fortunate that you had, like I had a couple of teachers who took me under their wing and made a huge difference. Then

the baseball experience at Oxford.

Two or three people can be 95 percent of the value of who you are and how you live your life. It can all go back to one or two or three people. So, to that extent, this little white kid who wasn't very athletic, coming from a little modest, safe white neighborhood, ends up in the heart of inner city St. Paul, and life sort of opens up.

KH: Now, have I heard you say a few times that you went to Oxford to play with your friends? So were there other white kids, like from St. Mark's or from your neighborhood, who also ended up playing down at Oxford for Bill?

[00:56:00]

JH: Oh, for him? Yes, absolutely. I had a whole bunch of my high school buddies, and the word got out, and we would all go, "Where are we going to play in the summer?" So that's where we would end up. So I had kids I played grade school ball with, that I played high school ball with, now we're down playing summer league ball down at Oxford. As I look back on the teams that I played on, they were at least 50 percent white kids in terms of the mix, which is a beautiful sign of how the Black community not only welcomed, but embraced the white kids and the Black kids all played together. Again, it doesn't happen without Bill Peterson, in my opinion.

KH: And again, maybe it's not as remarkable as it seems, but given the times and the tension, the racial tension that was permeating the country, what do you—well, I guess you just answered the question. You attribute that kind of ability for these white kids and Black kids to kind of live and play in harmony to Bill?

JH: Well, I do, but I also think kids inherently at that age, they don't want to think about politics, they don't want to think about all that adult stuff. We want to play ball. Sports was an escape. Sports was a way to get away from that craziness that was happening. They talk about kids being stupid and doing things in the neighborhood and

getting in trouble. I say, well, yeah, look at the adults who are doing it on a far grander scale at levels that are far more impactful.

[00:58:00]

JH: I think we sometimes forget that it isn't just kids that do stupid things in the neighborhoods. The system can be not good, too. So we learned that. We lived in our little bubble, if you will. Those summers playing at Oxford, that was my entire summer. I mean, you had nothing you'd rather do than go there and practice and then play your games. We would either practice or play at least five days a week, if not six. I mean, it was a full time job, but we loved it. I remember the last day of my senior year, and Billy P. gave me a ride home from our last game, and I was getting out of the car to go into my house. I couldn't take it. It was like, this thing is over. I can't believe it. I don't want it to be over. It was all done, but that's how powerful that was because I knew that. What am I going to do now? You've got to rewrite. You've got to start over. So it was like a life, it was a world that made sense and gave you purpose.

[01:00:00]

JH: So, again, I apologize. I get emotional when I talk about this because you think about who and what makes a difference. Had I never set foot at Oxford and had I never met the people I met down there, Billy P, the Winfields, all the people, I don't know where I'd ended up, or how my life would be different, but it certainly would be different. It would be different.

KH: I think what your story and your recounting of all this reminds us of is that, and you've said it yourself, that sports are so much bigger than sports. They're so much bigger than what you do on the field. They're so much bigger than the physical skill because of all these other—and I'm sure it happens in other settings, too, school. To walk into a community that is built through somebody like Bill and that and the values that he

has shared with that community and that emerge from that community, it's so much bigger than your win-loss record.

JH: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I look back, I honestly cannot remember much about any of the games. I really can't. I couldn't recall what the score was. There were a few games that we played in the regional tournament up in North Dakota that I remember things about. But I hope this isn't a sign of old age, memory loss, but you can forget the details of what happened, but you will never forget how it made you feel to be there to experience it.

[01:02:00]

JH: So the human development part of the Oxford experience was as great as the athletic development part. I believe that a big part of my viewpoint and how I view the world and how I view what I perceive to be fairness in the world comes from the Oxford experience. Fairness is very important. And life has luck, life has bad luck. You might be up at the plate, and a ball is this far outside, and they call it a strike. Well, that's bad luck. Or, maybe there's one that you should have swung at that was a strike, they call it a ball. Okay, that's good luck, but fairness and luck are on a different plane.

Playing at Oxford under Billy P, like I said, firm but fair. I remember a guy would strike out, swing at three pitches, miss them all at Dunning, and he's walking back to the dugout dejected. Bill comes up and says, "You got nothing to be dejected about. You made three good swings and you were aggressive. The next time you're going to hit it." The next time that kid is up and he knocks it over the fence, so it's staying positive. But if you did stupid things and if you were careless and if you were not mentally paying attention, those were the things that really got him and he'd call you out on that. So you had to be aware of the moment. And there's no time. The only moment anybody has in life is the one you're experiencing right now.

