

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Major League Baseball

Andy Kosco

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Interviewed

by

James Manross

on

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INTERVIEWEE: ANDY KOSCO
INTERVIEWER: James Manross
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DATE: December 3, 1975

M: This is James Manross of the Oral History Program at Youngstown State University. The date is December 3, 1975. Tonight we are interviewing Mr. Andy Kosco, veteran major league ballplayer who has played for many a team in the major leagues.

Mr. Kosco, where is your family originally from?

K: Originally from Youngstown, Ohio, but I was raised in Struthers, Ohio.

M: What were your goals and ambitions when you were in high school?

K: In regards to sports--I'm sure this is the point you are trying to attain here--it was to be a good athlete, probably to make all-state or all-conference and things like this. I participated in all sports; baseball, basketball, football, and track. I thought football was my best sport upon graduation. My dad emphasized baseball a great deal and this is why I pursued this field.

M: How did you originally get signed for the major leagues?

K: I signed immediately upon graduation out of high school with the Detroit Tigers. A scout by the name of Cy Williams and also a fellow by the name of Chuck Perazich who was a writer for The Vindicator in Youngstown.

M: When you first joined the Tigers, what were your goals?

K: Well, again, there is only one goal I think when you sign with a professional baseball team, it is to reach the major leagues in, naturally, as short a period of time as

possible. My goals really weren't attained in that organization. I was traded to the Minnesota Twins and this is where I became a major league ballplayer in 1965.

M: Describe a typical day in the minor leagues in the early 1960's.

K: Well, it's kind of a tough question. I would say that the worst thing about playing--and I have to say the worst thing, and categorize it that way because of the fact that the travelling was very bad--was being on a bus similar to a present day school bus, and the meal money at that time for allowance for food was about \$3.50 a day. This included breakfast, dinner, lunch, and snacks, and what have you. So it was the thing that most of the money would come out of your pocket when you wanted to meet the needs of living. When you look back on it, the travelling was bad. The food allowance was bad, and also the playing conditions were bad. But you don't realize that when you're actually participating because all the players are going through the same thing.

M: What was the approximate salaries in minor league playing?

K: Well, it has gone from roughly about \$400 to \$500 a month just for the playing months, which would be a total of about four months. So you're talking anywhere from two or three thousand dollars maximum to about twelve or fifteen hundred dollars a month. So there is a big increase, but the economy has brought about this change.

M: Were you confident that you would make the major leagues?

K: Yes, this is something that never really entered my mind, a feeling of defeatism. I think that this had been instilled in me in high school by participating in sports and also through my father who was, like I mentioned, very instrumental in my reaching the major league level. But this is something I think all athletes should have. If there's any doubt in your mind, I don't think you'll ever reach the goal that you're striving for.

M: Were you happy with the Twins organization in the minors and with the Tigers?

K: Yes, very much so. Probably more so in the Minnesota Twins because they helped me attain the major league level. I think the reason why I was happier is because of the coaching that they had at that time. I thought well of the coaches. I think they were very instrumental not only in my attaining my goal, but they would help other ballplayers. As a matter of fact, even today I'm friends with all of the coaches that I had at that time.

M: Who were a couple of them?

K: Well, Cal Ermer was one who was considered for the Minnesota Twins as manager recently. He had managed the Minnesota Twins for a couple of years. Also, Billy Martin and Vern Morgan were coaches at that time. So, these are people whose names are prominent and were very instrumental.

M: When you first came to the majors in 1965, the Twins were in the pennant race; what were some of your memories of that race?

K: Well, the big thing about it is that I was really happy to be called up. I was called up in 1965. I was playing in Denver, Colorado, for the triple A farm team in 1965. They called me up and it was the first game in Cleveland. So I got to play close to home and family, and friends were able to watch my first ball game. My first ball game I hit a home run the first time against Sam McDowell. So I was really thrilled about that. That's one of the big things I remember about that. That is one of the big things I remember about that year.

The second thing was the close fight we had with the Chicago White Sox to win the pennant that year. I didn't hit very good for an average, but I had only played sparingly. It was something that was memorable to me to be able to play in the World Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers. It was something else that I'll never forget.

M: Oh, you played them in the Series?

K: Yes, we did.

M: I mean did you personally play them?

K: Well, I didn't get into any ball games, but I was able to participate from that standpoint. There are always ball players that don't play. I wasn't a regular like I mentioned, but I was there.

