John H. Bates Oral History Interview

Interviewee
Bates, John H., 1938-

Interviewer
Crosby, Tom, 1940-

Date
November 16, 2009

Location
Union, South Carolina

ID Number
CROS 032

Use Restrictions
©University of South Carolina. The transcript and audio are provided for individual Research Purposes Only; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction, and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, 910 Sumter Street, Columbia, SC 29208.

Scope and Background Note
In this oral history interview, John H. Bates discusses his educational experiences at McBeth Elementary and Sims High School (Union, South Carolina), the football team and Coach Moorer, his career as a basketball coach at Maryland Eastern Shore and Coppin State University, and a few of his players that were drafted into the National Basketball Association. John Harold Bates was born on December 13, 1938, in Union, South Carolina, one of fourteen children born to Lula Mae and Caldwell Bates. Tom Crosby interviewed John H. Bates in Union, South Carolina, on November 16, 2009. Interview covers Bates' education at McBeth Elementary School (grades 1-8) and at Sims High School (grades 9-12) from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s.
Tom Crosby: Today is November 16, 2009 and I’m in Union, South Carolina. I have in my presence Coach John Harold Bates. What is your date of birth, sir?


TC: Okay, who were your parents?

JB: My parents were Caldwell and Lula Mae Bates.

TC: Caldwell and Lula Mae Bates. And you have brothers, sisters?

JB: Well, I had quite a few brothers and sisters. There was a baseball team of boys and a basketball team of girls. We had nine boys and four girls.

TC: And four girls, okay. Usually basketball was at least five, wasn’t it, for basketball to play?

JB: I played basketball.

TC: No, I mean you said a basketball team of girls.

JB: Well, we were kind of one short.

TC: One short, okay, I got you. At least I know something about athletics too. (Laughter) Okay, now what was the name of your elementary school?

JB: Macbeth.

TC: Macbeth Elementary, okay.

JB: Well, we had Contree and then from Contree to Macbeth.

TC: Okay, so you didn’t go to New Primary? Did you go to New Primary?

JB: No.

TC: It wasn’t existing at that time?

JB: Yeah, but I didn’t go over there.

TC: Okay, so you went first grade at Macbeth?

JB: Yes.
TC: Oh, yeah, and then all the way up to the eighth grade at Macbeth?
JB: Right.
TC: Okay. Who was your elementary school principal?
JB: The principal at that time.
TC: You remember? Douglas?
JB: Was Mrs. Hunter?
TC: Henderson?
JB: Henderson.
TC: Henderson?
JB: Mrs. Henderson.
TC: Yeah, and then that was all the way up to the seventh grade?
JB: That was all the way up until the seventh grade, all the way up until eighth grade.
TC: Eighth grade, okay. And then beginning the ninth grade through the twelfth it
JB: Samson.
TC: No, the principal.
JB: Mr. Moorer.
TC: Mr. Moorer, James F. Moorer.
JB: Yes.
TC: Okay. So you didn’t have any education under Prof Sims, did you? Was he your principal at any point, maybe like the eighth grade?
JB: I think one year.
TC: Like eighth grade I suspect.
JB: I think one year I was under Prof Sims. And I think Mr. Moorer became principal-
TC: After him?
JB: I think it was the middle of my ninth grade year.
TC: Moorer became principal in 1951.
JB: Oh, no, that was a year before.
TC: Yeah, so you must have had, because you graduated in ’58.
JB: Fifty-eight.
TC: From high school.
JB: Right.
TC: And so you had I guess Miss Henderson up until about the eighth grade I guess.

JB: Through the eighth grade.

TC: Through the eighth grade.

JB: Right.

TC: Yeah.

JB: See because Sims went from nine through-

TC: Twelve.

JB: Twelve.

TC: Yeah. I’ve heard a lot about Mrs.-- I think it’s Herndon, H-E-R-N-D-O-N, I believe. Okay, I’ve heard a lot about her as a teacher and principal. Would you like to make any comments and, of course, they’ll be all positive per se.

JB: But everything happened-

TC: She was very firm.

JB: With Miss Herndon it always came out very positive. She was very strict, she was very firm but in the end you could understand exactly why she did it and the way she did it and also other little things. But she was such a great motivator also.

