

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Willie D. Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Willie, 1934-2020
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis,
Dates:	July 9, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:54:00).
Abstract:	Broadcast executive, football player, and entrepreneur Willie D. Davis (1934 - 2020) played for the Cleveland Browns and Green Bay Packers, winning Super Bowls I and II. In 1981, Davis was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He was also the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 9, 2007, in Culver City, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_200
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Broadcast executive and football player Willie D. Davis was born on July 24, 1934, in Lisbon, Louisiana to Nodie Bell and David Davis. Recruited to Grambling College (now Grambling State University) by football coach Eddie Robinson, Davis captained the football team and was a student on the dean's list for two years. In 1956, he graduated from Grambling with his B.S. degree in math and industrial arts.

Davis was drafted by the Cleveland Browns in the seventeenth round of the 1956 National Football League Draft. However, that same year, Davis was also drafted into the U.S. Army and was unable to begin his NFL career until 1958. After two years with the Browns, Davis was traded to the Green Bay Packers. For ten seasons, Davis played 138 consecutive regular season games and was a member of all five of Vince Lombardi's NFL title-winning teams, playing in Super Bowls I and II. In his career with the Green Bay Packers, Davis recovered twenty-one fumbles, setting a team record, never missing any of the 162 games in his twelve-year tenure. Davis was awarded the Associated Press' All-Pro honors in 1962 and from 1964 to 1967. During the last two years of his football career, Davis studied at the University of Chicago, earning his M.B.A degree in 1968. The following year, the Packers honored Davis' retirement with Willie Davis Day. That same year, Davis purchased the West Coast Beverage Company and served as its president for eighteen years, while also working as a color commentator on the NFL telecasts for NBC in the early 1970s. Since 1976, Davis has been the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc., a Los Angeles broadcasting company which owns radio stations in the Midwest and Southern California. In 1981, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Davis served as the director of the 1984 Olympics Committee in Los Angeles in 1984. That same year, President Reagan appointed him to the President's Commission on the Executive Exchange.

Davis has served on the boards of the Sara Lee Corporation, the National Association of Broadcasters, Dow Chemical Company, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Johnson Controls, MGM Mirage, Manpower, Fidelity National

Financial, Wisconsin Energy, Strong Management Fund, Mattel Toys, Schlitz Brewing Company, Fireman's Fund Insurance, Bassett Furniture, Alliance Bank, the Green Bay Packers, the Kauffman Foundation, Occidental College and K-Mart. Davis is also an Emeritus Trustee for the University of Chicago and a Trustee at Marquette University. In 2001, Davis co-chaired and founded the Vince Lombardi Tiletown Legends, a charitable organization created to assist various charities throughout Wisconsin. Davis was named the Walter Camp Man of the Year, was ranked 69th on *The Sporting News*' list of the 100 Greatest Football Players and was given the Career Achievement Award from the NFL Alumni. Davis and his wife Ann have a son, Duane, and a daughter, Lori.

Willie D. Davis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 9, 2007.

Davis passed away on April 15, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Willie D. Davis was conducted by Jacques Lesure on July 9, 2007, in Culver City, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Broadcast executive, football player, and entrepreneur Willie D. Davis (1934 - 2020) played for the Cleveland Browns and Green Bay Packers, winning Super Bowls I and II. In 1981, Davis was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He was also the president and chief executive officer of All Pro Broadcasting, Inc.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Davis, Willie, 1934-2020

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Davis, Willie, 1934-2020 --Interviews

African American football players--Interviews

African American radio broadcasters--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Football League.

Occupations:

Football Player

Entrepreneur

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|SportsMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, July 9, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual

(Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_001, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Willie D. Davis was born on July 24, 1934 in Lisbon, Louisiana to Nodie Allen Archie and David Davis. His mother was one of eleven children born to Ada Allen and Amos Allen in Lisbon, where she was an all-state basketball player in high school. Davis' parents married at twenty years old, and had three children. His father left the family after the birth of his younger sister, Lurenia Davis Bratton, and joined the U.S. Merchant Marine in California. After Davis' parents separated, he moved with his mother to Texarkana, Arkansas. There, his mother was a cook at the Texarkana Country Club; and attended Miles Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Davis loved playing sandlot football, and despite his mother's concerns about injury, she allowed him to join the team at Booker T. Washington High School. He was teased by other children for his father's absence, but came to appreciate his mother's strength as a single parent. Later, Davis reunited with his father, and forgave him for abandoning the family.

African American families--Louisiana.

High school football players--Arkansas--Texarkana.

Parent and child.