M: I didn't know that. That team pulled out a lot of late victories that year.

K: Oh, I couldn't come up with the stats on the records and the games they had won by one or two-run margins. I think this is the main reason why ball clubs win today; they can win the close ball games.

K: Was there unity in that pennant winning club?

M: Yes, definitely. I think, again, this is another example of a team that wins. For example, I played with the

Cincinnati Reds, and they probably are the finest close-knit ball club that I have ever participated on, not only on the field, but off of the field which is very important. Things like this are important to a ball-player when he gets out of the game because he can identify with the players later. He can call them or run into them any time and the feelings are still there. The memorable occasions are all brought up again, so it's great. It's really something that what it amounts to is a bunch of men playing a kid's game. But it's something that you really enjoy.

M: Your manager was Sam Mele?

K: Sam Mele was the manager? Well, yes and no. I can say no because I didn't play a lot after coming off the years I had in minor leagues. But again, we had won the pennant. He had some problems the following year with the owner of the ball club, Calvin Griffith. This is what ball-players don't like to see. If they feel the manager can't run the ball club solely, they sort of lose a little bit of respect for the man. I think this is what had materialized here. Some good feeling and respect was lost for Sam Mele. He only lasted one more year and then he was fired.

M: Griffith ran about almost every team Minnesota has had?

K: Yes, I think when you run into a sole owner of a ball club an owner has a tendency to want to run the ball club, to run the show himself. This is true with other ones. Charley Finley is another example, but he has the players and he has won. I'm not saying you win or lose because of an individual like this, but it's happening quite a bit in baseball and in football and other sports.

M: What kind of people were like Harmon Killebrew, Bob Allison, and the veterans in that club?

K: Well, first take Harmon Killebrew. I would have to say Harmon Killebrew is probably one of the finest gentlemen that I have met in baseball. I don't have to talk about his baseball credentials because they are great. They're right up at the top with any. Again, it's important to be a good individual and people look up to you. An example of that is the fact that he was finished with the Minnesota Twins, but the Kansas City Royals thought enough of him that he would be an example for their ball club, a leader, and this is what they went after. They went after, and signed Harmon, and he helped them play well. He contributed a great deal, not in average in home run production, but for the other ballplayers.

M: Who, if anybody else, from that club stands out in your mind?

K: Well, Jim "Mudcat" Grant was on that ball club, and Jim Kaat, who you had mentioned is still playing, and won twenty ball games in the last couple of years. Earl Battey was catching, and Zoilo Versalles was the Most Valuable Player that year. Rich Rollins, Bernie Allen, Jimmy Hall, Tony Oliva, and Caesar Tovar were on the ball club, and Carew had come up at the end of the season that year.

M: Were there any of them that you were really close with?

K: Well, yes. I would say Rich Rollins, Bernie Allen, and another fellow by the name of Gary Roggenburk, who all are from the Cleveland area. We knew each other before we went into baseball. I think you just have a tendency to keep that friendship going.

M: What was your reaction when you went to the Yankees in 1968?

K: It was kind of a difficult trade for me because of the fact that my family had liked Minnesota so doggone much and I was experiencing the first trade on a major league level. But one thing good is you seem to get over it right away. I went to spring training and I was a regular. This is something, again, that you strive for, to be a regular on a ball club. So after you've gotten over the initial shock of being traded and you see that you're playing regular and you're doing well, then the trade is just like moving from one house to another, really.

M: Is there anything in particular that you remember about that year?

K: Yes, I thought the biggest thing about that, not only in performance, is I've had a pretty good year for the amount of time that I played. The biggest thing about it was I had the opportunity to play with Mickey Mantle his last year. I thought this was one of the highlights of my career.

M: Who do you remember most of the Yankees in that year?

K: Oh, naturally, Mickey Mantle was on the ball club. Elston Howard was on that ball club. Whitney Ford was still playing. Tom Tresh was playing. Gene Michael was on the ball club. Bill Robinson, Roy White, and Bobby Mercer had come up at the end of the season.

M: Who were you closest to in that ball club?

K: Gene Michael because of the fact that he is from Canton. He was a local.

Surprisingly, I had gotten along really well with Mickey Mantle. I was a newcomer to the ball club. I was much, much younger than he was. But then again, he was the super individual off the field that he was on. I think he helped everybody out. Another fellow was Joe Pepitone, who was really, really great for the game and he was a great ballplayer

M: What were your memories of when you were traded for Mike Kekich? What was your reaction to that?

