

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with David R. Duerson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Duerson, David Russell, 1960-2011
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with David R. Duerson,
Dates:	August 28, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:08:43).
Abstract:	Football player and corporate chief executive David R. Duerson (1960 - 2011) is a former NFL player who is now CEO and owner of Duerson foods, sausage maker to Burger King and others. Duerson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 28, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_210
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Former NFL player-turned-business owner David Duerson was born in Muncie, Indiana, on November 28, 1960. After graduating from Northside High School in Muncie, Duerson began his promising football career at the University of Notre Dame. Duerson spent the summers from 1979 to 1981 working as a law clerk in Miami, Florida, and during the summer of 1982, he served as legislative aide to U.S. Senator Richard Lugar. Duerson graduated from Notre Dame with a B.S. degree in economics in 1983.

Following graduation, Duerson joined the Chicago Bears, where he played from

1983 to 1989, earning his first Super Bowl ring in Super Bowl XX. In 1990, he joined the New York Giants, and that year the Giants won Super Bowl XXV. He then went on to play for the Phoenix Cardinals from 1991 to 1993. After leaving the NFL, Duerson decided to go into business through franchise ownership. He attended McDonald's Corporation's Hamburger University and in 1994 bought three McDonald's restaurants in the suburbs of Louisville, Kentucky. Selling his franchises in 1995, Duerson became president and CEO of Fair Oaks Farms, one of the primary suppliers of sausage to McDonald's and a number of other companies with an international distribution arm to Japan, Singapore, Turkey and Kuwait. Under his leadership, sales grew from \$38 million in 1998 to \$63.4 million in 2001. That same year, he earned an executive M.B.A. from Harvard University's Owners and Presidents Management Program.

In 2002, Duerson started Duerson Foods, providing pork and turkey sausage products to corporations such as Burger King, White Castle and SYSCO.

Duerson has earned a number of honors over the years, including being named two-time All-American at Notre Dame and the 1987 NFL Man of the Year. He serves on the University of Notre Dame Board of Trustees and as chairman of the National Football Foundation & College Hall of Fame, Chicago Chapter. He is also active with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, serving as a national trustee. Duerson and his wife, Alicia, have four children.

Duerson passed away on February 17, 2011.

Duerson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on August 28, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with David R. Duerson was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 28, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Football player and corporate chief executive David R. Duerson (1960 - 2011) is a former NFL player who is now CEO and owner of Duerson foods, sausage maker to Burger King and others.

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:

Duerson, David Russell, 1960-2011

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Duerson, David Russell, 1960-2011--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

National Football League.

Occupations:

Football Player

Corporate Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers|BusinessMakers

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 David R. Duerson, August 28, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual

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 David R. Duerson, Section
A2003_210_001_001, TRT: 0:29:13 2003/08/28

KSJ: See page 2—most of this tape centered on describing the Duerson's family, especially discussing father's family and mother's family. Also, Duerson talks about the importance of Muncie community from the economic point of view. He also describes "Back to Muncie" which is an African American community in Muncie: all of African American who were born and raised in Muncie and come back to Muncie for the reunion.

MD: David Duerson describes his mother's background and traces her roots back to the late 1700s. Then he talks in depth about his father and his origins, explaining the story of his slave ancestors. He also details his father's career success, stating awards he won and jobs he held. David Duerson remembers his hometown of Muncie, Indiana.

Video Oral History Interview with David R. Duerson, Section
A2003_210_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40 2003/08/28

KSJ: In roll #2, Duerson mostly talks about his earliest growing up memories and his memories related to sounds, smells, and sights (See page 3).

Then, he talks about his school experiences. Duerson attended to East Longfellow Elementary school and he was a good student. When at the fourth grade, he was placed to Gifted Students' program: Gifted students have

an extra day, Saturday, so-called Saturday school. On Saturdays, these students went to the museums and met politicians in order to expand their learning experiences. It was an integrated school and the population of black kids was only 10%. Most of the kids who Duerson grew up with went to Arrival Middle school at Alley.

