

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Athletics-Football Project

Personal Experience

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WILLIAM DAVIS

Interviewed

by

Dan O'Brien

on

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BILL DAVIS

For a firsthand, insightful glimpse into the realm of professional football and its administrative process, one must only talk to Bill Davis to understand the true mechanisms of the game

William C Davis was born July 21, 1938 in Youngstown, Ohio to William and Helen Davis. While growing up on Youngstown's north side, Bill attended The Rayen School of Higher Learning and was graduated in 1956. During high school, Bill excelled in essentially three sports, football, track, and basketball.

Upon his graduation, Bill enrolled at Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, where he participated in football, basketball, and baseball. Throughout his college career, Bill accrued a total of nine varsity letters, and played both quarterback and safety on the football team. He also punted and returned punts and kickoffs.

In January of 1961, Bill was graduated with a BA degree and returned to Youngstown to establish the Austintown Frank Ohl Junior High football program, where he was employed as a physical education instructor. After his tenure at Frank Ohl, Bill secured an assistant coaching position for two years before being elevated to the position of Head Football Coach at Austintown Fitch for three years. When his association with Fitch ended, Bill assumed assistant football coaching duties at Westminster College, Pennsylvania in 1967, where he also was the head swimming coach. He became head football coach at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan in 1968 and turned around a losing program. His teams shared M I A A Championships in 1970, 1971, and 1972.

Bill's resume with collegiate and professional football is nothing short of remarkable. In 1972, Bill accepted the position of Assistant Head Coach at Michigan State University, which

opened the doors for employment in the professional arena. From 1976-1978, Bill served under Philadelphia Eagles' coach Dick Vermeil as Assistant Coach and from 1979-1981 under the great Don Shula as Director of Pro Personnel for the Miami Dolphins. In 1981, Bill was approached by Art Modell of the Cleveland Browns to assume the duties of Director of Scouting and eventually the Vice-President in charge of Player Personnel from 1983-1987. Bill rejoined the Philadelphia Eagles in 1988 to 1989 as Vice President of Player Personnel.

Bill has since left the ranks of professional football and is now enjoying a thriving real estate career in North Carolina. The parents of three children, Bill and his wife, Joanne reside in Charlotte, North Carolina.

O This is an interview with Bill Davis for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Athletics-Football, by Dan O'Brien, on November 25, 1991
First of all Bill, could you give us a brief biographical sketch? Where were you born? What was your schooling like? And what are you doing now?

D I was born in 1938, in Youngstown, Ohio, North Side Hospital [I] went to The Rayen School of Higher Learning on the North side of Youngstown I participated in football, basketball, and track I played for Ralph Robinette, who was an excellent coach, and well revered in the city I matriculated to Mount Union College, was an English major, and participated in football (4 years), basketball (4 1/2 years), and baseball (1) year I earned a total of nine varsity letters at Mount Union I played quarterback and defensive safety I played four years on the football team and one year as a pitcher on the baseball team During my senior year, on Christmas Eve, I was in an automobile accident back in Youngstown during the holidays I was laid up for six months in the hospital at home, so I did not finish my education at Mount Union in the normal four year period So, I went back the first semester of the following year and finished my education and my basketball career I had already played four years of football I was graduated from Mount Union in January of 1961

[I] came back to Youngstown to Frank Ohl Junior High in Austintown [I] taught Physical Education and started the football program It is now one of two middle schools in Austintown I stayed there for one year and moved to Austintown Fitch High School as an Assistant Coach for two years under Bob Winterburn Bob was appointed the principal of Fitch in 1965, and I took over the football program and stayed there for three years as head coach

I had the opportunity, when I was working on my Masters Degree at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, to have Dr Harold Burry as my philosophy professor Dr Burry offered me a job as an Assistant football coach at Westminster So, we left Austintown and went to Westminster as assistant Football Coach, head Swimming, and assistant Track coach

I stayed there for only one year and moved to Adrian College, in Adrian, Michigan, as Head football coach from 1968-1972 After Adrian College I was fortunate enough to go to the Big 10 conference under Denny Stolz at Michigan State I was the Assistant Head Coach and Offensive Backfield Coach for three years I ended up with Dick Vermeil of the Philadelphia Eagles as an Assistant Coach in 1976, 1977, and 1978 I spent 1979 and 1980 with Don Shula at the Miami Dolphins as Director of Pro Personnel and Administrative Assistant to Don

O That was 1979, 1980?

D Yes, 1979, 1980 In 1981, I went to Cleveland as Director of Scouting, and in 1983, I believe, Art Modell gave me the title of Vice-President in charge of Player Personnel I stayed there until 1987 I got out of Professional Football, went to Ft Lauderdale, Florida, earned my real estate license and sold real estate for seven months Then, after

seven months, I got a call from the Philadelphia Eagles and they gave me the opportunity to go to Philly again as Vice President of Player Personnel. So, I stayed there in 1988 and 1989. I left Philadelphia in 1990 and came back to Youngstown and am presently working as a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker, Meikle and Co. in Youngstown.