K: Well, I had taken a lot of ribbing, since you had brought that up, because he was involved in that wife swapping deal with Fritz Peterson. Ralph, who was the manager of the Yankees at that time, came over to me and he blamed me for that. He said, "See what you caused. You caused this thing." But I didn't think about that too much. I knew Mike Kekich at that time was probably in the same situation I was. It was his first or second year in the major leagues. He was with the Los Angeles Dodgers. He didn't think too much about it. They had asked me if I would accept the trade and I said yes. I think the reason for that was I hit 24 or 25 balls over 400 feet that were just outs in Yankee Stadium. There was 457 in left center. So going to Dodger Stadium was somewhat of a help to me for hitting runs.

M: As it was, you did hit nineteen home runs.

K: Yes, so the following year I did lead the Dodgers in home-runs and RBI's. So it was a beneficial move for me.

M: I might add that when you were in the minors you hit two years in a row there before you came up here, over thirty home runs each year.

K: Yes, I was fortunate, I guess, in the minor leagues to do that well.

M: Does anything in particular stand out in your mind playing for Walter Alston?

K: I think the way he handles a ball club, his mannerisms, remind you really of a schoolteacher. He doesn't get upset about anything. He's very calm. He's very subtle about everything that he does. He is able to handle ballplayers with twenty-five different personalities as you could find on a ball club. He knows what he wants and he just goes about it and does it.

M: Who were you close with in the Dodgers those two years, anybody?

K: Jimmy Lefbure was one of my closest friends and Wes Parker was the other one of the Los Angeles Dodgers.

M: Wes Parker, I met personally. He was really a gentleman.

K: Yes, he certainly is.

M: You had been traded to Milwaukee for Al Downing; what were your memories of your year in Milwaukee?

K: Right. It seems like every year that I was traded somehow it turned out to be on an outstanding ball club. That year that I was traded for Al Downing, the year before that is, he had won five ball games with Milwaukee, so the following year I believe he won nineteen ball games and came in second or third in the Cy Young Award. Well, it was right there. It's amazing, but again, both ball clubs had benefited, I think. Milwaukee was looking for a right-handed pinch hitter and a player to play against left-handers, which I had done solely with the Milwaukee Brewers. The Los Angeles Dodgers were looking for a left-handed pitcher to go along with a lot of the young ball-players that they had finally brought along: Ted Sizemore, Bill Buckner, Steve Garvey, and guys like that.

M: Did you enjoy your year at Milwaukee?

K: No, not really, because of the fact that . . . I'm not saying that I really didn't enjoy it. I enjoy playing baseball and I enjoy playing in the major leagues, naturally, but as compared to the other seasons, the reason I didn't is we had finished right at the bottom. I think when you don't play well and you finish twenty or thirty ball games out it makes the season a very long and dragging season. All the years ahead of that I was either one or two in the standings with the team. It makes the season go that much faster and enjoyable.

M: In 1972 you ended up with the Red Sox?

K: Yes, in 1972 I held out with the Milwaukee Brewers and they frowned on this, it seemed like, so I was traded to the California Angels to start with. Half way through the season Boston was fighting for the pennant like they had done this year. They had bought Deron Johnson from the Chicago White Sox. Well, this was the thing, I was having a good year with the California Angels, and consequently, they needed a right-handed playing outfielder and first baseman so they purchased me from the California Angels with about two and one half months to go in the season.

M: That race wasn't done, I remember, until the next to the last game of the season, Detroit and Boston.

K: Yes, it was the next to the last in Detroit. As a matter of fact, we went into that stadium with a half a game lead and we ended up losing by half a game, so it really was a heartbreaker.

M: They have that big giant of a tiger outside the ball park.

K: Yes, exactly. There were some great memories up until this time.

M: Who were you close to on the Red Sox team?

K: Well, one player that stands out more than anybody else was a fellow by the name of Phil Gagliano, because I had played with him before. I was new on the Boston ball club. I didn't really know anybody, so to speak, to really be close in that short of a period of time. But, like I said, you had a tendency to get along with everybody. That's no problem, but to really get close to somebody is a different story. This is usually built up over a year or two period.

M: In 1973 and 1974 you spent most of those two years with the Reds?