[01:04:00]

JH: Maybe I've never thought of it this way, but the Oxford experience, just about every moment down there was a now moment, because you never took a day off and you never took a pitch off. You paid attention to every little thing. When we would win games by doing one or two little things correctly that nobody else does, he would point that out to us and he'd say, "If we didn't work on that little thing there, that one little thing that we spend time on, we won a game because of it. We don't win that game if we don't have this little piece down that we're talking about."

He was such a stickler for those fundamentals. He told me, he's told me many times, he says, "You guys thought I knew what I was talking about. I was just like you. I was learning it on the fly." But he sounded like he knew what he was talking about, so we believed him. Even if he wasn't right. He says, "Sometimes it's better to believe in what you're doing incorrectly than to not believe in what you're doing correctly because you've got a better shot of pulling it off." So that was just a fascinating time. But I think the thing I want to get back to is that the White-Black thing never, ever was an issue while we were on the field playing.

Now it might have been for somebody else who wasn't on our team who was hanging out at the playground. I don't know that. For the guys that were actually playing, never a hint once of any issue, Black-White stuff. Again, I think that comes from the fact that the leadership that we had under Bill was such that we're going to be above that. It ain't going to matter. That's not going to be anything to us.

[01:06:00]

JH: I was lucky that my parents were open minded in terms of race, too. We never had, as kids, anything put into us to suggest that there's second class citizens here or that you're better. None of that. In fact, my dad talked about serving in the military alongside a

diverse crowd and you get along. And so, yeah, it was never an issue.

KH: Thank you. I was going to ask about your mom and dad and how they felt about you going down to Oxford. Part of the reason I was thinking to ask that is that so many of the African American folks I've interviewed for this project who lived in Rondo, they talked so much about how they were there when they were younger than you, though, that Oxford was a place that their parents just knew where their kids were. It was a safe place. They knew where the kids were. It was going to be a healthy environment. They weren't going to be getting into trouble and it was just such a community institution that families relied on. Now, granted, again, when they were talking about that, they were talking about being quite a bit younger than you were when you headed down there.

JH: Yeah, exactly. I don't know what I was going to say but go ahead.

KH: No, I think that's the end. I've just driven that into a dead end right there.

JH: I do remember a cute story one time where I might have mentioned this to you when we spoke on the phone, but we were doing a drill at practice down at Oxford. Bill was real big on efficiency. In other words, the ball comes into your glove, and you have to throw a guy out at first base. I'm at third base. So you watch some fielders, even at the professional level, you watch them field it. They'll take a couple hops with their feet, and then they'll casually throw the ball over, and maybe they get the guy out by a foot, or maybe the guy's safe. Well, he said, "We're going to get the ball out quick."

[01:08:00]

JH: So we worked on catch and release but do it fast. We would do this drill where he'd line up half the team one side, half the team facing them, and you'd just play catch. Two guys would be playing catch as fast as you can. Well, naturally, when you're first do this, your accuracy is going to be a bit off. So balls were flying into the street, hitting parked cars, and so on. One of these neighbors comes over and confronts Bill and

says, “Hey, balls are hitting my car. What’s going on?” Peterson says, “This is a baseball field. You should know better than park next to a baseball field. Balls are going to be flying.” And the guy walked away and moved his car.

The other thing, the other lesson we learned was when we were throwing those balls wildly, so maybe our grade school coach, Joe, he might have said, “Take your time, make an accurate throw.” Bill’s theory was, “No, get it out quick because it’s going to go flying for a while, but eventually, the accuracy is going to come, and we will already have the quick release.” And he was right. Eventually, we could get that thing out and throw a strike to first base. So control doesn’t come immediately. I learned this later when practicing my magic. Like if I’m learning card tricks or something, and I’m working on a particular a sleight of hand maneuver, and I’m flubbing it, I’m flubbing it, I’m flubbing it and you get your hundred, thousand, ten thousand reps in, and it goes from not working, it’s not working, it’s not working, and all of a sudden it works. You go, oh God, I think I got it. That’s what you call the eureka moment where all your practice, eventually it’s like a light bulb switch goes on, and I got it. That was happening with us in baseball all the time, getting to that moment where all this repetition eventually became the norm and now it’s like riding a bike.

[01:10:00]

KH: Did you play basketball at Oxford also?

JH: I played pickup ball down there. While I was playing college ball, I’d come back down and I’d play at the Oxford playground in the gym. I’d be the only white guy playing with all the Black kids. My game was influenced by Black athletes. So I learned how to do fancy dribbling and fancy passing and I had good moves. I remember one day down there, I think it must have been a Saturday morning and I’m just playing. I must have been in my early twenties, or something like that. I put a move on this one kid and

got a layup, went by him. All of his buddies were sitting on the side, and they were all high fiving each other saying, “See what that white boy just did?”