- O Taking you back to the early days in Youngstown. What do you remember about the whole family life and growing up and things?
- D Family life in Youngstown was excellent because the North side at that time between Elm and Bryson and Kensington streets was an excellent middle-class neighborhood. Everybody worked hard. Everybody was just beautiful and friendly. You did not have to lock your doors at night and you were not afraid to walk to Hayes Junior High or to Rayen or to Ursuline. I would go see Penguin games on a Saturday's, because I followed the Penguins then. They played at Rayen Stadium. We had a very close-knit family, my mom and dad, and myself. I had two younger sisters that also went to Rayen. It was just a nice competitive background. We played baseball, football, and basketball. Sports was my life with the guys with whom I ran around. So, there was never anybody from our neighborhood that got into trouble. We were always playing basketball in my backyard or football up at the corner. We were always involved in athletics of some kind.
- O So, that is how you got started, you think in football?
- D That is basically how I got started, by just growing up.
- O And playing pick up games?
- D Playing pick up games on the North Side. That is right.
- O I am from the North Side, too. I can remember doing that in the late 1960's and early 1970's, when I was a kid.
- O We used to go to Wick Park and play. We used to go to Crandall Park.
- D Crandall Park, that's where we used to play.
- D To Harding behind the field. We used to jump the fence or go under it to watch the Penguins play on Saturday because we could not afford a ticket.
- O That same hole?
- D That same hole. We would cut it in the morning and tape it up. We would end up playing football in the end zone, up on the hill behind the stands, while the game was going on. So, we did not really care if we saw the game.

O What do you remember about high school? Essentially you excelled in three sports track, football, basketball?

D I did not excel in track. I can say I ran track because our football coach, Ralph Robinett, demanded that all of his football players come out for track. See, we really did not have a lot of conditioning at that time and it was before weight lifting became as popular as it is today. So, if you lifted weights in those days, you were considered a body builder or kind of a freak. They did not know enough about the philosophy behind lifting. They thought it would make you muscle bound, back in the early 1950's. So, all we really did was play ball the whole season, whether it was indoors or outdoors. In football, the thing I remember is my Junior year we were third in the state of Ohio, an undefeated season. Guys like Red Timlin, Taddy Horvath, Dave McBride, Neil Patrone, Dick Schnieder. Those are the kind of kids that basically were the starters.

O That was in Rayen?

D The Rayen, 1954. My junior year when we went there, I was a starting defensive back, but played behind Red Timlin. Then, my senior season, I ended up being the starting quarterback for the first three or four games and then Robby benched all the seniors because evidently "senioritis" set in and we were not performing up to his expectations. So, he started a couple younger kids. I still played the whole defensive season, and I still punted. In basketball, we had an excellent team. Charlie "Pappy" Joachum was our coach. He is now in California as a retired teacher and educator. We went on to Regional finals or District finals, I am not sure, but we had four seniors and a sophomore named Sam Fletcher. We played some very good basketball during those days.

O You are talking about sports in high school athletics, how do you think that differs now from when you were growing up? Do you think that the programming is much more rigid?

D I do not know if that is the truth or not. I know that during my sophomore and junior years we had spring football in high school in the state of Ohio. So, it was a year round program to an extent when we had spring ball. I think today, and even when I was coaching at Fitch in the 1960's, we had a much better off season conditioning program. We were better prepared, I think than the coaches were previously because you learn with experience and with the ages. So, we had a better off season program and we knew that with the proper teaching, a young man could gain not only strength but flexibility through an outstanding off season weight program. So, I think we had the advantage of making our players better than our coaches had when we were in high school, but as far as working as hard, the coaches back then worked just as hard. Ralph Robinette, Johnny Knapick from Campbell, and Tom Carey from Ursuline, had some great careers in high school. I have always felt that those guys could have gone on to a small college, or major

colleges, or even the NFL, and been outstanding coaches there too, but they chose not to. I chose to go on with my life and career. They chose to stay in Youngstown.

O Then, you went to Mount Union College, was that on an athletic scholarship?

D Well, we really did not have athletic scholarships. My dad had passed away in April of my senior year, and I was not planning on going to college because I had my mom and two younger sisters at home. But my mom talked me into college and Duke Barrett, who was the head football coach at Mount Union at the time, came down and recruited me along with George Hunter, who was the Head Basketball Coach. He is still in the area now. It was only 34 miles away from home. So it was close enough that I could get home when I wanted to, or my family and friends could come up and see me, but yet far enough away from home to be on my own.

Back then it was about \$1,200 a year for room, board, books, and tuition. So, I believe I was getting \$600 or half of that during my freshman year, and through the work study program I probably did not have to pay a whole lot my last three years there either. Basically, it was on financial need, the financial assistance that you got. Which is still a case in division three today. It costs a lot more than \$1200 to go there now! My mom and sisters made some extreme sacrifices so that I could continue my educational and athletic career. I am deeply indebted to the three of them.

O At Mount Union, you played quarterback and defensive safety?

D Right.

O This was 1950?

D 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1960.

O So, you think these are the last days of actually a college player playing a dual position?

D No, I think basically if you go to a Division III school today, you could probably still participate in football and basketball, or football and baseball. I know it was tough playing football, finishing on a Saturday and going to practice on a Monday into basketball season.

O Just in football, you do not really see the quarterback and defensive safety being the same player?

D Oh no. There were a couple years there where you had to play. You could not substitute. There were some rigid rules and they were experimenting with substitution rules. A lot of us played both ways in those days.