TC: Oh, yeah? In what way or ways would you say as a motivator?

JB: For an example, if she could, well, let’s just go on and use the word determination like it’s used, she could beat you. But in the end-

TC: She didn’t beat you, did she?

JB: Yes, she did, a many a time.

TC: Really? I can imagine.

JB: (Laughter) But-

TC: Knowing you as I do somewhat.

JB: As we got older-

TC: You understood?

JB: We understood that it was for a reason.

TC: It was a strap?

JB: She had a board.

TC: A board?

JB: She had a board.

TC: And she’d put it on you?

JB: And she’d put it on you.

TC: Really? I see. Okay, so after elementary and we will say junior high, you got into
the high school level, which was ninth grade for us for the most part. Okay, and you got into high school around 195-

JB: Four.
TC: Right and the principal then was Mr. Moorer.
JB: Yes.
TC: Okay. Now so when did you start playing football?
JB: I started playing football under Mr. Moorer.
TC: Eighth or ninth grade?
JB: No, I was too small and too young then.
TC: Really?
JB: And I went out for the team in ’54 but he ran me back inside and told me to come back next year.
TC: Because you were too small?
JB: I was too small and he didn’t need no more doctors’ bills.
TC: Oh, really? So you didn’t play on the team when Sims High’s streak was broken by Carver High?
JB: No.
TC: You weren’t playing then?
JB: No, I was a trainer.
TC: You were a trainer at that point?
JB: At that time.
TC: I see. And was Leon also a trainer at that time? I think he was.
JB: Leon became a trainer along with me.
TC: He did?
JB: No, Leon didn’t become a trainer until 1955.
TC: Right and Leon is your brother?
JB: My brother.
TC: Leon Bates.
JB: Leon probably one of the, well, I never called him a trainer; I called him equipment manager.
TC: Oh, yeah, I see.
JB: And he really kept up with all the equipment.
TC: Kept things up, oh yeah. Now so you weren’t in high school or you were in high school but you were not playing on the team when Sims High’s streak of ninety-three games actually, consecutive games, was broken by Carver High School?

JB: Right, in 1954.

TC: But you were right there at the game I bet you.

JB: Oh, yeah, I was a trainer.

TC: You were? I see, you said so. Now what was that like for Sims High to have played Carver High School from Spartanburg, South Carolina and they beat us?

JB: That was-

TC: A sad day?

JB: Like someone had died.

TC: Really?

JB: Nothing else meant, the whole season meant nothing else.

TC: After that?

JB: After that, meant nothing because everybody felt that this is the best football team in the world. And to be honest with you, Tom, they got too cocky. Carver did not beat a good football team that particular night.

TC: Yeah.

JB: They were talent-wise, great.

TC: So they just knew they were going to beat Carver?

JB: Right.

TC: And what happened?

JB: Just wasn’t there. Overall I think everybody did a poor job, including the coaches because--

TC: Including Moorer?

JB: Everybody.

TC: Now wait; you don’t want that man to wake up.

JB: No, no, but I think deep down inside he would tell you, ‘I didn’t do my job, I didn’t’ motivate them’, you know, ‘and prepare them like I usually do’.

TC: Really?

JB: And I think at that time I was a ninth grader but I had a twelfth grade mind in terms of athletics and I never will forget it, and the way they practiced that week.

TC: Right, I see.

JB: And going through the motions.

TC: I see.
JB: And they played that way for all the way up until the middle of the fourth quarter.

TC: I see. Now see I was living in the suburb of Santuck.

JB: What you call it, the suburb? *(Laughter)*

TC: I was living in the suburb of Santuck so I don’t think I was at that game because see I was around in the seventh grade at that time, something like that. And anyway, I remember students on the bus talking about it. So, what grade were you when you started playing on the team?

JB: I started playing in 1955. That was my sophomore year.

TC: Your first year of playing?

JB: Well, at that time we didn’t say sophomore or junior. We said tenth, eleventh, twelfth, so that was tenth grade.

TC: Now Coach Willie Jefferies he was on that team when it got beaten.

JB: Right.

TC: Yeah, and then that very next year Sims won the state championship.

JB: Yeah, that next year we won the state championship.