Then next time down, one of them said, “Do that to him again.” So I did it to him again and they all went nuts. It was just I felt like, hey, I’m one of them now. I fit in. So I did. I played a fair amount of basketball down there. I’ve been playing basketball my whole life. We have a group called Noon Ball that we have been doing and occasionally our game would find its way to Oxford Playground, so we still get down there now and then. Or, at Jimmy Lee now.

KH: You played baseball and basketball throughout your high school and college?

JH: Correct.

KH: I’m just making sure we’re good on time. You just kind of gave this really heart wrenching recall of your last game with Bill, and how, oh, this world that you’ve lived in was just over because time passes.

[01:12:00]

JH: Yeah, I guess I would equate it to, again, I’ve never been married, but I’ve had relationships, and I would equate it to, let’s say you’re in love with somebody and everything is great. You’re just having the time of your life and it’s a summer long deal, let’s say. Then all of a sudden you come to the realization you’re going your way, she’s going her way, and what you’ve been doing will never happen again between you. And that was sort of the feeling. Now, even though I’ve maintained a great friendship my whole life with Billy P., the thing that I experienced under him in those formative years, I knew that was over. So now all of a sudden it’s no longer a coach-player and it’s more of a friendship. But, even though it’s a friendship, he’s still my coach and I’m still a player. That relationship never changes.

We talked many times on the phone through the years, and I remind him all the

time of the impact he had not only on me, but so many kids. But that helped me in college when I was playing at Winona State and when my baseball coach down there found out that I played for Bill Peterson and Attucks Brooks and that I played alongside the Winfield brothers, that carried a ton of street cred. Because, at the time, Dave was playing at the University of Minnesota. He was one year older than me, but he was playing there and we were at Winona. Playing two sports in college, that's a full time job. But, yeah, just about everything that I ever did in sports can go back to what I learned in grade school.

[01:14:00]

JH: Then more importantly, how it got cultivated and all that got added to it at the Oxford experience. I remember playing in the JV basketball game for Winona. We were the opening game at the University of Minnesota. We were the preliminary game to a Gopher basketball game. We played the Gophers JV team. Dave Winfield was in the stands watching me play, cheering me on, which was kind of cool. I actually had my best game of my college career that day. We, little Winona State, beat the Gophers 79-72. I didn't miss a shot. I made all my shots and I had a bunch of assists. Dave was in the crowd and so we then stayed and watched his game.

There's another story for you. Dave Winfield wasn't a basketball player. He could play basketball, but he got discovered by Bill Musselman playing intramural basketball at the University of Minnesota. The story I remember is, "who's that kid?" They said, "Well, that's Dave Winfield. He's a baseball player." He says, "Yeah, he's also a basketball player." So that's how great of an athlete he was. Again, I think if you talk to Dave, I've heard him say it, it all goes back to Bill. All that stuff. And Stevie, too. They lived about five doors up from the playground. Think about that. You live about five doors up from the playground, and you got that every day of your life down there as a kid. So it was a

wonderful time. As you can tell, without it, I don't know how much my life is different, but a lot.

KH: Now, am I remembering correctly that you also coached?

JH: I did.

KH: Tell me about that.

[01:16:00]

JH: So I got my teaching job at Cretin High School, my alma mater. I got hired to teach math there the summer after I graduated from college. That was 1975. The first couple years, I just taught. I just wanted to focus on teaching. Then I was sort of a volunteer assistant to Len Horyza, the head basketball coach. My first year there was the first year that the Catholic schools could play in the public state tournament and we got in it. We played in the public state tournament. We didn't win it, but we won our first game. We ended up losing to the team that won the whole thing, Bloomington Jefferson, but I was very active helping Coach Horyza. Even though I wasn't an official coach, I would come to the practices and just do things.

At one point, then the actual B squad coach moved on, and then the job opened up. I think I was the freshman coach one year, and then the next year, I was a sophomore coach, so I had the kids two years in a row, and I coached that for a few years. I remember my philosophy was very much shaped by what I had experienced at Oxford. I remember bringing the team together before one of our early practices. One of the things I said to them is, "Guys, I'm a detail guy, and if I see something I don't like, I'm going to blow the whistle, I'm going to stop it, and I'm going to critique it and I'm going to correct it. You might think I'm being mean or I'm being hard on you. That's not it at all. My job is to help you become the best player you can be, individually. My job is also to help the team be the best it can be, collectively. So I have decisions I have to make. Who's going to

play? Where are you going to play? How do we adjust? You might not agree with me. If you don't, I welcome it. You can tell me you don't agree with me. You tell me. I'll listen to you. I got the final say, though, because that's my job. If you think you see something that I'm not seeing, I want to hear it."