- O I was talking with Tom Carey and he was doing the same thing when he went to Slippery Rock That is where he graduated from
- D But he was in college long before I was
- -> O These are the last days of this, from like the late 1950's and the early 1960's You can see a change with that
- D Right
- O It is almost like a certain breed of player was going out and now the more, I guess you could say the more specialized the player was coming in
- D Back at that time, I returned punts, and kick-offs, and I was the punter If you could snap and punt on the same play I would probably have done both, but you could not It was fun, interesting, a great career
- O Now, who got you involved with coaching? Did this begin at Mount Union?
- D Probably at Mount Union I really did not know what I wanted to do I was a confused young man when my dad died, and I went on to college I was a rebellious kind of a student and a player I probably took it a little too far at times but I was just going through a tough time in my life Guys like Duke Barrett, and George Hunter really helped me through it Mount Union did not have a major in physical education at that time and I was not as concerned with my education then So, my coaches talked me into majoring in English and minoring in physical education, Getting me involved with English was one of the best things they could have done for me at that time So I wanted to be a teacher I was not sure I wanted to be a coach until after my automobile accident in 1960 I stayed for one year as a student assistant coach and helped Duke Barrett at Mount Union I really enjoyed coaching so I got into it from that point on
- O Then you came back to the Youngstown area?
- D Back to the Youngstown area to Frank Ohl
- O And that is when you began your association with Austintown?
- D Yes
- O Then was it Bob Winterburn?
- D Actually, when I was the head eighth grade coach at Frank Ohl in 1961, Frank Harbol was the head football coach at Austintown Fitch He retired that year and I went into the

Superintendent, it was John Schuler, and I told him that I had just come off of an undefeated season, it was 7-0, and I thought I was the greatest coach in the world. He said, "You are not even dry behind the ears yet. We are going to bring in a guy who can teach you something." Which they did, they brought in Bob Winterburn who had been the head coach at Heidelberg College. He came in and taught me probably more than any other single coach about "organization and morale," being the two most important factors in winning. I learned a lot from Bob Winterburn. I was his assistant for three years, or two years, and then, like I said, he became the principal. So, John Schuller tabbed me for the head football job.

O From there it was what?

D My third year as head coach I knew that I wanted to move on. I wanted to get into college. I sent out a lot of resumes and I was sitting, having a cup of coffee with Dr. Burry after a philosophy class, and we were "x"-ing and "o"-ing on a napkin there, and he offered me a job and I took it.

O Your days at Westminster, how were your seasons there?

D Excellent. Harold Burry was just an excellent coach. He probably lost, at the most, one or two games a year during his career.

O What is their division?

D They are Division III, but they are NAIA. They just got beat by Findlay this last weekend, 9 to 8.

O From there you went to Adrian, Michigan. How did that job go?

D I will tell you how it came about. I was still at Westminster. It was just at the end of the football season, and there were no playoffs in the NAIA at that time because we were sitting home working on next year. I saw just a one paragraph column in the Youngstown Vindicator that Adrian College had just fired Chappy Marvin, their head coach, and they were taking applications. So, I applied. There were 98 applications for the job, 98 applicants. I started working on the inside and finding people that knew somebody, and talked my way into being one of the last five. From the last five, during my second interview, I was offered the job by Dr. Robert Gillis, who was the athletic director at the time.

Before we got there, they had one winning season. That was in 1918. Their only championship season was 1929. So, we went in and our first year--we only played eight games--we were one and seven. I went to the President, John Dawson. I said, "Dr. Dawson, there are only two things you can do. You can drop the football program because we cannot competitively recruit with the other people we are playing, or you can

give us some financial assistance ”

We were not even meeting the financial need of our young men I did not want any scholarships I just wanted to be able to compete with the Albions, the Almas, the Westminster, the Findlays, and schools like that at the time We started a couple extracurricular performance aid funds, and we got funds started in all sports The second year we ended up winning three or four games, but my third, fourth, and fifth year there, we shared for the league title So, we took something that was less than ordinary, and built upon that One of my greatest thrills in coaching was taking something that was less than ordinary and making it into a championship program

O Any outstanding players come to mind?

D Lots of them We had Jimmy Calcagni from Chaney, who was an inside linebacker, and Harry Marok from Toledo, Billy Sullivan from Niles He was the starting center Bobby Woytec, who is now the head coach at Matthews High School, was a running back for us Denny Walsh who was the starting guard for us from Niles, tragically lost his life during an automobile accident during his freshman or sophomore year We had Ronny Leibert from Niles, who was in the same accident as our quarterback Joe Donofrio played for us. Joe was from Cardinal Mooney Vince Spuillace was from Cardinal Mooney Rob Conklin is now coaching at Cardinal Mooney He played for us Girard's Larry Dietz played for us So, we had a lot of Youngstown area kids That is basically how we started our successful program, by recruiting the North Eastern Ohio area

O That is interesting because I have always wanted to pin down something about this area This place is such a haven for football and baseball really Those are the two sports that come to mind immediately Why do you attribute that to this area?