TC: So you were on that team?

JB: I was on that team.

TC: Now the trophy exists down at Sims Middle School now, that’s where it is, that 1955 trophy is down there. So some of us are trying to get all of the trophies that we can find about Sims High, to be put into the museum here in Union. Have you seen it? It’s on Main Street across from the post office, our museum.

JB: Oh, you’re talking about the museum?

TC: Un-huh.

JB: No, I haven’t.

TC: So we’re trying to get all the Sims High trophies to be put into that museum, rather than be down at Sims Middle School. Okay, do you recall the team that Sims played in 1955?

JB: Oh, yeah.

TC: I mean the championship game.

JB: Oh, yeah.

TC: Who was it? Lake City?

JB: We played Lake City in 1955 because in 1956 we played Carver.

TC: Oh, yeah.

JB: That’s out of the lower state.

TC: From Lake City I think. I think that’s where Carver was, in the lower state. Now
in ’55 you played Lake City, you know that’s Bill Chapman’s school? **JB:**
Right.

**TC:** Yeah, did you ever talk about it, tease him about it?

**JB:** Well.

**TC:** He wasn’t playing at that time. But you have mentioned it to him before?

**JB:** I think the one we really at that time, ’54 still hadn’t left our minds, and we talk more about the ’56 championship than the ’55 championship. See, we came back and won it again in ’56.

**TC:** I see, okay, and you played Carver of Lake City at that time, I think it was.

**JB:** That was, what’s his name, he went to Benedict and he played on that team.

**TC:** I don’t know. Now-

**JB:** Jimmy Green.

**TC:** Jimmy Green?

**JB:** Played quarterback and running back for Benedict.

**TC:** I remember him.

**JB:** Along, you know, when we played.

**TC:** Yeah.

**JB:** And he played on that team.

**TC:** Right. So now in ’55 who was the coach in ’55?

**JB:** In 1955?

**TC:** Moorer or Gilliam?

**JB:** No, Mr. Moorer was the coach in ’55.

**TC:** I see.

**JB:** See, what happened, Gilliam coached in ’54.

**TC:** Assistant coach?

**JB:** Gilliam was the coach.

**TC:** Head coach?

**JB:** And Gilliam went in service.

**TC:** I see.

**JB:** And Mr. Moorer took over. And when Gilliam came back out, I don’t think but Gilliam did but two years.

**TC:** Service?

**JB:** And when Gilliam came back out he gave the team to Gilliam.
TC: You may not remember what year and that’s not so important right now. But anyway, so who were the coaches in ’55?

JB: That was in ’56.

TC: Okay. So who were the coaches in ’55, Moorer?

JB: Moorer, had good coaches then, Leroy Huff, Leroy White came the following year, Shelton.

TC: I see.

JB: One other person that helped out.

TC: I see. Okay, now Roy Henderson is still living up in Spartanburg.

JB: I read that. I read that in a paper.

TC: You did? Okay.

JB: When they were talking about the biggest win in the history of Carver.

TC: Right.

JB: It was in the Spartanburg Times.

TC: So I interviewed him I think about the last week or so in August, somewhere like that. I went up to his house in Spartanburg and he told me some interesting things about coaching at Carver and he grew up in Washington, Pennsylvania. I’ll tell you what he told me, another interesting thing about growing up in Washington, Pennsylvania later on. So now how would you describe Mr. Moorer as a coach, would you say?

JB: As a coach I thought Coach Moorer was ahead of his time.

TC: In what way or ways?

JB: In terms of coaching, motivating. I look at Mr. Moorer-- and I had two coaches, I was very fortunate to have two coaches with that same mentality. There was Mr. Moorer and Joe Golphin at Allen.

TC: Oh, yeah?

JB: Both of them, same way, great motivators. Plus they knew the game but not in terms of where I get an A here, A here, A here, like in a class. I might get a C over here. I might get a B here. But when I come back up here I got A+ because what I accomplished. You know, from getting from C to A, and I never could figure that out until I had a chance to talk with Pete (? ) at Allen and I asked him about that and he told me at that particular time, and I never will forget it, he said, “Bates, that is something you would never be able to explain. That is something you would never be able to teach. That is something that you pick up from instinct.”

