

Gary Clark

INTERVIEWERS: Andrew Barksdale, Brian Wertz, Rhett Williams

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Gary Clark, Athletic Director, Furman University

DATE: 2008

LOCATION: Dr. Clark's Furman office

SUBJECT: Integration and racial issues at Furman from the 1960s to the Present

EDITOR: Anna McDanal – August 5th, 2010

EDITOR: Dr. Courtney Tollison – August 8th, 2010

Time Code

Minutes 0-5

Discussion of racial issues in the late 60s: playing basketball at Furman; the differences in racial issues and how they were viewed in Chicago as compared with Greenville, South Carolina; Clyde Mays

Minutes 5-10

Continued discussion on the earliest integrated sports teams at Furman: the *Paladin*, racial incidents at Furman in the late 1960s; coaches on the early integrated teams; list of several of the earliest African-American basketball players at Furman, included Joe Bronson; Frank Selvy; Joe Williams

Minutes 10-15

Joe Williams; process of handling racial issues with the press; social life on campus for African-American students at Furman in the late 1960s

Minutes 15-20

Recruiting African-American players in the late 1960s; Louisiana state law that would not allow their colleges to play teams with African American players on them; integration issues in various universities throughout the Southeast

Minutes 20-25

Process of acceptance for integrated teams; recruiting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and athletic recruiting at Furman in 2004; dealing with affirmative action at Furman; Coach Jeff Jackson and Dr. Sam Dickson, first Africa-American coach of the women's basketball team at Furman

Minutes 25-31

Affirmative action and the hiring process for new coaches at Furman; Larry Davis; percentage of African-Americans at Furman and on athletic teams in the early 2000s

Field Notes

Rhett Williams

May 19, 2006

Question 1:

- 48,000 approx. population of his town when he finished high school in 1970
- Integration caused separation of high schools into upper and lower classmen

- Recruitment of Clyde Mays from Beck, HS from Louie Goldin

Question 2:

- Integration was very second nature to him, “dumbfounded” him and others some problems they heard of others having with integration

Question 3-4:

- Not that big to the team, cohesive unit of players
- Most incomers already played at integrated schools

Question 5-7:

- There was questioning of validity of scores by students and faculty
- Created great discussion in places like the ‘Paladin’
- Coaches very impartial.... Joe Brunson 68-70, Lisco Thomas 69-71, DJ Jackson, Bernard Collier, M. Call
- Everyone already integrated, more culture issues with hair and dress than anything else
- Sometimes more difficult for non athletes

Question 8:

- To his knowledge as a player.... Only the best players for the job were ever recruited... no discrimination by coaching staff

Question 9-10:

- Military schools had the toughest times integrating, the elite schools W&M, Davidson, etc were even later
- By '78 all playing fields level for recruiting
- SES makes it hard to continually diversify the pool of candidates at Furman
- Latest job offers a 50/50 pool of candidates

Overall, there were no hindrances to the interview. It was a quiet atmosphere with no interruptions. He answered all questions without exception.

Transcript

BARKSDALE: You came to Furman from Chicago, and I was wondering what the differences were in view of race between at home in Chicago and when you came to Furman.

DR. CLARK: Well, in fact, it was interesting. In growing up in, actually a suburb south of Chicago, Chicago Heights, Illinois. It was a community of about 45-48,000, and at that time the three major racial groups were probably the Caucasians, blacks, and Hispanics, and I would guess that the breakdown was right at fifty percent white in our community, thirty-five percent black and fifteen percent Hispanic. That's, again, a long memory, so it could have shifted three or four percentage points one way or the other.

The biggest difference, I think, in coming down to South Carolina, to Greenville, was the school situation. Of course, being eighteen and just finishing high school, you were very aware of that, and in looking at what's going on in the community. In the community we grew up in, and again, that's in 1970 when I finished high school, so between '66, '64 really, and '70 there was a tremendous amount of activity within the country.

The Civil Rights Movement, obviously, and those things going on, and a part of that, a big part of that, was the busing issues all over the country in order to achieve integration into the public school systems. Where we grew up the way they approached that, the high school actually was not large enough for the high school population, but rather than build a second high school in the community, what they ended up doing was building a campus for the ninth and tenth graders about ten miles outside of town itself. So all of the ninth and tenth graders bused out to the new campus for high school. All of the eleventh and twelfth graders in the community went to the older high school campus in town, and so the community ratio, integration ratios, remained constant then. So you didn't have to worry about, do we have enough of this group or enough of that group from one campus to the other, and so that was very different.