D Well, I think it is because of the work ethic of the people in the area We have got a lot of blue collar workers We had the steel mills People knew what it took to work to put bread on the table I think the impact of coming from a part of the state, or a part of the United States that is so ethnic oriented that the work ethic of those people just was passed on to their kids The coaches in this area, I think, were way ahead of the rest of the United States Right now, I would say California, Texas, Florida, parts of Jersey, and the North Eastern Ohio-Western Pennsylvania area, were the top five recruiting areas where people will come in not only for Division I, but Division II, and Division III

O Yes, if you look at it on a national scale, our representation is so impressive and so right, in both collegiate and professional ranks in those sports

D I will tell you another thing that helped a lot of us as athletes We had a guy, first it was Larry Stolle, who was the sports editor of the Vindicator Then Chuck Perazich took over Chuck took care of all the local guys You could always see your name in the paper, always see your picture in the paper no matter where you ended up But hey, here

is a Youngstown kid that did well and that brought a lot of people closer together too as a community. He just took care of the kids from Youngstown.

O So, you think the media had something to do with it?

D I think the media played a large part in it. He is still doing it.

O You know he is retiring.

D He is retiring. He is going to Las Vegas.

O How did you become interested in the whole idea of professional football for a career?

D Well, basically I knew I wanted to be a coach. When I was the eighth grade coach at Frank Ohl Junior High, I was to be married that June, and I told my wife Joanne, "You are getting involved with a football coach and I am going to end up coaching in The National Football League someday." She kind of laughed it off and thought she would be at Frank Ohl or Fitch for the rest of her life. Her first move was the toughest from Austintown to Westminster. We had a 30 mile move there, and then it was easy to take her to Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Florida once it started. I knew then I wanted to go just as far as I possibly could go into coaching. I knew I had to get into a major college program. So, my last year at Adrian College, Dike Beede passed away. Probably my biggest career goal at that time was to become head coach at Youngstown State. That was one of my immediate goals, while the NFL was a future goal.

I ended up being one of the last five to be interviewed, and it was Bo Ryan who went on to collegiate coaching fame. Bobby Cummings ended up coaching at Iowa, and Dick Crum ended up being the head coach at North Carolina and Kent. Rey Dempsey was the fifth candidate. In the process of going through the interview, I went to Ohio State and I asked Woody Hayes to call for me. I left Columbus and went up and asked Duffy Daugherty to call for me. He picked up the phone and called Dr. Peter Baldino, who was head of the search committee at that time, and recommended me. Then Denny Stolz was the defensive coordinator at Michigan State, I had coached against him when he was head coach at Alma and I was head coach at Adrian. He was now the defensive coordinator for Duffy. So he said, "Bill, I will call for you, but would you rather be head coach at Youngstown or assistant at Michigan State?" I said, "I do not know, why? That is an interesting question." He said, "Because I may get the head job." I said, "If you get the head job you call me." So, when I went in for my final interview at Youngstown State, I told the secretary that if a Denny Stolz called, I want you to come in, interrupt the meeting with Willard Webster and the rest of the committee, and tell them I am wanted on the phone. So, that is what they did. I was in there for about an hour, and she knocked on the door and came in and said, "Mr. Webster, there is a phone call for Bill Davis and he wants to take it." So, I took it, Denny offered me the job. I went in, collected my interview material, thanked the committee, and went on to Michigan State.

I made a split decision then that I could get into the National Football League quicker as an assistant in the Big 10, than I could at Youngstown. Ray Dempsey came into Youngstown as head coach, and he went to the Detroit Lions my second year at Michigan State. So, I did not make a bad decision, I just could have probably done it from Youngstown State or Michigan State because that was my goal and I was going to reach it!

O How did you come across Philadelphia?

D We coached for three years at Michigan State and Denny Stolz was fired for alleged recruiting violations of the staff. So the NCAA came in and we all had one year contracts so we were okay financially, but he was asked to fire the whole staff. So, the guy that got the job was Darryl Rogers. He replaced Denny Stolz. I had a three hour interview with Darryl. He was allowed to keep some members of the staff who were not being investigated by the NCAA, so he interviewed me. At the end of the interview he said, "Okay Bill, what would you like to coach?" I said, "I would like to coach running backs." He said, "Well, I have got so and so coming in for that, what else?" I said, "Wide receivers." "Well, I have got coach Smith coming in for that." "How about quarterbacks?" "I am coaching the quarterbacks, how about defense?" I said "No, what I would really like to do, Darryl, is get into the NFL." So he picked up the phone and called Don Shula. Don was not in, he said, so Dick Vermeil just got that job at Philadelphia, "I will call him." So, he called Dick and said, "I have got a young man in here that wants to break into the NFL." He gave him my background. Dick said, "Put him on the phone." I was on the phone and he asked me, "When can you fly up for an interview?" I said, "I will be there tonight." I did not even know Dick Vermeil, and went up and spent three days with him.

O Vermeil just got this job?

D Vermeil had just gotten the job. He had known Darryl from coaching at San Jose State. So, Dick brought me up for a three day interview and I got the job.

O So, he was putting together a team, a staff right then?

D He had a staff together, but Lynn Styles, who is now the special teams coach for the 49ers, came up working with linebackers, and he had just been named the head coach of San Jose State. So, he had just lost him the day before. So I replaced Lynn Styles.

O So then you found yourself on the sidelines of the Philadelphia Eagles there in 1976. What was the transition like from college to the NFL?