Single parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Willie D. Davis' maternal grandfather, Amos Allen, was a Methodist lay minister in Lisbon, Louisiana, where he also worked as a sharecropper. His paternal grandfather, Norman Davis, lived in Friendship, Louisiana, and stood 6'9" tall. Davis was raised in Lisbon with his younger siblings, Alcus Davis and Lurenia Davis Bratton, until he was in the fourth grade. After his father left the family, he moved with his siblings and mother, Nodie Allen Archie, to Texarkana, Arkansas, where he worked in a small market and was initially bullied by other children. There, Davis' mother remarried his stepfather, Edward Archie, whom he never fully accepted. The family lived on Ash Street, which had white residents on one side of the street and black residents on the other. Davis recalls the sounds from the tavern located near his house, and how the city of Texarkana was split between the states of Arkansas and Texas. Later in life, he reconciled with his father, and hired him to work for his beverage company.

Race awareness--United States.

Segregation--Arkansas--Texarkana.

Race relations—Arkansas—Texarkana.

Stepfathers.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Willie D. Davis attended elementary school on the Texas side of Texarkana starting in the fourth grade; and then after moving to the Arkansas side, began the sixth grade at a middle school there. During grade school, he was known for his speed and agility while playing sports; and the strict discipline of his mother, Nodie Allen Archie, kept him well behaved. As Davis' mother was very religious, he and his siblings attended Miles Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church weekly. He enrolled at Booker T. Washington High School in Texarkana, where his mentors included math teacher, Miss Grant, and principal, Mott H. Mosley. In high school, Davis worked part-time at the Texarkana Country Club, where his mother also worked, and aspired to become an entrepreneur after graduation. He also played on his school's football team for Coach Nathan Edward Jones, and won one state championship. Davis had a close bond with his teammates, especially Edwin Finn. He received a scholarship to Grambling College in Louisiana.

Robinson, Eddie.

Student activities.

Football players—Recruiting.

African Americans--Religion.

High school football players.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_004, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Willie D. Davis was an all-state football player at Booker T. Washington High School in Texarkana, Arkansas. Three of his teammates and friends committed to play football at Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, but he chose not to join them. Instead, Davis accepted a scholarship to Grambling College in Grambling, Louisiana to play for Coach Eddie Robinson, in part because his mother appreciated Robinson's promise that Davis would attend church. When he began at Grambling, he was initially very homesick. After a week there, he left campus and hitched a ride to Shreveport, Louisiana, but his college coaches caught up with him, and persuaded him to return. Davis enjoyed playing for Coach Robinson, and came to see him as a father figure. Robinson was admired for his winning record, and for mentoring National Football League star Paul "Tank" Younger. Davis dated Pearl Andrews for four years at Grambling, and came to love living there, often staying on campus during academic breaks.

Robinson, Eddie.

Grambling State University.

Grambling State University--Football.

African American universities and colleges--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_005, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Willie D. Davis played football for Grambling College in 1955, when they defeated Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and the team's star player Adolphus Frazier in the Orange Blossom Classic. He was selected by the Cleveland Browns, led by Coach Paul Brown, in the seventeenth round of the 1956 National Football League draft. During training camp, Davis was drafted into the U.S. Army, and stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado. There, he played for the football team, and along with co-captain Forrest Gregg led his team to victory in the Satellite Bowl. Davis was discharged in 1958, and returned to the Cleveland Browns, where he played both offensive tackle and defensive end. His teammates included Bill Willis and Marion Motley. In 1960, Davis was traded to the Green Bay Packers. He was originally disappointed about moving to Green Bay, but Coach Vince Lombardi won him over by offering him a

thousand-dollar raise. Davis also worked as a substitute teacher during each football offseason.

Cleveland Browns (Football team : 1946-1995).

United States. Army.

Football draft--United States.

Football.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_001_006, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Willie D. Davis played football for ten seasons on the Green Bay Packers team; won five National Football League championships; and was later inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. During his sports career, he earned his M.B.A. degree at the University of Chicago, graduating in 1968. Davis retired from football in 1970, and Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company placed him in charge of a liquor distribution business in Los Angeles, California. Under his leadership, the company became the largest Schlitz distributor on the West Coast. He stayed involved in football as a commentator on NBC for seven years. Davis served on the board of directors for many companies, including Mattel, Inc., MGM Mirage and Wisconsin Energy Corporation; for many of those boards, he was the first black member. He also owned and operated radio stations across the country, including in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Atlanta, Georgia; and California. Davis describes his hopes for the African American community, and how he wants to be remembered.

Lombardi, Vince.

Green Bay Packers (Football team).

Directors of corporations.

Corporate governance.

Video Oral History Interview with Willie D. Davis, Section A2007_200_Davis_Willie_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:03:31 ?

In honor of BusinessMakers: Breakout Leaders, we salute Willie Davis (1934-2020) former NFL Lineman for Greenbay Packers, entrepreneur, and corporate board member who speaks about his career and childhood dream of becoming an entrepreneur.