K: Yes. In 1973 and 1974 I was with the Cincinnati Reds. As a matter of fact, Phil Gagliano and myself were both traded or sold to the Cincinnati Reds. Again, I think we were involved in a youth movement. The Cincinnati Reds turned out to be the best ball club I had ever played for because of the players and the way we had participated on that ball club.

M: First of all, in 1973, in my opinion, the Reds were probably by far the best team in baseball, yet the Mets knocked them off in the playoffs, which in my opinion, is something against the playoff system because the best team may not win.

K: Yes, that's true because we did have the best record in baseball. Again, we weren't in the World Series. You know it's a funny thing, in a short series anything can possibly happen. Just like Pittsburgh, for example, as good of a ball club as they have, they looked terrible, and so did Oakland. In a short series anything can possibly happen in a playoff like that.

I think the 1973 Cincinnati Reds really are no different than what they are today. They are just a fine ball club. The ballplayers they have on that ball club are the best in baseball.

M: What happened with that brawl between the Mets and the Reds?

K: Well, this is when Pete Rose had slid into second base and had knocked Bud Harrelson over, who is much smaller in size and in weight. Naturally, being in New York, the fans were going to get on Pete Rose for being abusive to a smaller individual. This is the way Pete plays. He goes hard into second base. I don't care if Frank Howard was at second base, he would still try to knock him over. This is the way the game is played. You don't go out of your way to hurt somebody or to knock somebody over. This wasn't Pete's intention at all, it was just to break up a double play. Consequently, he did break up the double play. The guy was safe at first and if the next guy hits a home run we're back in the ball game. This is the way the game is played. He plays it properly.

M: When Sparky took all of the guys off of the field, were you guys really leary of those fans?

K: Yes, we were because I was in right field when this had happened playing that ball game. Pete was playing left field. I remember talking to him, "Geez, Pete, I'll tell you one thing, I wouldn't go over there. I mean once you say something to Sparky you know we'll get off the field here." Well, knowing Pete, he didn't want to just let it go and play over a little bit further hoping they wouldn't reach him with any bottles or anything being thrown. But Sparky came out and called everybody off of the field. You know it's funny about that. I'd like to elaborate on this a little more. We had a little plan. We were getting beat at about seven to one at that time and it was late in the game. It was about the fifth or sixth inning. We thought that once we went back out we would get all the guys in the bullpen. The bullpen was located right in left field behind Pete Rose. We thought we would have them load up their pockets with beer bottles, empty beer bottles. Then when they went out and the game resumed, they were to throw the bottles out at Pete to land behind him and they would, consequently, call the game off and it would be forfeited. We would then get the win. But what had happened once they had gone out of the bullpen, there were twenty or thirty cops out there stationed around the bullpen to try to refrain the people from throwing anything. It really didn't have a chance to happen.

M: Are there any moments that you had with the Reds by winning games that year, those two years?

K: I had seven game winning hits with the Reds that year in 1973. I would say two games that I could remember really good offhand would be I hit a three-run homer off of Steve Carleton when we were down in the seventh inning. Prior to that, I had already struck out two times. With the home run we ended up winning, for it

was the three-run homer to win the ball game for us.

About three weeks later, I came up in the ninth inning. I pinch hit against Bob Gibson and I hit a home run off of him to win the ball game for us. The other thing, as long as we're talking about that, is the second game of the play-offs in 1973. We had only had two hits off of Matlack. I had the only two hits, so this was something I felt good about.

M: I feel I have to ask this. In 1974, it was reported that you threw the first punch in the famous Pirates-Reds Brawl. What exactly happened there?

K: I don't know if I threw the first punch or not because it started and then it had stopped. I don't know what kind of punching actually went on, but everything had ceased and we were going back to the dugout and Sparky Anderson had turned around and unintentionally had stepped on Ed Kirkpatrick's foot. Well, Kirkpatrick, thinking he had done it on purpose, pushed Sparky down. Well, being closest to Sparky at that time, I grabbed Kirkpatrick and I hit him. Then everything started over again. It erupted into a fight for probably about fifteen minutes. There were a few players that were pretty badly bruised, but nobody was seriously hurt, actually. The incident carried on a little bit too long. I was ejected out of the ball game along with Ed Kirkpatrick and Sparky Anderson. It was kind of a hectic day. I think I probably suffered more than anything because I had pulled a back muscle and it had just progressively gotten worse. Eventually, I was operated on.

M: You were out for the rest of the season then weren't you?