D The biggest transition, and it was a great transition, because you did not have to worry about the academics. You did not have to worry about recruiting. You did not have to

worry about teaching a class or two. You did not have to worry about going out and pleasing the alumni. All you had to do was work on football 24 hours a day. That is what we did. Anybody that wants to get into coaching, when you reach the NFL, or the NBA, or the Major Leagues, there is nothing else to worry about but the sport itself. That was an easy transition to make, but it was certainly the biggest transition.

O What were your duties like there?

D Well, working with Dick Vermeil was extremely tough. He was a great person and a great coach, but he was a work-aholic. We would get in at seven in the morning, and some nights we would not leave there until four or five in the morning. So, we put in probably three years every year because we worked so long. He just kept his adrenaline flowing and his metabolism was such that he could work forever and ever.

O What was the year of the Super Bowl?

D I left in 1978, and they went to the Super Bowl in 1979, or 1980. It was the year after I left.

O You were talking about going in there and Vermeil as a work-aholic and stuff like that. What exactly did you do? What was a typical day like in the NFL?

D A typical day, in season, as an assistant coach, you would get to the office by 7:00 a.m. You would have a complete staff meeting with Dick Vermeil. We would talk about personnel, both offensively and defensively. Then, we would break down into offensive staff and defensive staff meetings. At the time, we did not really have an offensive coordinator, so Dick Vermeil was with the offense, and we had Marion Campbell, who was our defensive coordinator. He would take the defensive staff.

Basically, what you would do, was prepare a game plan on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, for your Sunday game. Learn the offensive game plan, special game plan, and defensive game plan. We would practice and set up the practice schedules during the morning. Basically we would break down our next week's opponent offensively, defensively, and special teams. So, from 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning, until maybe a break for lunch, you worked on that.

If the players were there, they would usually come in around 11:00, 11:30, or 12:00. Then we would have an offensive team meeting, defensive team meeting, overall team meeting, and then break up by position. I was coaching the tight ends my second and third year, and line backers my first year. So, we would go into our respective meetings with our respective players and critique their last week's performance, and give them a scouting report on the next week's opponents. So, basically we spent a day talking about last week's game and the mistakes they made, and the rest of the week talking about our upcoming opponent.

- O I am trying to get an idea of what the player reaction was like a lot of times. Were they pretty much cooperative?
- D Very cooperative. I would say that a professional player is easier to coach than a high school or collegiate player because in the pros a coach can say, "You are not good enough to play anymore. Now get into your life's work." So, these players have to be cooperative and they had to be coachable. They were getting paid to play. There were some kids that were not coachable, but with a strong head coach like Dick Vermeil or Don Shula, or Sam Rutigliano, or Marty Shottenheimer, those either did it or hit the highway. So, it started with the head coach. I know it started with the head coach and the attitude he had, and the assistant coaches just followed on the head coach's leadership. It was very easy to coach them, and it was a pleasure to coach them because it was more of a peer relationship coach/player, than it was, "Okay here, I am the coach and I am teaching a junior high or high school kids how to play." You had to do the same thing. Coaching was the same. You had to cover fundamentals, which foot to step with first, and they were eager, and they were hungry to learn how they could beat the opponent.
- O What was the best season that you had with them?
- D Well, our last year with the Eagles we went to the playoffs, and we got beat by Atlanta. We missed a field goal in the last four seconds on Christmas Eve, and Atlanta beat us in the first round of the playoffs. Dick took a team that was absolutely nothing, like we did at Adrian, and he built them. We probably had only thirteen to eighteen players that started with us Dick's first year of coaching.
- O So, you pretty much constructed the whole team around what Vermeil wanted?
- D Right, the type of player that Dick Vermeil wanted. He wants somebody that was an extremely hard worker and intelligent, because we had some offensive schemes and defensive schemes that you had to be able to react on, move and adjust to different situations as you saw them and read them on the field. You had to incorporate what you knew from a classroom session onto the field, and you had to be a good enough teacher to be able to teach the players. It is never what we know as teachers, it is what our students learn that they can take on the field with them or into their life with them, that makes you a good coach.
- O How did Vermeil differ from Shula?
- D Vermeil, it was in his first year as head coach that I was with him, so he was a little stronger, a little more disciplinary in his treating of the players and if you did not do it his way, you were gone. When I got to Shula and worked with Don, he treated players more as peers. He knew what he wanted to do offensively and defensively, whereas Dick was

building and developing a philosophy, Don had already had it and used it in Baltimore and Miami, and had met with fantastic success. He treated players more as individuals. Dick treated them more as team players. So, Dick had a very low tolerance if somebody stood up against him, or an assistant coach, or a teammate. Where Don knew this was part of growing as a team and he had witnessed that over his years in the NFL. Don had taken his team to the top with a 17-0 season, and a Super Bowl. Now, Dick, in his later years as a coach developed that same philosophy and knew that he had to have a little more give and take with his players. Coming out of UCLA, where everything the coach says is correct and do not challenge me, then you get into the pros and some of them challenge you.

O Did you see any similarities between Dick Vermeil's first year with the Eagles and Shottenheimer's with the Browns?