Then coming down to Greenville at that time, and coming down to play basketball, one of the guys that I got to know right away was a year younger than I was, a guy named Clyde Mays who ended up coming to Furman the following year as a freshman, and Clyde is an African-American gentleman. He went to Beck High School through the tenth grade and they had won the black state championship. His coach, Louie Golden, a much-celebrated and decorated high school coach here in South Carolina; [he] had coached at Riverside High School-coached the boys for many years, and he's now actually the girls coach. He came out of retirement to coach the girls at Southside High School, and he was, obviously, a younger coach at that point in time, early in his career, and got to know Clyde from playing at the Y, because we were recruiting him here at Furman. He was one of the first guys I met when I got down here, and he had just finished his junior year at Wade Hampton High School, and that was the first year of integration in the public high schools here in Greenville, or at least in a large manner. We obviously went out and watched him his senior year, and it was different. I mean, just the newness, the uniqueness of that. The acceptance was a very new sort of...I mean, it was just second nature, having grown up in a very integrated community, that was very second nature to me. To see these issues and questions, I mean, you saw it on television, but to really be here and experience that was really a very different circumstance.

BARKSDALE: When you went back home to Chicago Heights to talk to your family about your college days, what were their reactions to the racial stories, or the racial differences, you talked about?

DR. CLARK: Well, I think that, yeah, there certainly was kind of dismay, surprise. I played basketball in high school, as I said the high school was heavily integrated. We had two white guys and eleven or twelve black guys on our team, so it wasn't a case where, you know, you were separated in any way and that sort of thing. So talking with those guys, too, as you come back and visit, and want to know, how are things going, how's basketball, you kind of talk about that sort of thing. Really dumbfounded, I think,

is the best way to describe it. It was just so foreign and different than what was the circumstance there.

WERTZ: Okay, your next question would be: if any of your Caucasian teammates here at Furman were upset about the integration of African-Americans, or playing on the same court with African-Americans?

DR. CLARK: Yeah, that's a good question. I don't think so. I think it was a big adjustment for some of our older teammates because we did have some teammates who had played in South Carolina. And as seniors in college when I was a freshman, they really went through high school playing in a segregated high school. They were on all-white teams, only played against other white teams and so forth, but for the most part, my teammates had played on integrated team. I didn't get any sense that that was a big adjustment or any real issue for the teammates.

WERTZ: Our next question is: if there were any certain racial incidents that occurred when you were competing at Furman, whether it was on the field or off the field and how you handled them, if you can recall any.

DR. CLARK: You know, I don't know that I can actually recall any specific racial incidents. You know, again, I'm sure there were comments made. I know there were fans that wrote letters. There were those kinds of things that occurred. [They] occurred not just here, of course, [but] all over the country at that time, but I really don't recall a specific circumstance. There was...the only thing that came close to that, there was a student who wrote to The Paladin at the time questioning whether some of the basketball players should be at Furman at that time, given their board scores and some things of that sort. The one or two students that they questioned were African-American, and so it was a very kind of narrow view of the world that was...and I can't remember the details of what the letter said. It was just, I remember kind of in general connotation, that it was a very narrow view of the world at the time, and I do remember that we were upset about it. [We] got angry about it, responded via letter to the editor, to the paper and that sort of thing as well, but again, that's about the closest thing to any kind of incident that I really do remember.

WERTZ: You played basketball with Clyde Mays, who would be the first African-American basketball player. . .no? Joe Bronson would be. Sorry. So you started right at the...Furman had integrated right before you came here. What was your coaches on your team...how did they handle the situation? Did they treat you and the African-Americans just the same way? Was it a fair playing field for everybody, or was there partial to, you know, someone versus the other?

DR. CLARK: You know, that's interesting, and I'd say right off the bat that it was very impartial. If they got onto us, they got onto all of us. If they were giving us some kind of praise, then it came to everybody. But it is interesting. You mentioned Joe Bronson was the first African-American athlete at Furman, was a basketball player, and he was here from the fall of '68 through graduation in June of '70, and was a junior college transfer.