TC: And experience, I guess.

JB: Right. I never forgot that because I’ve always been one trying to pick someone’s head.

TC: Yeah, so you can use it.
JB: Right.

TC: Now you know some of the background of Mr. Moorer, with reference to coaching. You know, he went to workshops with Lombardi?

JB: Lombardi.

TC: He was a football or baseball?

JB: Football, Coach Lombardi.

TC: Okay, he knew him, he knew that guy and he had some workshops under him. Are you aware of that?

JB: No, not really, but I can see some of the ways and if you talk to Lombardi, Lombardi was not a great student in terms of English and math, but he was a great motivator.

TC: Yeah. Did you know him?

JB: I didn’t know Coach Lombardi.

TC: You’ve read about him?

JB: Read about him and I put two and two together and kind of matched him up with Joe Golphin and Mr. Moorer.

TC: I see. Okay, so what were some of the ways in which Moorer motivated the players, a few ways in which you say he motivated them?

JB: Let’s take for an example, Mr. Moorer could go all over the community in anybody’s house uninvited and get welcomed. In other words, he had parents to call him, say, “My son’s not in.” They thought that much of that football team and they thought that much of him. They say, “He’s not in and I know your rules,” and Mr. Moorer would get up and go there and when he [the student] come in, he’d be waiting.

TC: Not in at night?

JB: At night.

TC: He’d be there at the house?

JB: And things like that and he was so polite.

TC: They knew that he meant business and he cared?

JB: I don’t care what lady he met, he always tipped that hat and took it off.

TC: Oh, yeah.

JB: Always. If he walks in that door, that hat comes off.

TC: Right, right.

JB: I can see him now, putting there.

TC: And then you have another way in which he motivated players?

JB: Prof could come in and say some things in front of other players to you where it
would make you feel real bad. But he knew who to say it to and he knew how to say it to them. Now for an example, a star player, he would tell him how wrong and embarrass him in front of the group, but he never did let that young man get far from him before in so many words he was apologetic to him, around the corner where nobody else saw it: ‘I cannot let you be any different from anyone else and this is the reason I say that’.

TC: Oh, really? Yeah, he knew how to insult and then praise.

JB: Motivation.

TC: And let them know that I did this for your sake.

JB: That’s right.

TC: For improvement.

JB: I remember he used to say, and I never will forget this, and he used it at that particular time. He said, “You have to learn how to accept life as it is. It’s not going to ever, ever be like you want it to be, but with your help, it can help others be like you want them to be.” And he said, he would use the word now, he said, “When that white man mistreats you do not,” and he put a lot of emphasis on that,” do not let that get you down because that’s what he’s trying to do, destroy your mind, destroy your body.” Said, “Use that as a teaching tool.”

TC: Right, but yet he as well as Prof Sims knew how to do what with reference to the white people?

JB: Oh, he knew how to use them.

TC: What do you mean?

JB: In other words, they knew how to tip the hat to them, they knew how to say their ‘yes ma’am’, ‘yes sir’, but they also knew how to get the things they wanted.

TC: Right, right. That’s what I was after. They were very political, very political. JB: Not up here, under here.

TC: You mean political in terms of how?

JB: In other words, he kind of laid low but he got what he wanted for the kids and he got what he wanted for the school.

TC: Somebody was telling me about how he got new equipment from Howard at Clemson. Are you aware of that, how he was a friend of that coach at Clemson University, Coach Howard, football coach? Someone was telling me he was such a friend of that guy that that guy gave him new equipment for Sims High team. Had you ever heard that?

JB: No, I never heard that but I can tell you where he did get new equipment from.

TC: Where?

JB: From the whites here in Union.

TC: How?
JB: They donated money, like the dude that owned the liquor store.

TC: Pete?

JB: Pete. How you know about Pete?

TC: Somebody told me that he used to bet and all that kind of stuff.

JB: That’s right.

TC: You want to make some more comments about that?

JB: Huh?

TC: You want to make some more comments about him?

JB: Not really.

TC: I don’t mean negative things.

JB: Well, let’s put it like this. This football meant a lot to a lot of the whites in Union. If Union High played in Spartanburg and Sims played in Union, they were going to be at the Sims game.