D No question, but Marty had the advantage of being a defensive coordinator in the league for a while, then stayed with that same team, so he basically knew the personalities and talents of his team. Dick was coming in cold. Dick, by the way, was the first special teams coach ever in professional football for George Allen with the Los Angeles Rams. Then he left George Allen and the Rams and went to the head job at UCLA. So he had only had a couple years experience in the NFL. So, when he came to us, actually, I came with him, he brought me. But when he came to the Eagles, he had a lot of adjusting to do because he did not know the players and he did not know the coaches. He had to keep a couple coaches and he brought his staff in from all over the country.

O When you went to Cleveland, what was your title? In charge of scouting?

D I came in as Director of Collegiate Scouting, right.

O How does that go about? What were your duties involved with that?

D Well, basically they had just lost Peter Hadhazy, who was the general manager, and Sam Rutigliano was the head coach. So, I had met Sam at an owners' meeting in Hawaii that year and we started talking and we struck up a relationship. He said he was going to have a position open, and it would probably not have all the responsibility of a general manager, but basically in personnel. So I told him I would like to be interviewed for it, so he set me up for an interview with Art Modell and I had a couple other interviews and Art offered me the job with Sam. Basically, the responsibilities were that I was in charge of all personnel decisions. Whether they were bringing in free-agents, or bringing in players through the draft or through trades, it was my responsibility and the staff I had assembled to know every talent in football on a collegiate level, and in the Canadian football league, and in the semi-professional leagues, that could eventually come up and be NFL players.

O Is there any big difference between being a coach and doing what you did?

D Oh, no question. My first year, when I left Philadelphia to go to Miami, I left the field completely and I was Director of Pro-Personnel and negotiated every contract with every player in Dolphin player, whether they had been in for 10 years or whether they were rookies. So now my relationship was more adversarial because I handled the boss's money. The players had to get through me to get more money. I was no longer a buddy that could go out and have a beer with the guys because I was coaching them on the field and I had that kind of a rapport with them. So I was seen as a bad guy holding them back from making more money.

O So, did you feel that?

D Oh, definitely. I was never on a practice field because when coach Shula and the rest of the staff were out coaching, I was in a closed door meeting with a player's agent. We were hammering out a contract for all those players on the field. Probably the best piece of advice I ever got in negotiating was from the late Joe Robbie, who was the owner of the Miami Dolphins. He said, "Bill, I am going to tell you one thing, do not make friends with my money." Which made a lot of sense. So, I had to treat it as if it were my own money and not give away the candy store.

O Any feelings of animosity toward the old players you used to be with?

D No, none at all. You got that contract negotiated and you were hammering at one another through the agent. We did not do a lot of actual negotiating with the players. We would like to have them in, but the agent did not because the agent then had to go back and tell the player the truth. If the players were not in there, the agent could go back and say, "This is what those SOB's want to give you, now here is what I am fighting for." So, it was all a negotiating game. It was interesting and fun, but once you got one done, you had to worry about the next one. Just like a victory, if you are the head coach and you win on Sunday, you do not have many hours to savor that victory because you have to prepare for the next one. There is only going to be one happy coach every year in the NFL, he is the one that wins the Super Bowl. Even the Super Bowl loser is looked on by the fans as a loser, which is not right.

O Was Joe Robbie pretty easy to work for?

D Joe Robbie, I did not say he was easy to work for. I said he gave me a great piece of advice. What I had to do during my two years at Miami was, I was between Don Shula and Joe Robbie. So, Don Shula would say, "Bill, I want that guy on the field at practice today!" Joe Robbie would say, "Bill, don't you give him one more penny." So Shula wanted a player on the field so he could practice with him, and Joe did not want to give him any more money to do it. So, that was a little tough the first year. The second year I

did not have to report to Joe Robbie with everything I did. I would go and lay out a plan for him, and Don Shula was the guy that I would sit down with and he would say, "All right, here is how the players fall. Here is what they did on the field this year. Here are my recommendations to take to Joe Robbie." Even though Don had part interest in the club when he first started, he did not want himself to be considered by the players as somebody from the front office. He wanted to be a coach and a coach only. So, Joe eventually bought back the interest that Don had in the club and Don did not really want people to know he was involved in player contracts, which no coach wants to do. Because now all of a sudden there is a Duriel Harris who needs two more catches in his last game to reach his \$10,000 bonus level and if Duriel thinks, or even had an inkling that the head coach knows about that, and he only catches one ball then you are trying to keep me out \$10,000. So, no head coach ever knows what a player's bonuses are. He knows what their salary is, and he knows what he signed for, but he does not want to know, nor should he know, any incentive bonuses in the players' contract that are individual.