[He] was here for two years, and then Lisco Thomas arrived the next year. [He] was a junior college transfer, so he was here from '69 through '71. The fall that I came, in '70, we had two additional junior college transfers, D.J. Jackson and Bernard Collier, who came in that fall as well. The integration began, and then the following year, you mentioned, Clyde came in in that class, and then Michael Hall from Atlanta was a 6'4" wing player. Clyde, of course, was a 6'9" post player, and then we had a 7'1" post player from Columbus, Georgia, Fessor Leonard. Then we also had an additional junior college transfer that came in that year, a guy named Roy Simpson, who came in from Junior College, was a 6'9" post player as well.

As I said, from that point forward, there really wasn't any discussion or records...I shouldn't say records weren't kept. They certainly were, but in terms of keeping score, so to speak, early on when the integration began, a lot of people were very concerned about how many black guys versus how many white guys are on the team, are on the floor at the same time, and I would say that was never an issue here at Furman with our team or with our coaches. Frank Selvy was the coach that recruited Joe Bronson and Lisco Thomas, and then Joe Williams came in the fall that I did as a freshman, and he had just come off of the national championship game. He was coach at Jacksonville University. Ardis Gilmore was one of the players he had at Jacksonville, who later on became one of the all-time fifty greatest NBA players, seven foot center, and so forth. They had gotten beaten in the finals by UCLA, and then he came to Furman, like, two days later, and was coach here. So once again, he had been involved on a national basis and the kind of having sort of quota of a particular number of white players, black players, that sort of thing, was never an issue from that standpoint.

WILLIAMS: Nowadays, a lot of times when you play for baseball, they would address certain issues like gambling or certain issues that were popular in the press. Like the media would ask questions, you aren't allowed to accept any donations or anything, so it seems like at that time...did any of your coaches give speeches, or would they, did they address the issue and say if you were approached by media or anything like that, about the integration issue, or Joe Bronson or any of the, Clyde Mays or any of the first people? I mean, did they ever give you any of the talks or advice on how to cope with that, because I know in the press it was kind of a popular idea at the time.

DR. CLARK: In fact, thinking back, I don't recall any specific instructions, and it's funny: to the guys on the team, all of that hubbub and issue would seem kind of silly, to be quite honest. As I said, most all of us, particularly by the second year that I was here playing on the varsity team (at that point you played just on the freshman team as a freshman), by the time I was on the varsity as a sophomore, most all of those guys had come in to the school with us, either in the same class or as a junior college transfer and that sort of thing. Everybody had come in from programs that were integrated, and this whole kind of issue was...again, in the southeast, they came to it a little later than the rest of the country, and so we kind of...plus we grew up with it, so really, you know, it was more of an issue for some adults than it was for us obviously. As much of an issue, really, was the long hair, the clothes, and that sort of thing. The group I played with had, you know, hair almost to your shoulders and that sort of thing, and facial hair, and we had a lot of fans, that, again, it was those styles had been in other areas of the country for a

while, but they were relatively new to the southeast and particularly for athletes. A lot of people had as much trouble or more trouble with that, and style, than they did with the racial issues.

WILLIAMS: Were there any problems with your friends that were not on the basketball team? I mean, any classmates and their reaction to you befriending your African-American teammates over any of them, and did that cause any problems?

DR. CLARK: Well, you've got to remember, too, Clyde, for instance, was 6'8", 6'9", about two-forty, so there weren't too many people talking about us in any kind of way or the other. No, really, the guys we ran around with, you know, again, you had your friends as athletes do today. We had our teammates, and we ran around with them, but we also had our friends that weren't on the team, we ran around with those guys as well. Yeah, you were with different groups and you intermingled and I can't think of a single instance where anyone would have not gone out with us if one of my teammates who was African-American was with us and that kind of thing, but it could have been that somehow we communicated, you know, that wasn't an issue and if there was somebody that had an issue it may have been they just would not have naturally been a part of the group we ran around with as well. I don't know, but I don't recall it ever really being an issue from that standpoint; however, socially. . .again, and I'm kind of stepping outside of my own personal experience on one hand, but I know it was difficult for a lot of the African-American athletes and students generally that were here. There were students who were not athletes who were African-American as well. For instance, Ruth Mays was in my class, Clyde's older sister; Vera Jenkins was a classmate of mine who works here in Greenville in the media business. Just in talking with them I knew that there were some social challenges, there just. . .culturally, that sort of thing. There just weren't as many opportunities, and a lot of times they spent time in the Greenville community at large as opposed to campus events.

