

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Billy Williams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Williams, Billy, 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams,
Dates:	January 16, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:29:58).
Abstract:	Baseball player Billy Williams (1938 -) was an outfielder for the Chicago Cubs for over eighteen years, before ending his career with the Oakland A's. Williams was an inductee to the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, and the National Baseball Hall of Fame, in addition to being named as a finalist for the Major League Baseball All-Century Team. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 16, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Major League Baseball Hall of Fame inductee and former Chicago Cubs outfielder, Billy Williams was born Billy Leo Williams to Jesse Moseley Williams and Frank Levert Williams on June 15, 1938, in Whistler, Alabama. Williams's father was from Dolphin Island, had ties with the Faustina community, and was a teammate of Bill Robinson, who later became a member of the Negro League's Chicago American Giants. The Mobile area produced Major League Baseball Hall of Famers such as all time home run king, Hank Aaron, and pitching legend, Satchell Paige; other greats from Mobile include Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, Tommy Aaron, Cleon Jones and Tommy Agee. Most of the aforementioned stars had played for Ed Tucker's Mobile Black Bears. Williams attended Whistler Elementary School where he excelled in sports; he graduated from Mobile County Training School in 1956; that same year Williams, following his brother Franklin Williams, was drafted by the Chicago Cubs.

Playing initially with the minor league Ponca City, Oklahoma, Cubs of the Sooner State League, Williams improved his game. Other black members of the Cubs organization included Gene Baker, future Hall of Famer, Ernie Banks, Sam "Toothpick" Jones, Sollie Drake and Negro League great, Buck O'Neal who served as a scout. Despite Jackie Robinson's 1948 integration of Major League Baseball, Williams faced segregated accommodations on the road and at home games. In 1957, Williams hit a walk off home run to beat the Cardinals minor league team; this play angered the players on the all-white Cardinal team so much that they beat up the black elevator operator at their hotel as a stand-in for Williams. The next day with the game in progress, the elevator operator emptied his gun at the Cardinal players as Williams watched from left field.

Called up first in 1959, Williams was named National League Rookie of the Year in 1961. In his career, Williams hit twenty or more home runs in fourteen different seasons, and batted .300 five times. Williams was hero of the

legendary 1969 Cubs along with Ernie Banks and Ferguson Jenkins. In 1970, Williams led the National League in runs scored (137) and tied for the lead in hits (205), while batting .322 with forty-five home runs. Williams was the Sporting News National League Player of the Year in 1972. Selected as an All-Star six times, he was the second most durable player in National League history (as of 2007) playing 1,117 consecutive games. Traded to the Oakland A's in 1974, Williams played in the American League Championship Series in 1975. After eighteen years with the organization, Williams began his post player years as a coach for the A's. Williams joined the Cubs staff in 1986, becoming an assistant to Cubs president Andy McPhail. Williams was elected to the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame in 1981, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame in 1983, and the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1987 in Cooperstown, New York. In 1999, Williams was named as a finalist for the Major League Baseball All-Century Team.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Billy Williams was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 16, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Baseball player Billy Williams (1938 -) was an outfielder for the Chicago Cubs for over eighteen years, before ending his career with the Oakland A's. Williams was an inductee to the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame, the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame, and the National Baseball Hall of Fame, in addition to being named as a finalist for the Major League Baseball All-Century Team.

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:

Williams, Billy, 1938-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Williams, Billy, 1938---Interviews

African American baseball players--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American athletes--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Major League Baseball (Organization)

Occupations:

Baseball Player

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Billy Williams, January 16, 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 Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_001, TRT: 0:28:27 ?

Billy Williams was born on June 15, 1938 in Whistler, Alabama to Jessie Moseley Williams and Frank Williams. Williams' paternal grandfather, Louis Williams, was a white man raised in northern Alabama, where he met Williams' grandmother, an African American woman. They moved to Faustinas, Alabama, a mixed race community on Mobile Bay, where they raised Williams' father. Born in 1902, Williams' father settled in Whistler, a community near Mobile, Alabama. Williams' maternal grandparents also lived in Whistler, where his grandfather worked at a steel mill, and his grandmother raised twelve children, including Williams' mother. She was born around 1910, and married Williams' father as a teenager. Williams was raised in Whistler's Baptist Town neighborhood, and later moved with his family to Methodist Town. In Mobile, they attended the Pilgrim Rest A.M.E. Zion Church, and frequented the supermarket. Williams was also exposed to Mobile's white community while accompanying his mother, who worked as a domestic.

African American baseball players--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American athletes--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_002, TRT: 0:28:47 ?