- O So, that is pretty much the individual and the agent?
- D The agent and between the front office
- O Are there any instances where that would come out? Word does get around through locker rooms, saying I have got a \$10,000 bonus right here
- D Basically not, because the coaches are not in the locker rooms very often. We meet the players. When I was a coach, we met them in the classroom. You teach them on the field and then they go into individual meetings with their individual coaches. Basically that kind of talk does not come up because there is a lot of lying between agents and between players. If I am a receiver and you are a receiver and I'm telling you I have a \$10,000 bonus if I make 30 catches that year and you do not have it in yours, then there is going to be some animosity there. You are going to go to your agent and demand that. So, players do not really talk much about their contracts. You can see those and you can get those and the public can get them, and sports writers can get them, but basically the incentives are not known by the assistant coaches or head coaches. There is a reason for that, which we talked about.
- O You were in charge of trading, too?
- D Well, basically what I did at Miami, I would be responsible for making sure that I knew every player on every NFL team. So if one of those came across a waiver wire or Al Davis called and said, "I want to trade you Neil Colsey for two number three's." Then I go into Don and say, "Here are my field evaluations of Neil Colsey. Here are the college evaluations for Neil Colsey coming out of Florida." Then Don would have his own impressions of the man because he played against him, talk to his offensive coaches about

Neil Colsey, talk to Bill Arnsparger, who was the defensive coordinator on what his thoughts were So, collectively you would get together and give the head coach all of the information you have and then Don Shula says, "Okay, here is what I want you to take back to Al Davis " Or, "I know Al Davis better than you do, I will make the deal," so he would make the deal Basically he would give me the parameters and I would make the trade

- O When you first started with Philadelphia in 1976, do you think the whole businesslike atmosphere was as developed as the time when you were with the Browns in 1983? You talked to other players in the earlier days, probably since the 1960's, who played professional football in the 1960's It did not seem like the players felt like it was a huge business apparatus as you see it today?
- D I think it was at the time, even when I first started in 1976 It was a business because the players knew they had to perform, or they had to get into their life's work, as I mentioned earlier The front office is the front office and the coaches and players are the coaches and players What people like Buddy Ryan tried to do at Philadelphia, my second trip, was to try to keep the coaches and players on one side and against the front office, and the owner, and the general manager Shula tried to bring it together, Vermeil tried to bring it together, and most of your successful coaches tried to bring that together and work as one big happy family Continuity and stability are two integral parts of a successful program Everyone in the organization must be on the same page
- O In your years with the Browns, Shottenheimer's team comes to mind That was the team that you helped draft?
- D Yes
- O The Great playoff with the 1985, 1986, and 1987 seasons What did you see in a lot of those players that you thought were good?
- D Basically what we did under Sam a couple times, we tried to reach too far We had a philosophy of taking the best player available, regardless of position, instead of taking the best athlete or a player at a particular position that maybe was not as good as a player in another position on the board You know, the two who I talk about a lot are Bruce Davis, who we drafted in the second round, a speedy wide receiver, and Keith Baldwin, who I labeled the best pure pass rusher that came out of college that year that most often haunted me We reached, in those instances, too high for those players If we would have taken them a little lower, they might have been better players With Sam we reached, with Marty, Marty and I had worked together when he was an assistant and we worked together closely Basically, they gave me the final decision on Webster Slaughter, for example, or a Chip Banks The scouting staff and I did most of the homework and the undercover work to get these players in There was a science to it

For Webster Slaughter, we had nine coaches or scouts see all eleven games Webster played his senior year. When it came down to picking and he was the best player up there we knew that we had to go with Webster Slaughter.

- O So by this time you were Vice President of player personnel? What was Art Modell like to work for?
- D Well, Art Modell was easy to work for, he paid plenty of money to his players. He paid his front office people. Art is and was a very involved owner. I like to compare him to Eddie DeBartolo as being just the opposite because Eddie DeBartolo hired people and let them make the final decisions and was more or less an absentee owner. Art Modell was at every single practice. He met with the head coach and the personnel director, if I was in town, daily after every practice. He was highly, highly involved with the day to day decisions. We had a great working relationship my first couple of years, and then he fired Sam. Marty came in and Marty and I worked together and it was at the point where we were speaking with Marty as head coach, and under me as personnel director. Then all of a sudden Art wanted to bring in some non-football people, in my opinion, to make football decisions.
- O What kind of people were they?
- D Ernie Accorsi, Paul Warfield, people like that who really did not work at the game of evaluating talent. They would go to a couple of all star games, they would watch a couple TV films, and all of a sudden they became experts on player personnel. My staff and I would go out and work 12 months of the year evaluating players. We would start with thousands of young people and bring them all the way to the end to the 300 people who we thought that we would put on our board the final draft day. Of those 300 or 320, we would probably only have 100 people that we thought were good enough if they were available to draft for the Cleveland Browns.
- O What do you think the best deal is that you made?
- D The best deal was probably the trade we made with the Chicago Bears for the USFL players. We had the draft in one day at the time, and we got down to the 10th, 11th, and 12th round and the coaches and Art, Ernie, and the rest of them had already left the room, and we made the decision to try to trade a couple of our late round picks because on our draft board there was nobody up there that we thought could play with the exception of one man from East Carolina, Ernie Byner. I had a scout by the name of Dave Beckman, who was pushing for Ernie from the third round on. We kept saying, "Dave, he will be there, he will be there later. Let's not use a high pick on him." So, I had Dave call the six teams that drafted ahead of us that year and only one team, the Bears, were interested in trading for their picks. They wanted immediate help. I did not think any immediate help was on the board with the exception of the people we had on the USFL board who

were presently playing in that league. I went to the telephone and we traded a ten, two 11's, and a 12th, for that season, for that draft, for their top three. We only had three draft choices in the USFL draft, which gave us a total of six picks in the supplemental draft

O So you traded the ones you picked up?