Duerson talks about some teachers who were memorable for him (Muncie has four high schools: Muncie North, Muncie Central, Muncie South, Burriss laboratory school): First, Mrs. Heights who was Duerson's second grade teacher in his elementary. She made a statement everyday that "Learn to listen and listen to learn." Another person was Waners, the economics teacher, when he was a high school. He had a long hair and mustache. He had a great respect for students. Duerson's aunt Doors Fulkner, who was a music teacher in Northside high school, is also an impressive teacher because she brought the Christmas program to middle and high schools, so all of the kids from middle and high school could gather at the arena and celebrate Christmas song.

MD: David Duerson discusses his mother's life, giving details on her childhood and some of her hobbies. He then speaks about an early memory, a family car trip to Richmond, Kentucky. Duerson then recalls his childhood home of Muncie, Indiana and explains the importance of basketball there. Next, he describes some of his juvenile tendencies in which he and his friends were involved. Duerson talks about his early sports memories playing baseball, football and basketball, mentioning teams he played for and people with whom he played. He tells about his experience in Muncie at an integrated elementary school and then remembers influential teachers.

Video Oral History Interview with David R. Duerson, Section
A2003_210_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 2003/08/28

KJS: In roll #3, Duerson mostly talks about his high school and his collage life. Duerson starts this roll by talking about his high school: Duerson attended Northside High School in Muncie. It was a great place but black population was only 10 %. In an academic perspective, Duerson was an only black person among 10 honorable

students. These 10 group of students made their own group which called "Outcast" (03:02) because they were not fit into both academic and athletic groups. Then, Duerson talks about the bus: Duerson rode a bus one time at the very first day of going to school. But since there were some guys who smoked in the bus, he started to go to school by his family vehicle.

Duerson talks about some highlights in his high school: Duerson played some musical instruments such as Trumpet and Tuba. He still has these instruments but he forgot how to play. His family members are good at music, so music has been always a part of his life. Duerson thinks that he had a unique childhood because he was exposed to a lot of things: his family spent 2 or 3 weeks traveling in order to experience new things. From athletic perspective, Duerson was both a baseball and soccer player during his high school. Cherry Hitchcock, Duerson's high school football coach, had a great influence on him: Hitchcock encouraged Duerson to be an exemplary in his team (Duerson received many honors during his high school years, including the 1979 Indiana Mr. Football, and was part of the National Honor Society and The Musical Ambassadors All-American Band).

Then, Duerson explains about University of Notre Dame in Northern Indiana from 1979 to 1982. Baseball was still his first love at that time but with some reasons, he decided to play football. Duerson decided to go to Notre Dame University as a college football player even though his parents kept pushing him to go to academic side. During this college life, he could get whatever he wanted from Notre Dame experience (from a football perspective). He was named as his team's MVP in 1982, and a Captain. In academic side, Duerson got BA in Economics. Duerson says that Notre Dame was a special place for him because he got the best from the Notre Dame experience: great spiritual environment and wonderful friends. He says that until recently, he was a member of the Notre Dame Board of Trustees.

Duerson also talks about his teammates: in soccer side, Ferguson, David Ramer, Carter, and Tony Hunter and in baseball side, Randall, John Packson, and Tracy Jackson.

Duerson got double scholarships from both football and baseball. Duerson wanted to have an opportunity to play baseball but every year, something happened to him: After Spring football season, he had to think about safety because Steve broke his neck at the very first day of Spring season (he learned about a strong safety position). At Duerson's second season (after his sophomore year), he played in Georgia for national championship. At third season, Duerson had to move to free safety position. Since something happened every year, Duerson had to keep focusing on football.

Then, Duerson talks about a little bit about how moved to defense position in football: there was a guy whose name is Ruther Bradley, who also played in Notre Dame and Duerson broke all Ruther's records.

MD: David Duerson talks about his high school days and describes his value system that kept him out of trouble. He then talks about highlights from high school and remembers experiences of being in the school band. David Duerson then details his high school athletic accomplishments. Next, he explains how he became interested in Notre Dame and how he eventually ended up there to play football. Duerson discusses his continued involvement with the University of Notre Dame and tells about being a part of their selection committee. Then he recalls Notre Dame teammates and their athletic exploits. David Duerson talks about his decision in choosing to play football over baseball and basketball.