Billy Williams grew up in the small community of Whistler, Alabama, which was located near Mobile, Alabama. In Whistler, Williams swam in Eight Mile Creek, shot marbles and raised produce and poultry at his family's home. He began his education at Whistler Elementary School, and then attended Principal Lilly A. Dixon's Mobile County Training School, where he excelled in shop class. In Mobile, William's father, Frank Williams, worked for the Murray Stevedoring, Co., unloading banana boats at night. He also played baseball in the Negro Leagues, alongside William "The Vacuum Cleaner" Robinson and Satchel Paige, both of whom grew up near Mobile. During Williams' final year of high school, he was offered a football scholarship to Grambling College, but rejected it. Instead, he played baseball semi-professionally, until Chicago Cubs scout Ivy Griffin offered him a professional contract. Williams also talks about his admiration for baseball player Hank Aaron, and describes Aaron's cross-handed batting technique.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_003, TRT: 0:29:26 ?

Billy Williams attended the all-black Mobile County Training School in Prichard, Alabama, where he played football for Coach Charles T. Rhodes. He often visited Mobile, Alabama to see musicians like Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder perform at the Harlem Duke Social Club. During Williams' senior year in 1956, the Chicago Cubs baseball team sent Ivy Griffin to scout Tommie Aaron, Hank Aaron's brother, who played on Williams' team. After seeing Williams play, Griffin offered him a contract with the Chicago Cubs organization. Williams began as a member of the Cubs' Class D minor league

club in Ponca City, Oklahoma, where he was barred from the team's hotel because of segregation. While playing in Ponca City, Williams changed positions from third baseman to outfielder, and improved his swing with the help of Coach Rogers Hornsby. Williams recalls the other black baseball players in the Chicago Cubs system, including Buck O'Neil, Ernie Banks, Gene Baker and Sam Jones.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_004, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Billy Williams played minor league baseball for the Chicago Cubs from 1957. He began his baseball career in segregated Ponca City, Oklahoma, where racial tensions were high. After Williams helped win a game against the all-white Ardmore Cardinals team, several of the Cardinals players, including Corey Smith, assaulted their hotel's black elevator operator, who retaliated the next day by shooting at Smith. In 1959, Williams was promoted to play in San Antonio, Texas, where continued to be mentored by Coach Rogers Hornsby. Williams also continued to experience discrimination in segregated Texas. He left to return to Mobile, Alabama, until Coach Buck O'Neil convinced him to rejoin the Cubs. Williams was promoted to the Chicago Cubs' major league team in 1959; and hit his first major league home run in 1960, against Stan Williams of the Los Angeles Dodgers. In 1961, Williams was named the Cubs' starting leftfielder. During that season, he hit twenty-five home runs, and won the Rookie of the Year Award.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_005, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Billy Williams won the National League Rookie of the Year Award in 1961, defeating Los Angeles Dodgers player Willie Davis for the honor. Williams continued to play for the Chicago Cubs during team owner Philip K. Wrigley's College of Coaches experiment, which brought Coach Bob Scheffing and manager Bob Kennedy to the team. During this era, the Chicago Cubs had a strong offense featuring Williams, Ernie Banks and Ron Santo; but their pitching staff performed poorly. In 1966, Leo Durocher became the team's manager, and recruited strong pitchers like Ferguson Jenkins and Ken Holtzman. Williams left the Cubs to join the Oakland Athletics in 1975. That year, the Athletics made the playoffs, but lost to the Boston Red Sox. Williams talks about the Chicago Cubs' culture of losing, which persisted despite the changes in personnel. He also describes the new challenges for baseball players since the heyday of his career, including the calculation of batting averages during games.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_006, TRT: 0:28:44 ?

Billy Williams played major league baseball for the Chicago Cubs from 1959 to 1975. He witnessed the Civil Rights Movement during the off-seasons, when he drove home to Mobile, Alabama. During Williams' career as a leftfielder for the Cubs, he started 1,117 games in a row, breaking St. Louis Cardinals player Stan Musial's major league record. In 1969, the Chicago Cubs team included Ernie Banks, Ron Santo, Bill Hands and Don Kessinger; and set an attendance record with over 1.6 million fans. That year, the Cubs led the National League East for most of the season; but then, in August, fell behind the New York Mets, who went on to win the World Series. Williams lost the Most Valuable Player Award to Johnny Bench in both 1970 and 1972, which were Williams' best statistical seasons. Traded to the Oakland Athletics in 1975, Williams became their designated hitter, and helped them qualify for the playoffs. He retired from baseball the following year, and was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1987.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_007, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

Billy Williams lived in a majority African American neighborhood on the South

Side of Chicago, Illinois while playing for the Chicago Cubs. He later moved with his family to Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where he enrolled his daughters in the public schools. Williams retired from baseball in 1976, and built a home in Loomis, California, where his brother, Franklin Williams, also lived. After a year of retirement, Williams was recruited by Bob Kennedy, his former manager, to return to the Chicago Cubs organization as a hitting coach. In this role, Williams mentored future star players like Joe Carter and Heathcliff Slocumb while they were in the minor leagues. He also developed a working relationship with Andy MacPhail, who later became the Cubs' general manager, and hired Williams as his assistant manager. Williams talks about his favorite Cubs players, and the negative impact of steroid use among athletes. He reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, as well as his life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Billy Williams, Section A2007_010_001_008, TRT: 0:07:21 ?
Billy Williams narrates his photographs.