K: Yes, I was.

M: I was at that double-header by the way. My two memories of it, for one, was Pedro Borbon biting Daryl Patterson. They had to give him a tetanus shot and Bob Prince, subsequently, called him Count Dracula. Borbon was going to beat up Prince, he said. Prince told him that Stargell said it's not me, because Stargell was so much bigger. My other memory of the game is after the brawl had started and they were fighting and everything, about five minutes later we were down the right field line and here comes Ramon Hernandez meandering out of the bullpen about five minutes later. He didn't really want to get involved. He was just wandering down. For some reason that cracked me up at the time. That brawl did go out to spur Pittsburgh on.

K: Yes, it did.

M: Do you think a brawl can help teams?

K: Well, I don't know, it could. It could for that day. Now whether it would affect somebody for any length of time or period of time I don't know. I don't really believe so, because of the fact that you play every day. At any given day, a team can beat somebody. But they have a good ball club. This is one thing. When they get beat, they get beat because of their defense. It's pretty hard to shut the Pirates out because they have a great offensive hitting ball club.

M: Would you say Borbon was the number one brawler on the Reds?

K: Oh geez, yes. By far, he just enjoyed doing that kind of stuff immensely. He sort of looked for fights. There are a few ballplayers like that. I think he just liked to bite people, really.

M: What was it like to play on a club with Pete Rose?

K: Fantastic. I don't think enough could be said about a player of Pete Rose's caliber. I think of all of the good ballplayers I have played with, with Killabrew, Colivitos, and Drysdale, and Mantle, and everyone like that, I think they're fine ballplayers and they are. They're just great ballplayers, superstars, but I think Pete Rose typifies what baseball's all about. He's 34 or 35 years old right now and you would still think he's sixteen or seventeen years old the way he plays. Whether you're getting beaten fourteen to one or you're winning fourteen to one or it's a close game, he plays the same continuously. He never quits and it's good for the ball club. A fellow like him should never be cut in salary. I think and I know he makes a lot of money. He deserves a lot of money. If somebody deserves \$200,000, he does. If it's more, then he does deserve that also. But with his type of playing and what he does for fans, this would be the ballplayer I'd want my children to go and see. I think it's good to take somebody to watch a player like him perform.

M: How did it feel going to the minor league last year after all those years in the majors?

K: Well, not too good. In fact, I don't think I would have gone down to play in the minor leagues had it not been that I had gotten hurt in spring training. They had told me to go on down and play in their minor league farm team to get back into shape, because the beginning of the season you have an awful lot of off days because of the cold weather. So they have a two or three-day space between the ball games to allow for make-ups and things

like that and the cold weather. So I agreed to go down there. I only played for about three weeks and I broke my wrist playing first base down there. So I was out of the game for the full season.

M: Had the minor leagues changed since you played down there in the first place?

K: Yes, two things that I had mentioned earlier. The traveling has gotten much better because of the fact you travel by plane now.

M: Oh, really.

K: Secondly, the meal money has gotten better and the playing fields have gotten better. Everything has gotten better. I think, again, this is just the general trend of the country. But it's still not on the level of the major leagues. No matter what you say and how you try to compare the two, there is no comparison. I think the same holds true for the ballplayers.

M: What is the meal money down there now?

K: The meal money is seven dollars a day. So there is an increase, but not much of an increase. So again, most of the money comes out of your pocket.

M: What are your plans for next year?

K: Well, I don't know. I'm going to have to see. Usually at the beginning of the year, I'll sit down with the Philadelphia Phillies. I'll go into Philadelphia and talk to the management. I'll see what they have to say in their contract and their plans and what the plans of the ball club are, what players they have, what trades they have made, just sit down and hash everything over. Then I'll make my decision.

M: Do you feel baseball talent is getting too diluted because of expansion and other things?

K: No, no, I definitely don't. I'll tell you it was very good to be down and play in the triple A just from the standpoint of seeing what type of ballplayers they have coming up. I think that the ballplayers in triple A ball are just outstanding. I think that they can use another couple teams in expansion. I think it wouldn't saturate the ball clubs at all. I think the ballplayers today are much better because they specialize. You know it's just like in football, you have an offense, defense, kicking and receiving, and things like that. This is what baseball does. Baseball players usually don't perform in all of your other sports in high school. They

just play baseball, and consequently, they excel much better.