TC: You mean the white players from Union High School?

JB: Not the white players, white business people like Pete and all of them.

TC: Oh, yeah?

JB: We had so many whites.

TC: Oh, you mean they would leave Union and go to Spartanburg to see Sims play?

JB: Yes.

TC: That’s kind of unusual.

JB: And the thing about it, they knew just about all the players. Well, they knew all the star players.

TC: I’ve heard that too. And another way Moorer, I remember hearing Moorer around the school, he would motivate them, ‘Carver going be throwing that ball tonight’, talking to the players at lunchtime.

JB: Right. I remember this was my senior year at Sims. My mother always told me if anything happened like with Di with a teacher, with Russell with a teacher or ( ) or Leon, you go check on them, find out what happened. So something happened, Di and Shelton had this fall out.

TC: Is that your sister?

JB: Coach Shelton.

TC: And your sister?

JB: Right, and Di came to me and she was crying.

TC: Her name is Diane?

JB: Brenda.
TC: You call her Di?

JB: Yeah. So I went around and I said, “Coach Shelton, what did she do?” And I don’t know what exactly happened but he missed the concept in terms of explaining to me exactly what happened, since my mother had given me the authority to find out and bring her the information. And I think he got upset because I asked him, and he told me to get out of his class. So I got out, no, he sent me to the office, and I went to the office. Before I could get in there somebody had told Mr. Moorer this and Mr. Moorer told me, “Don’t stop here. You just go on home,” said, “just come back tomorrow. Bring your mother.” So by that time I ain’t said nothing. So I got my books and I was on my way out the door and somebody told Prof Sims, “We got a game tonight.” (Laughter) He said, “Come here boy, you get back in there and you get yourself straight.” He didn’t ever tell me, apologize to no one. In other words, ‘I’ll take care of this’.

TC: He wanted to win that game. You remember what game it was or you don’t remember?

JB: No, we was playing Gaffney.

TC: Bernard High School.

JB: Bernard.

TC: Now do you have one memorable incident that occurred? I’m talking about with reference to football that you might consider something that might be very, very important or something that you’ll never forget, remember what school that was or team?

JB: The thing I would never forget is when my mother found out that I played football.

TC: Oh, really?

JB: See I played my sophomore-

TC: Without her approval?

JB: My sister signed the paper, my sister Barbara.

TC: Oh, really?

JB: The permission paper for me to play.

TC: Well, now how about a game, a particular game?

JB: I think the game that stands out that I will never forget is when we played Bernard, and we played them in Gaffney, and at that time they had their best team and they’d never beaten us. And Professor Christian, Miss Christian’s husband, said that he wanted to see Bernard beat Sims before he died.

TC: Was he coach or principal or what?

JB: Principal.

TC: Of Bernard?

JB: And tough game. So, we scored, no, they led us thirteen six and we scored a touchdown and we didn’t have no one to kick the ball so we always used to run it or pass
it. So we gave it to Big Doug Fernandez and he missed that extra point. So now we’re down thirteen twelve. Now to understand what I’m talking about you would really have to know football.

TC: Yeah. About how much time left?

JB: We had something like either thirty-some or forty-some seconds left. So we scored a touchdown at this end. That meant we were supposed to go down this end and kick off to them because this is our goal line and that’s their goal line. They went down there and we kicked that way to them. So Gill’s coaching at that time and I said, “Do you want me to onside kick.” He said, “You better do something.” So we pulled an onside kick. The boy from Gaffney had the ball. I dived in the pile, got part of my hand on it, and I think I punched him in the side with my fist and he kind of turned it out for the ball.

TC: Turned the ball loose, you got it.

JB: And we got it.

TC: And then scored.

JB: And Perry was quarterback, Perry Rice, and he threw a touchdown pass.

TC: Okay, now about what yard line were you on when he threw it?

JB: We were on the thirty-five and the ball had to go ten yards so we’s on about the forty-five yard line, our forty-five. So Perry threw the ball. After Dean Jones caught the ball…

TC: Around the?

JB: …around the thirty and ran it on in for the touchdown.

TC: You probably had maybe five or ten seconds left in the game?

JB: We had something like that left in the game.

TC: That was exciting.