D We traded late round picks, a number 10, two 11's, and a 12, to Chicago, and we got their three top picks for the upcoming USFL draft

O That was what year?

D 1984

O That kind of worked out for you

D We had the one tenth pick, we got Byner, and with our three USFL picks we got Kevin Mack, Michael Johnson, and the little receiver, McNeil. We also signed Frank Minnefield that year. I went out and signed Frank Minnefield from the Arizona Ranglers. That, combined with the rest of the guys we drafted turned out to be a great class

O That was devised from the USFL Board?

D Yes

O What was the competition like going after that?

D Well, really it was not because we drafted from them. We had certain places where we picked. We could not get Reggie White, for example, because Philadelphia drafted ahead of us that year. It was just like going back in and drafting collegiate now. These players had the benefit of playing in the USFL and we had the benefit of watching these players on film and live. See, we treated the USFL just like we did the Canadian Football league, like we did major colleges. We knew eventually those kids would come back

O What is the big difference, do you think, between scouting college and scouting NFL, if there is any?

D Well, if you are a director of pro-personnel you get all the films sent to you, and you break down these films and write reports, then put your evaluations in the computer. You do not really have to go out and physically watch these kids perform. In college, you have to look at all the films or video tapes, but you also have to go out and watch them practice and look at all the films at the university's office. They do not send you that film, basically, like they do in the pro's

O If you look at the front office in general, what's your evaluation of the process in general

D If you have an owner like Al Davis, who came up through the coaching ranks, and through the playing ranks, and he is going to be the one to make your final decision on player personnel, and on what you pay a player, then I think that he should go ahead and do it. But there are not 28 Al Davis's in football knowledge wise. Most of the time you have people who have a lot of money or who are avid football fans, buy a club and now they hire people like Bill Walsh or Don Shula. They hired somebody to coach the football team. They will hire somebody else to bring in the players and evaluate the talent available, and then they will hire yet a third guy to negotiate player contracts. Basically that is what your most successful franchises have done. They let the football coaches coach, they let the general manager and/or the player personnel department choose their talent, and they let the people who negotiate contracts, negotiate their contracts.

O When you said before that Art Modell is a very involved owner, would you say that to be detrimental in cases?

D No question about it because he is down there every day and he becomes friendly with the players. That is all Art has. He does not have another business like Eddie has. He does not have other interests. Football is his life, and he puts too much pressure on himself to win, and consequently he has been impatient with coaches and players. The teams that have been most successful are those who have had the stability of an owner, a general manager, a head coach, and a player personnel staff.

O So the owners decision is more or less setting up this whole thing?

D Absolutely

O And not to get as heavily involved

D Wellington Mara from the New York Giants has been so successful over the years and a lot of people do not know who Wellington Mara is, but he hired George Young and then George Young hired Bill Parcells, and they went from there. Joe Robbie was never involved in football. I never saw him in two years at a practice. He hired Don Shula to do the coaching and the personnel work, and Joe Robbie ran the other end of it financially. So basically Bill Walsh is a general manager and a head coach. Eddie did not hire Bill Walsh's assistant coaches. He helped hire John McVay who has been an excellent general manager. Jim Mora at New Orleans, does the coaching and he works in personnel. I think Cleveland now is going to be very successful if they will let Bill Belichick and his staff evaluate the talent, make the football decisions, and if Art Modell can have patience with Bill and his staff, they are going to get that team back on top again.

O Do you think he will?

D I do not know I think that he has had a good start because he has said the right things Bill is an excellent coach and has an excellent young staff with him, and if he is allowed to make the decisions that a head coach has to make along with the personnel director, then I think they will be successful

O So you think the success of a franchise strictly depends on its coordination of administration?

D There is no question in my mind Look at Tampa Bay How many coaches and people have they gone through? Look at Green Bay, they just turned over their President because they did not get it done Phoenix was a volatile owner Indianapolis had an owner that moved out of town in the middle of the night So, they changed coaches and players, and people on a whim You cannot do that and be successful!

O If you could pick one moment or time out of your career, what would you think would stand above the rest?

D. As far as my career in football, there are a number of them I am not sure I could pick one I know that as a head coach, what we did at Adrian and what we accomplished, taking a losing program and starting a tradition that is still there today Another would be the first time I was ever at a pro-football camp as an assistant coach for the Philadelphia Eagles was really thrilling for me because I felt in my own mind that I had made that jump into the National Football League as a coach, which was my goal from the day that I got into coaching Those were two things probably that stick out in my mind more than anything because of the things we did well with all three of those teams was to me was always a team effort Even in Cleveland, I am not going to take all of the credit for Webster Slaughter, Don Rogers, Chip Banks, or the USFL trade without giving credit to the people on the staff and without the coaches whose cooperation we had to evaluate the talent with us If no one cares who gets the credit when you win, then it is going to be fine

O Any big influence?

D I think you could just tap about everybody I have worked with, I have learned from, so I do not think there would be a big influence You could probably go back to my father and my mother who were big influences in my life because they let me do the things I wanted to do They did not say, "You cannot play football," or, "You have to do this, or you have to do that " They were very flexible and they let me do my own thing I fell into an athletic career that has been good to me

O Thank you very much

D You are welcome

- →End of Interview