Video Oral History Interview with David R. Duerson, Section A2003_210_001_004, TRT: 0:30:00 2003/08/28

KSJ: In roll #4, Duerson mostly talks about Chicago Bears and football in his life: Duerson's initial dream was to use his education in order to go to Harvard Law school but he realized that he was very fortunate to go to Notre Dame and play football because he thinks that he got a special talent in that field: he realized that he wants to play football until the last of his life. But, Duerson wanted to leave Mid west because he was tired of spending most of his life in Mid west.

Then, Duerson started to talk about Chicago Bears from

1983 to 1989. While in Notre Dame, Duerson and his wife used to go to Chicago on Sundays to watch Bears game. Duerson also talks about Buddy Ryan who Duerson worked with: Ryan was the defense coordinator from Kentucky. Duerson felt that Buddy was different from other people: Ryan advised Duerson to stay Chicago Bears for short period of time because Ryan did not want a smart nigger. For three years, there was a constant love and hate between Ryan and Duerson: Duerson loved the idea that 1) Ryan could not break Duerson and 2) every week, they could take a test. But the hate portion was that Ryan always waited for Duerson to make a mistake. Since Buddy waited for Duerson to mess up even one time, Duerson started to have a lot of mental pressure.

Duerson also mentions briefly about Alan Page: Alan played in Chicago for one or two years and he was one of the best player. Whenever there was a problem, Duerson wife and father became a great support for Duerson. Duerson's father is not a person who talks very much but he used to say about perseverance, standing up, and getting through the touch time. Duerson's father used to clarify the problem and what Duerson needed in getting through his touch time. Also, when Ryan gave Duerson a lot of stress, his wife became a real support for him.

Duerson also recalls that he had a great time in Chicago with great teammates: Walter Payton was very passionate in games and life and he also had a great record. Duerson enjoyed playing with him. The best friend for him was Wilson and they even could communicate without speaking. There are several guys who still have a great touch with Duerson. Duerson says that they had a unique group of characters such as refrigerator Perry and Mango, Dan Hampton.

Then, Duerson talks about a part of history of Bears: Mike Ditka was hired (Armstrong was fired in 1982 and replaced by Mike Ditka. Mike was first hired by Buddy as a defensive coordinator). Duerson explains the tough relationship between Buddy and Ditka: when Buddy had a meeting, Mike was attempting to come into their meeting room to say that it is his team, not Ryan's team. Buddy and Mike did not have a good relationship and that was a

big distraction for their team. Duerson also talks about Jim: Jim was a line backer and Duerson has a great respect for him because he was the guy who was willing to do anything for winning the game and understood his role even though he has a bad reputation (he used to drive Mike nuts). Duerson says that he thinks Buddy is the defensive genius without question: he was a genius in designing defense by understanding that strong safety is the center piece for defense. Buddy revolutionized defensive football with his "46" package. From defensive perspective, Duerson says that Buddy was a great guy.

MD: David Duerson discusses his NFL draft day and talks about the reason he was not selected in the first round. He then speaks on being selected by the Chicago Bears and his early relationship with Mike Ditka. He then talks about working under Buddy Ryan and some of the troubles he faced in dealing with him. Duerson then tells how he learned to cope with the racism and difference of opinions with Ryan. He goes in depth and reveals the inner workings of the Chicago Bears coaching staff. Next, Duerson talks about teammate Jim McMahon, citing examples why he felt he was an effective player on and off the field. David Duerson describes Buddy Ryan's coaching skills.

Video Oral History Interview with David R. Duerson, Section A2003_210_001_005, TRT: 0:09:30 2003/08/28

KSJ: In tape #5, Duerson talks about what happened after 1988. In 1989, He got injured on his ankle so he missed couple of ball games. Everything changed dramatically: Duerson had his own radio show on WGN. He got a phone call from Bill Parcells in New York Giants. Duerson made a decision very quickly and went to New York (It was just after he got fired 6 times in one day). Duerson learns a lot of things there: Duerson was impressed by the fact that Bill who was at the peak of excellence was still learning and humble. Bill, Duerson's coach in high school, encouraged Duerson to go to law school so that Duerson promised Bill to pursue his law degree.

MD: David Duerson remembers the end of his career with the Chicago Bears and then talks about his decision to

play for the New York Giants. He also discusses his admiration of Bill Parcells.