JB: Then that man died.

TC: Christian died?

JB: Had a heart attack and died at the game.

TC: Now look, you’re on tape.

JB: I know.

TC: Seriously?

JB: Seriously.

TC: I got Alfred Dean’s number. You know he’s my classmate. I’m going to call him tonight or tomorrow.

JB: Ask him.

TC: About that?

JB: About the onside kick.
TC: Yeah. He was here. He came to the reunion.

JB: Someone told me Dean was there.

TC: Yeah, he’s a minister now you know.

JB: I talked to him a couple of times.

TC: Yeah, he was here. Now, okay, I want to ask you about one or two teachers and then we’ll move to college level. Any particular teachers you’d like to mention at this time that may have meant a lot to you or very interesting teachers?

JB: One teacher that meant a whole lot to me was Coach Long. Coach Long really took me under his wing and he taught me a lot of things.

TC: Football techniques?

JB: No, about coaching. And he said, “Don’t ever let nobody tell you what you can’t do.” He said, “Because all these sports, whatever you coach as a team, it’ll always come back what’s going on in the middle. And regardless of what team you’re coaching, it’s: how strong are you in the middle? In baseball it’s pitcher, catcher, center fielder, short stop, second base. In basketball it’s point guard and center. In football it’s quarterback, center and middle linebacker.” So it’s always what happened there. He said, “If you can understand what’s happening there, you know how to surround yourself with other things.” Another, a lady that meant a whole lot to me, a whole lot, was Miss Sims.

TC: Ma Sims as we called her?

JB: Meant a whole lot to me.

TC: In what way or what ways?

JB: In terms of my schooling, she would sit down and I remember times I would just rush through. And she said, “Hold up, take your time, slow down.”

TC: You were nervous like?

JB: No, I’m trying to get out of there.

TC: Out of the classroom?

JB: I’m trying to just give her a paper and get out the classroom.

TC: Oh, I see, okay.

JB: But she finally got control of me and that made me feel real good. I never forgot that.

TC: You felt comfortable after that?

JB: Very comfortable around her.

TC: Yeah, I had her too. I didn’t have her but about two or three days I believe, something like that. Now you had the geometry lady?

JB: Oh, Miss Stanley?

TC: Geometry.
JB: Oh, Miss Williams?
TC: Yeah.
JB: Miss Williams.
TC: Be careful now.
JB: If you want to describe her as a pillar of strength, but she had (?) that. She was a pillar of strength. And it was just certain things, it was going to go her way. And she was going to set there and explain it to you.
TC: The best she could.
JB: And that’s-
TC: And you could tell that she cared.
JB: Always cared.
TC: But you had to do the work. She had high expectations.
JB: And that’s good.
TC: Right.
JB: And that’s good.
TC: Okay, now you played what sports at Sims?
JB: I played football, basketball, baseball and ran track.
TC: Okay, alright. Now so you finished Sims and then you attended what college?
JB: Allen University in Columbia.
TC: Allen University. So did you get scholarships the first year?
JB: Not my first year. I received-
TC: Financial aid?
JB: Aid.
TC: Things like that?
JB: Yes.
TC: So you did get a scholarship your sophomore year?
JB: I got a scholarship my junior year.
TC: Oh, yeah?
JB: But my first two years I had to get aid.
TC: Yeah. So that junior year did they give you full scholarship or partial?
JB: I got full.
TC: And your senior year too? I see. Who made sure that happened?
JB: I think Pete and Coach Nelson. See Coach Nelson meant a lot to me and he
always took me under his arm like I’m his son.

TC: Yeah. Now did you play only football?

JB: No, I played football, baseball and ran track at Allen.

TC: And no basketball?

JB: No.

TC: And no basketball. Now here’s the interesting thing.

JB: Tom, I was not a good basketball player. I just played rough.

TC: I think you played some at Sims though, basketball.

JB: I played at Sims.

TC: Yeah, but no basketball at Allen?

JB: No.

TC: Okay, so here’s what I want to focus on. So how is it that you got involved in coaching college basketball?

JB: You want me to break it down?

TC: Yeah.

JB: Let me break it down to you. Mr. Moorer promised me the head football job at Sims when he brought me back. He said the next person leave, I’m going to put you in charge.

