

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Violet Palmer

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Palmer, Violet, 1964-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer,
Dates:	November 17, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:58:54).
Abstract:	Basketball referee Violet Palmer (1964 -) was the first woman and first openly gay official in the NBA. Palmer was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 17, 2016, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_115
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Basketball referee Violet Palmer was born on July 20, 1964 in Lynwood, California to James and Gussie Palmer. Palmer played point guard for Compton High School's women's basketball team. She earned her B.A. degree in recreation administration from California Polytechnic University Pomona, where she also led the women's basketball team to two NCAA Division II championships in 1985 and 1986.

After graduating from California Polytechnic University Pomona in 1987, Palmer worked for Placentia Recreation Department, where she began refereeing high school basketball games. In 1991, she officiated her first Division I Women's basketball game and, officiating the NCAA Women's Final Four from 1994 to 1997. In 1995, Palmer began training as an official for the NBA. In 1997, Palmer officiated the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) championship during the association's inaugural season. That same year, Palmer made history as the first woman to referee a National Basketball Association game. She became the first woman to oversee a postseason game for the NBA in 2006, when she officiated a postseason matchup between the Indiana Pacers and the New Jersey Nets. From 2009 to 2010, Palmer served as the coordinator of Women's Basketball Officiating (WBBO) for the West Coast and Pac-12 Conferences. She became the first woman to officiate an All-Star Game in any major United States sport, when she officiated the 2014 NBA All-Star Game at Smoothie King Center in New Orleans. Palmer retired as a referee from the NBA in 2016, after dealing with a long time knee injury. Over the course of her NBA career, Palmer officiated 919 NBA games. Palmer was also the first openly gay referee in NBA history.

Palmer received many awards and honors during her career, including being named a member of the NCAA Division II 40th Anniversary Tribute Team. She was also honored with the 2013 WNBA Boost Mobile Pioneer Award, and served on the board of the National Association of Sports Officials. In 1999, Palmer was named Naismith Women's College Official of the Year.

Palmer and her wife, Tanya Stine, have three children.

Violet Palmer was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 17, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Violet Palmer was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 17, 2016, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Basketball referee Violet Palmer (1964 -) was the first woman and first openly gay official in the NBA.

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:

Palmer, Violet, 1964-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Palmer, Violet, 1964- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Basketball Referee

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 Violet Palmer, November 17, 2016. 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 Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_001, TRT: 1:31:07 ?

Violet Palmer was born on July 20, 1964 in Lynwood, California to Gussie Palmer and James Palmer, Jr. Her mother was born in Fisher, Louisiana, and grew up in Many, Louisiana, where she played high school basketball. Palmer's father was also a native of Fisher, and grew up with eight siblings on his family's farm. He completed two years at Grambling College, where he played baseball and basketball. After marrying, Palmer's parents relocated to Los

Angeles, California, where her father worked as a furnace operator while her mother cared for the home. Palmer's younger brother, Rod Palmer, went on to become a basketball coach at California State University in Long Beach, and her nephew, Wun Versher, played for the Harlem Globetrotters. Palmer was raised in a close knit community in Compton, California, and her family belonged to the congregations of Ajalon Temple of Truth Baptist Church and Second Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles. She recalls two burglary incidents at her childhood home.

Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_002, TRT: 2:28:38 ?

Violet Palmer had an idyllic childhood in Compton, California, despite its reputation for drugs and violence in the early 1980s. She began her education at Clarence A. Dickison Elementary School, and joined the boys' Little League team, as there was no league for girls. Later, Palmer became a shortstop on the softball team at Compton High School, where she ultimately decided to focus on basketball. She also served as the vice president of the student council. Palmer led the Compton High School basketball team to three Moore League championships as point guard under Coach Caroline Montgomery. She faced future basketball coach Cheryl Miller in the California Interscholastic Federation finals, although Palmer's team lost in the end. As a senior, Palmer was named the Moore League MVP and an All-American player, and earned a basketball scholarship to attend California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Palmer also talks about the difference between men's and women's basketball.

Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_003, TRT: 3:28:46 ?

Violet Palmer played Division II basketball at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, where she was coached by Darlene May. The team, which included All-Americans Michelle McCoy and Debra Larsen, went on to win the NCAA Division II women's championship in 1985 and 1986, and became four-time California Collegiate Athletic Association champions. Palmer studied recreation administration, and worked part-time as a recreation assistant in Placentia, California. She also officiated intramural games on campus, and joined the California Basketball Officials Association. After graduating in 1987, she became the recreation director of the Rancho Cienega Sports Complex in Los Angeles, California, where she oversaw all of the sports programs, including a women's flag football league that she created. She continued to officiate high school basketball games at the city finals and state finals, and eventually advanced to the NCAA. At this point, Palmer describes the pay scale for basketball referees.

Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_004, TRT: 4:33:50 ?

Violet Palmer officiated her first NCAA women's basketball game in 1989, and her first NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Tournament in 1994. Due to protests from her male counterparts, Palmer was not allowed to referee the men's games. In 1997, Palmer worked on the inaugural season of the WNBA, where she met players like Cynthia Cooper-Dyke and Sheryl Swoopes. With the endorsement of fellow official Booker Turner, she was invited by NBA executive Aaron C. Wade to train as an NBA official. In 1997, Palmer became the first woman to referee a NBA game when she officiated the Vancouver Grizzlies and Dallas Mavericks matchup in Vancouver, Canada. Initially, Palmer faced criticism from players like Charles Barkley, who eventually apologized for his biased comments. At this point, she talks about the rules in the NCAA and the NBA, including the discriminatory regulation against dunking in the 1960s. Over her career, she worked with players like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and LeBron James.

Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_005, TRT: 5:30:26 ?

Violet Palmer and Dee Kantner became the first female NBA officials in 1997. She was initially marginalized as a female referee, but soon received praise for her fairness and accuracy. In 2006, she witnessed the brawl between the players on the Denver Nuggets and New York Knicks teams. Later that season, Palmer officiated her first NBA playoff game. She went on to referee the 2014 NBA All-Star Game as well. Despite sexist remarks from radio commentator and former player Cedric Maxwell, Palmer was respected by the majority of players, including LeBron James and Dwyane Wade. She also developed a good working relationship with her fellow referees, like Dick Bavetta and Robbie Robinson. As the only female official in the league for over ten years, Palmer served as a role model for young girls. At this point, she talks about other high profile NBA referees like Lauren Holtkamp, who was hired in 2015; and Tim Donaghy, who was convicted of crimes related to betting on games following an FBI investigation.

Video Oral History Interview with Violet Palmer, Section A2016_115_001_006, TRT: 6:26:07 ?

Violet Palmer founded a basketball referee training camp for women and men in 2001. During her career as the first female official in the NBA, she refereed games in her hometown of Los Angeles, California, as well as places like New York City and Chicago, Illinois. In 2014, she became the first woman to officiate an NBA All-Star Game. That same year, she married her wife, Tanya Stine. After retiring in 2015, she became the referee manager of development and performance for the NBA, and the coordinator of officials for the Pacific 12 Conference, the West Coast Conference and the Western Athletic Conference. To honor Palmer's legacy, ESPN produced the documentary 'Queen Vee,' which followed her daily life and career. Palmer reflects upon the injuries she sustained as a referee, and talks about the current gameplay in the NBA. She also describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. Palmer concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.