An example is swimming. You know records are being broken all of the time. You would never think anything of pole vaulting or skating or anything. This is why athletes, overall, are much better.

M: Do you feel keeping a player in the minor leagues hurts some of the players talent in baseball?

K: Well, this could discourage some. Some baseball players, if they are two-sport athletes, will have a chance of coming out of college immediately and getting a large bonus out of, we'll say, basketball or football. They figure, well, I'll take the money right now and I'll go with the football or basketball. In baseball the bonuses are at a minimum today; you have to go into the minor league system and participate one, two, three, four or five years, maybe, and there's still no guarantee of making it. A lot of players don't want to waste their time because they have their degree.

M: How do you feel about the D. H. [designated hitter] and changes in the rules?

K: Well, I don't like it. I personally don't like the D. H. for the fact that I think it has changed baseball too much. It has taken the strategy out of baseball. A good example is this year in the World Series when Cincinnati used eight pitchers. This would have never happened if the D. H. was in effect because of the fact that you would have had your pitcher not hitting. You would have had a player just hitting solely in the pitcher spot and there wouldn't be a necessity to change pitchers like that, maybe not that many, anyhow, maybe one or two times. Again, I think the Boston Red Sox also used four pitchers that day. So, again, you just wouldn't see it. It takes the strategy away, like I mentioned. It takes away the Monday quarterback, so to speak, from the fans. They always second-guess the manager. Here they just sit back and watch the ball game.

M: Do you think major league players are overpaid?

K: No, I really don't because of the fact that they are professional. They're something like an actor who is proficient in his line of work. I'm not trying to knock a profession or anything like that. For example, if an individual wants to become a doctor, he can if he applied himself properly and his salary would be unlimited. Whereas in baseball, you just can't say I'm going to go out and become a baseball player, because only a very few ever make it even to the minor leagues. So this isn't

something that you can plan for and almost be guaranteed of getting there. No, so I think they're doing something. The ball clubs are making money because they charge people to come in and watch somebody perform. This is the reason why fans are there.

Some of the ball clubs have tarten turf like Pittsburgh does. There's astro turf, then there's a new type of all-American turf or something like that. Kansas City has it now. But they all vary. Ballplayers speak both good and bad regarding the astro turf. Myself, I do not like it because of the fact that this, again, has changed the game. I think the general feeling of all ballplayers is that they don't like it. It has brought the player that can really run and do somewhat less into the game. You play deeper to cut off the ball from hitting the astro turf and going to the fence, cutting off doubles and triples. So you have to play deeper to try to hold these players to singles. The ball shoots through the infield much faster, consequently, you play deeper in the infield.

There are a lot of advantages that have changed the game. Some advantages would be the fact that there are very few rainouts now. There's very little slipping and something like this. But I think this is part of the game. You know, if the player slips, the other player has that much of an opportunity of slipping up if he wants to. People talk about the Boston ballpark. They differ and have a separate feeling. I think this is good. You go into that ballpark and you have to play the obstacles. This is why I hate to see true dimensions and standard dimensions in all ballparks. I think when you have some kind of a short fence in right or short field in center or left this is good.

M: It adds color to the game?

K: Yes, it does. It definitely adds something to the game.

M: Which baseball team would you rate the greatest of all you played for? Was it the Reds, which you played on?

K: Yes, definitely. Yes, there's no question about the Cincinnati Reds, not because they won, they won because they were good.

M: Who was the toughest pitcher you ever hit against, anyone in particular?

K: Yes, I could probably name a few of them. Tom Seaver would naturally be one. Jim Palmer is another. I hit against Don Drysdale when I played against him when I was in minor leagues in the same league. Bob Gibson was also somebody very tough. Sam McDowell, before he

had gotten out of baseball, I thought was probably the toughest left-handed pitcher that I can remember.

M: What do you feel you really could have done if you had had a chance to play full-time, regular, 150 game seasons?

K: Well, I was given that opportunity, I guess, on different occasions, but for some reason I had gotten hurt. That shelved me for weeks or a month or what have you, so I never did get the opportunity. I always thought that I'd be able to hit at least 25 home runs and drive in anywhere from 80 to 100 runs. I had always done this for the amount of time that I had played. I think the more you play the better the chances you have of excelling and reaching plateaus like this. I had always done it in the minor leagues even though it was different. But then, again, in the minor leagues you're playing against the same type or caliber ballplayers as yourself.