TC: So how long did you work at Sims?

JB: I worked at Sims two years.

TC: Okay.

JB: So Dixon left, George Dixon. He was the basketball coach. And he asked me to coach the basketball team. Gilliam was coaching-

TC: Football.

JB: Football. So I coached the basketball team and Gilliam left that next year and he gave it to Shelton.

TC: Basketball coach?

JB: No, football.

TC: Football, okay.

JB: And in so many words, that didn’t make me feel bad because I knew Shelton deserved it.

TC: Because of experience and so forth?

JB: His experience and he had really paid his dues. So I coached basketball that second year. And then I went someplace and I came back. That’s the year that Shelton
left and went up to Virginia and read in the paper they advertising the job in the paper. So I talked to Mr. Moorer.

**TC:** Shelton had left? Okay, and then you became coach?

**JB:** No. He said that, well, you’re doing a great job with the basketball. We’re going to bring in a football [coach]. I said but I’ve worked all my life. This is what I want to be.

**TC:** Okay, to coach football or coach basketball?

**JB:** Football.

**TC:** Okay.

**JB:** I never wanted to coach basketball.

**TC:** Okay, so how long did you coach basketball?

**JB:** At Sims?

**TC:** At Sims.

**JB:** Two years.

**TC:** Two years.

**JB:** So Gilliam got the job at Maryland State and I went up there for an interview. Okay, I could have taken the job as assistant football coach but I couldn’t teach because I didn’t have my master’s degree, so they said they would give me a dormitory job. I didn’t want that. So on my way, last day I was getting ready to leave, I found out that the job was open there in the county, you know, in Somerset County.

**TC:** High school?

**JB:** High school, so I talked to the supervisor and he needed to replace someone fast so he gave me the job. And I mentioned about coaching and he said, “You coach whatever you want, you’re the athletic director.”

**TC:** So how long did you coach high school basketball?

**JB:** I coached high school basketball from 1962 to [sic] 1961. But getting back to this basketball, I came home and I told Mama. I called Mr. Moorer, I said, “I got a job, I won’t be back.” See that’s what I’m talking about, just like that. I told Mama I had a job and I was coaching this and that.

So I left early August to go back to Somerset County. And I went to the school and the principal was working at the school during the summer, so he asked me ‘what was I doing back so early’. So I said, “I come back to get my football team in shape.” And he said, “There’s no football in this county.” [It] broke my heart, Tom, so I’m stuck with basketball again. So, every time I got where I got a football job, I got pushed back to basketball.

**TC:** I see.

**JB:** And I finally realized this is what He wants me to do.
So what’s the total number of years you coached high school basketball in Maryland?

In Maryland I coached from ’64 to ’71. I coached seven years.

Oh, I didn’t know it was that long. And you most likely had some championship teams or did you?

We won one championship. We finished runner-up in the state two years. So we finished runner-up in the state two years and we won one championship.

I see. And then you eventually moved to Maryland State, Maryland Eastern Shore?

Maryland Eastern Shore.

At that time?

At that time, and I moved to Maryland Eastern Shore. I think to everybody else that’s where basketball kicked in, but to me it kicked in at Sims.

That’s where you started.

That’s where I started, and that’s what I finally realized when I got into college ball, I said, “This is what God wanted me to do.”

I see. Now at Maryland State coaching basketball there, you had some championships?

We won two MBAC championships. I was there three years. We won two MBAC championships. We went to the national championship two years in a row. We finished second one year. And I think the biggest year was 1974 when we became the first black team to play in the NIT. We’re pioneers; we broke the barrier.

In NIT, right.

At the NIT, that was the most.

So you went there first up to what level of NIT?

We were Division 1.

No, I mean what-

We went to the quarter finals.

Okay. And the next year or several years later?

The next year I left and went to Coppin.

No, where did you play in the championship game, Coppin or Maryland State?

At Coppin.

Okay, okay.

The next year I go to Coppin and first year we had a good year.

So you went to Coppin in ’73?
JB: I went to Coppin in ’74.

TC: Seventy-four?

JB: September ’74.

TC: So the first year at Coppin you went to the NIT?

JB: No, we went to NAIA my first year at Coppin.