[01:18:00]

JH: And I said, "Remember, no matter how hard I am on you, or if I get upset, don't take it personally. We're all here trying to make this the best team. We got it?" We ended up winning the conference, and we ended up playing Minneapolis North, I think it was, in the Twin Cities Championship game at Augsburg. I remember during one of our practices, I always like telling this story, the kids came over during a game, and during a timeout during a game, you know how kids are. They come over and they're looking up, waiting for what the coach is going to tell us? So, I let about 20 seconds or 10 seconds pass, and I looked at them and they're wondering, "When is he going to talk?" And I said, "What are you guys looking at me for?" "Well, you're the coach." I said, "Yeah, you're the players. You're closer to the action than I am." I handed the clipboard to Peter Olson, I think it was, or Steve Walsh. I said, "You draw up the next play that's going to get us a basket."

So, this kid drew up a little back door cut, bounce pass layup, and they ran it to perfection and it worked. I sat back and I said to myself, "That's coaching." Coaching isn't telling them what to do. Coaching is getting them to figure out what to do. And they did it. You have to get your kids to be able to coach themselves. That one kid I mentioned, Steve Walsh, later became the starting quarterback for Miami and they won a national championship. To this day, he works in the development over at Cretin-Durham Hall, and we stay in touch. So he was the kid that I coached and I was lucky enough to be effective with him because of what I had learned at Oxford.

So I coached for a few years while I was teaching math. If you want, I'll just bring you full circle. So, in 1984, I'm in my ninth year teaching and I had developed this topic called Mathemagic, and I got invited to go to the national convention of math teachers in San Francisco and put on my presentation, which I did. It went over so well. I was nervous, I was scared, but it went over well.

[01:20:00]

JH: It was on that flight home, I said, I think I can do this for a living. So, it was that year that I went to my administration, I said, "I'm going to test the waters to see if I can make a living as a magical speaker and entertainer." And that's what I've been doing ever since.

KH: So that's what? 42 years?

JH: Forty-two years come May, since I ever had an official paycheck. Forty-two years, no official paycheck. A lot of little ones, but no official ones.

KH: Right, like from an employer?

JH: Right, never had an employer in 42 years. But that can only happen with a lot of self-belief and that self-belief can all go back to Oxford. So, I'm so grateful, so thankful. I mean, you've got to be honest with yourself. I believed in myself, but I didn't know for sure if I could pull it off, but I believed I could. I said, if it doesn't work, I can always go back to teaching because I know I'm good at that. But, if it does work, well, I'm going to be able to see a lot of cities and go to a lot of places and meet a lot of people. I've got to meet Muhammad Ali and perform for him four times and Joe DiMaggio, a lot of baseball people. Dave Winfield had me perform at his Hall of Fame induction party in New York City, 2001. That was cool.

So, yeah, I've had a blessed life. But how it all goes back to Oxford, and I'm realizing it more now in our conversation than I ever have. I've thought about it many

times, but just by going down memory lane here and recalling all these stories and the things that happened. Paul Molitor played. He was four years my junior, so we weren't on the same team at the same time.

[01:22:00]

JH: But I actually helped Bill coach when he was playing Legion. I was the head coach for a couple games for Attucks Brooks when Paul was playing. I love Bill's story about Paul Molitor's 3,000th hit. It was against Kansas City where Paul hit one off the wall in right center. For anybody else, it's a double. But Paul, being the astute baserunner, saw the outfielder maybe assuming he's only going to go to second, so the outfielder maybe casually picked it up. Paul never broke stride. He went headfirst into third base. Safe. He's the only guy ever to make a triple on his 3,000th hit. When Bill tells that story at banquets, "Everybody says Molitor's 3,000th hit was a triple." He goes, "It was a double that he turned into a triple as only he could do, because he learned it from us." I don't know if he said that part.

KH: The headfirst sliding.

JH: The headfirst sliding practice.

KH: And because the outfielder, whoever got his hit, didn't do the catch and release.

JH: That's absolutely right. Exactly. So you take advantage of the fact that your opponent, for all the little things you do correctly, they aren't. When you recognize that they aren't, you take advantage of that. So, for us, the art of playing ball at Oxford was, sure, we wanted to win, but the fun part was how you won and why you won. I often say that it's fun to impress others, but it's more fun to impress yourself. We learned how to impress ourselves by getting to the point where we could do things better than we ever imagined we could, simply because we were not only shown how, but we were guided and

we were believed in. We outperformed our own abilities many, many times. That's where the joy comes in.