M: Who was the greatest natural, regular hitter you ever saw in your years?

K: Johnny Bench, I would say. Johnny Bench was a natural hitter because he doesn't work at it. For somebody that doesn't work at something and is as proficient as he is, I would consider him one of the best I have seen. The other one would be Tony Oliva. These are probably the finest hitters that I have ever seen, natural hitters. I haven't played with Rod Carew lately, Yastrzenski, and people like this. I know Pete Rose works at it, he works hard. He's out every day working hard. This is his image to work hard. He just doesn't get enough work. But I think that those two would probably be the best, Johnny Bench and Tony Oliva for natural hitters.

M: Pete Rose said that he would walk through hell draped with gasoline on him for Sparky Anderson. Did you feel that way when you were with the Reds?

K: Well, I don't know if I would put it that way. I think he got the players to like him. There are two things about managing: One is the fact that you have to be able to cope with twenty-five different personalities. Secondly, is the fact that you have to be able to handle pitchers. Now, he did both of these as well, if not better, than most. This is why he had so much success and this is why the ballplayers respected the man. It's hard to attain something like that, that kind of respect from men. I think when you do this, ballplayers would do anything for you.

M: Who was the greatest defensive ballplayer you ever saw?

- K: Davey Concepcion is probably one of the best defensive men I have ever seen for a shortstop position. Brooks Robinson, I would say, is probably the best defensive ballplayer at third in the infield that I have seen. Johnny Bench catching, there's no question about it. I think he's the best ever who played. I haven't seen the ones before him, but of present-day players I don't think that anybody is even in his class. In out-field would be Carl Yastrzemski.
- M: What was your most satisfying season in the majors or the happiest?
- K: Two, I would say 1969, when I had led the Dogers in home runs and RBI's, would have been the first. My second would have been in 1973 with the Cincinnati Reds when we had gotten into the play-offs and I had had a pretty good year. There I hit .280 and I had a lot of game-winning hits.
- M: What is the one game that you remember the most?
- K: Right offhand would be the first game against Sam McDowell where I hit the home run.
- M: If you had to do it over again, would you do anything differently?
- K: Yes, I would. I would have gotten my education out of the way first. I've been going one quarter a year since I've been playing ball and some quarters I didn't even get a chance to go because I played winter ball over in Puerto Rico or in Venezuela or in Florida or someplace like that. It had delayed my education. This would be the thing, if I had to pick one thing right now.
- M: There has been a lot of publicity through books like "Ball Four"; do you feel this is overrated and it's over exaggerated and it's bad for baseball?
- K: Yes, I think it's over exaggerated, I think it was blown out of porportion a lot. It really ridiculed some good ballplayers. I guess that you can say just about everyone has a skeleton in their closet. You see a fellow like Mickey Mantle that was sort of a put down, I know my wife had read the magazine one day in a doctor's office--I think it came out in Look, if I'm not mistaken--and she said this is one thing that probably disturbed her more than anything was the fact that as much as she felt about Mickey Mantle she had to read this kind of stuff in an article. I think this is bad. I think it was bad for baseball. This is why you don't see real negative things coming out anymore, since the book of "Ball Four" with Jim Bouton.

M: What does the future hold for Andy Kosco?

K: Well, again, I don't know. You have mentioned to me what I planned on doing before?

M: I mean after your playing career?

K: Oh, well, in that respect, I want to go to law school. Now, whether I will, I don't know. I think the examination, the LSAT, will make a big decision for me. I have a few other things I'm pursuing. I could teach and things like this, but presently I'm just going to continue in baseball.

M: One last question: What was your reaction to the famous interference play of the 1975 series with Ed Armbrister?

K: Well, I thought he interfered. When they showed the replays, it was obvious. I know there was a lot of animosity about the play, but anytime a batter goes out in front of the plate that much, it naturally has to be interference; you block the home plate umpire so he doesn't see it. I think the other umpires in the field were just hesitant on overruling him. But I think something like this should have been done. They just didn't want to cause any real problems. I think they let it get out of hand.

I had been in this situation where I had bunted the ball and tried to stand in front of the catcher. I don't know if it's intentional, but it's just a reaction that takes place. So there was no question about it and I'm sure this is a feeling that most people have.

M: Thank you, Mr. Kosco, and I hope to be seeing you with the Phillies next year and God bless you.

K: Thank you, Jim.

END OF INTERVIEW