TC: Yeah. You played the NIT championship in ’80, was it ’80 or ’70?

JB: No, we never played the championship game; we became pioneers by getting invited, we were invited. But, something else that they did not mention.

TC: No but excuse me. You played Manhattan College. I remember that.

JB: That was at Maryland Eastern Shore. That’s the NIT.

TC: And you won the game, right?

JB: Yes.

TC: No.

JB: Yeah, we won that game.

TC: And that was the first black college to play in the NIT?

JB: But before we got there, Tom, and not only then but it happened since, we’re the first black school to be ranked in the top twenty among major colleges.

TC: I see.

JB: In other words, we were ranked the same as North Carolina, Duke, UCLA, Maryland. We were ranked in the same category as them.

TC: Yeah, I may have missed something here but now what was the year that you were the first black college to play in the NIT?

JB: That was 1974.

TC: Okay, I know that was a 4. I thought it was ’84 but it was ’74.

JB: That was the winter of ’74.

TC: Now when you played Manhattan, you didn’t win that game, did you?

JB: Yes, we did.

TC: That was the championship game?

JB: No, that was the first game.

TC: First game? Okay, so now what school did you play to be the first black college to win the championship game?

JB: Okay, we never won the NIT now.

TC: Oh, you were the first to play in it?

JB: To participate in it.
TC: In the tournament?
JB: Yes.
TC: First black college to participate in the NIT tournament?
JB: Right.
TC: And that year was 19?
JB: Seventy-four.
TC: Okay, I got it.
JB: In ’76 we won the NAAA championship, small college, when I was at Coppin.
TC: I see. Okay, and who were some of your outstanding players on these teams?
JB: At Maryland Eastern Shore we had about seven players that were outstanding. We had Rubin Collins.
TC: Did he play pro eventually?
JB: Rubin played pro. We had Joe Pace, he played pro. We had Tabon Skinner.
TC: Excuse me. What teams did these people play on?
JB: Rubin played with Portland, Joe Pace played with the Bullets, Tabon Skinner played with Seattle and Billy Gordon was with Seattle a while.
TC: I see. So those are all of the pro players?
JB: Un-huh.
TC: Okay. Alright, and now you retired from Coppin State?
JB: Yes.
TC: What year was that, do you remember?
TC: But you stayed on?
JB: I stayed on as an associate professor…
TC: I see.
TC: Okay, do you have any additional comments you’d like to make about your life, your career, any additional comments at this point, maybe something that we haven’t mentioned that you might want to mention at this time?
JB: Well.
TC: It can be elementary through college or whatever.
JB: First I would like to say this, and I give a lot of credit to her, and that’s my wife. You know, she has been a rock, like the rock of Gibraltar to me.
TC: She’s been there?
JB: She’s always stood behind me and she always made sure that this was what you want to do and work for it. And she’s one of the greatest things that ever happened to me. But I went to two schools, Tom, and to me they equal out to about the same because I had great teachers. I could go through Sims and name all the great teachers. I could go through Allen and name all the great teachers, but what I’m trying to say, if I had to do it all over again, I’d travel that same direction. I would hope I’d be born here in Union.

TC: Me too.

JB: I would hope I would end up at Allen. Those are the best years of my life.

TC: Right and then you went to graduate school.

JB: I went to the University of Indiana. Those little things that happened to me, I think my mama felt that it would happen but I didn’t.

TC: Right. Yeah, we both have been blessed to have had good parents, good teachers, elementary through graduate school. Okay, any additional comment or you think we’ve about covered the field?

JB: I think we about covered it. But I’d just like to thank you for coming by and letting me share this with you.

TC: I appreciate it. I’ve learned a number of things that I didn’t know about you and your career.

JB: I hope there’s some young person will see it or read it.

TC: They will hear it.

JB: To see exactly what’s going on and also find out, hey, he did it, I can do it.

TC: That’s true.

JB: That’s hope for me.

TC: That’s what we’re doing. In fact, you know, pledging Omega, I said now if other people can pledge, I can take it too.

JB: That’s right.

TC: So I took it from Freddy Owens. Thanks again, I appreciate it, thanks for your time.

JB: Thanks for having me.

End of interview