[01:24:00]

JH: Even to this day, if I'm doing a performance, every once in a while, I'll do something or I'll come up with a line or I'll react to a person in an engaging trick and I'll go, "Wow, I never came up with that before. That's a new high for me." So you never cease to get joy out of amazing yourself. It sounds weird, but I think this just goes to show you never stop learning, and you never stop trying to innovate and be creative and get better and use your imagination. But try to see things through not only your own eyes, but more importantly, through their eyes.

So, as a performer, I know what I'm doing, but I have to know what you're thinking while you're watching me so that I can guide that experience. Now, I know we're on audio, but if I was to take this little ball and say, "This represents teamwork sticking together," and it jumps back into the other hand, or I can go in the other direction this way, "I say relationships are a two way street," it's got to come back like that. I wish we had this on video.

KH: Yes, Hondo just did some magic and I can't explain it. So last question before we wrap up. Do you think it is possible, whether in reality or just imagination, to separate Bill Peterson from Oxford? Meaning, would you have had the same experience if Bill was your coach, say, at St. Mark's or at Cretin, or if you had played with those same teammates at Oxford under somebody else?

[01:26:00]

JH: The answer to both of those questions is it would be different for sure. The second question, the same kids with a different coach? You can't compare it because the leadership that we had from Billy P. was such that you can't get that from somebody else.

Now, if we had that whole same group, but we weren't at Oxford and we were, say, at, I don't know, Merriam Park or over at St. Thomas, I think it would be different as well. Because there was something about the vibe of the Oxford community. Although Billy P. was white, he on more than one occasion said, "My skin is white, but this is me. I'm in this community. There's a Black man inside of me."

We knew that he had an affinity, a soulful connection to that community and that neighborhood and those kids. And I, as the white kid from St. Mark's and my buddies, we felt, how lucky are we that they're even letting us into this thing here? We were just lucky enough that we were good enough players to make the team. Like I said, we had the coaching at St. Mark's and we had the fundamentals.

We were well coached. We were differently coached. We were coached out of authoritarian, fear based leadership. We then got moved into a collective situation where the motivation was combined with a confidence building, affirmative guy. So I think it doesn't happen if it's not there. I really do. You've got the Winfields, they lived a half a block away.

[01:28:00]

JH: There was something in the air down there that just felt. I can't imagine. Now. Frank White knows all about the Negro Leagues going way back, and Satchel Paige and all these little towns and the teams that were all Black that had not yet been accepted into the major leagues. Although we're integrated at Oxford, it had a feel to me like this feels like what I would imagine the Minor Leagues or the Negro Leagues, and we're down here doing our thing and we're going to impress you when you get a chance to watch us play.

I'll tell you a quick story. My dad used to sit with Paul Molitor's dad and Mrs. Winfield, Arlene, and my mom would sit with them, and they'd all sit together at these games. Well, actually, the women and the men sat differently because Mrs. Molitor, she

liked to yell at the referees, at the umpire, I mean. My dad and Mr. Molitor were quiet so they would sit away from that, but the mothers let the refs know when they weren't making the right call.

But where I'm going with this is that one of the dads said to me on many occasions through the years, he'd say, "When we came to watch you guys play at Dunning, if the game was being played at say one o'clock, we'd get there by noon or 12:15, because we wanted to watch you take infield practice." I don't know if you know what that is, but infield practice is where you do your warmups. We were like a well-oiled machine. Bill had that fungo bat and he could hit perfect ground balls, fly balls.

[01:30:00]

JH: But the manner in which we did it was with purpose, and it was with pace, and again it goes back to you practice the way you want to play. And we did that. Whereas other teams would do a casual infield. Even if you watch professional baseball, they do things casually. Bill and I have had many conversations about professional baseball, and he goes, "I can hardly watch it anymore because it drives me crazy, the lack of knowledge of the fundamentals. They've got all the physical talent. They can run, they can hit, they can throw, but they don't get it out quick. There's no cutoff man. They overthrow the cutoff man. They don't run the bases correctly."

So, anyway, it's a blessing to have learned down there that details matter, and confidence matters, and practice matters, and relationships matter. The fact that we had whites and Blacks playing alongside each other in a racially tense time, and it never became a divider. In fact, it was a unifier. You were proud to say that you played alongside Dave and Steve Winfield. And I still am.

KH: Well, that's a good place to end. Thank you so much, Hondo, for doing this. This was wonderful.

JH: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]