WILLIAMS: Great. You mentioned before that at the start of the integration everybody was wondering how many blacks were going to be on the floor, how many whites were going to be on the floor. Did your coach ever discuss his terms of recruiting with you, with any of the players, versus if he was trying to recruit X number of Caucasians versus African-Americans? You can feel free to expand.

DR. CLARK: No, not at all. I mean, we were clearly trying to recruit the best players, and the issue of race, again, particularly any sort of quota, at least was never discussed with me. I don't recall any particular recruiting class that had. . .it was kind of a, I don't know if it was 50-50 mixed, but certainly there was a growing mix of African-American athletes with the white athletes. So again, the discussion was kind of continually, how good was the recruit, where can they play and that sort of thing. I am not aware of any sort of plan, and in watching Joe Williams teams prior to coming to Furman, you wouldn't have thought that there was any particular ratio planned or anything as well, so I just don't think it was part of his makeup, as it were.

BARKSDALE: I know in the late sixties some states, like Louisiana for instance, passed state laws about not letting their colleges play against any teams with black players. Do you recall ever playing those? I mean, was that a big, prevalent thing, like you never played a team from Louisiana or Mississippi? Because I believe Mississippi tried to pass something along the same lines.

DR. CLARK: Yeah, that's a good question, and as an eighteen-, nineteen-, twenty-year-old, I'm not sure I was even aware enough to know whether that was happening. We never had an experience where a black player didn't stay where the team stayed. You read about some of those things, and I think I'm old but just not quite old enough to have been in that circumstance, to be honest. I think if that happened it may have happened a couple of years before; however, it could very well be that we didn't play some schools in the southeast, for instance, because the coaches were aware of that, but it was never something that was talked about. It was never pointed out or anything like that. We certainly played in...I'm trying to think. We played in Atlanta, we played all over the southeast, but I don't recall that we played in Mississippi, for instance, or Louisiana, for that matter, although I think that...is it the Sugar Bowl that was in New Orleans, or in Louisiana, and I know, I think it was the year after I finished, so '75, I think, that part of the Sugar Bowl football game, there was a basketball tournament, and Furman went down and played in that. So certainly by '75 that was not an issue, but prior to that I'm not aware of anything, but again, don't know that I would have been, either.

WERTZ: And just to expand on that question, were the other teams that you played in the conference similar to Furman in the integration way, or were there any drastic differences with any of the teams in the conference?

DR. CLARK: In fact, the military schools had the toughest time. I think that by the time I was a senior both VMI [Virginia Military Institute] and The Citadel had their first African-American basketball player, but I think there was only one African-American on each of those two teams, maybe two African-Americans. Beyond that, [University of] Richmond, [College of] William and Mary, Davidson [College] probably were a step behind Furman in terms of the number of African-American recruits and student athletes that they had, but it wasn't a case where a school, you know, did not recruit black athletes, that sort of thing. But it was a slow transition. East Carolina [University] was in the conference at that time. Appalachian State [University] was in the conference. If I would guess if I had to make a generalization, the state schools were typically a little bit ahead of the private schools, although [College of] William and Mary being public really behaves more like a private institution in a lot of ways, so I would think if there is a generalization it would be that.

WILLIAMS: All right, now we're going to try to move a little bit more towards your job now. Building on that, as far as recruiting, as a player originally and now kind of in a more administrative role now, when did you begin to see things change? We were talking about William and Mary and Harvard and the more elite schools. When do you think things really began to change for the level playing as far as recruiting, between African-American and minorities and Caucasians, and then more nowadays in your more

administrative role, just the...like a progress. Where are you thinking you really saw it begin to be level?

DR. CLARK: Well, I think that it really began to change quickly. I finished in '74, certainly by '78, I would say everybody's on a level ground if not even before that. It was interesting. Once change began it came very, very quickly, and that's true, I think, nationally as well. It was interesting to watch. It was one of those things [that] after five years, [there was the] "what was the big deal" kind of reaction to that. Moving into administration and being involved with Furman now, thirty-five years later, thirty years later? Something like that. Obviously we've made a lot of progress in our area of the country. The country as a whole has made a lot of progress. I don't think that that's an issue in any way. I think we're recruiting the best athletes. I think that if there's an issue, it's more socio-economic, and that it's not a bias toward one particular socio-economic group or another. It's simply the correlation between socio-economic level and success in school, and with a very competitive academic admissions program like Furman, the reality is, it's tougher for a Furman to recruit as many students from a lower socio-economic strata, simply because they haven't had the opportunity academically to succeed and be prepared. Furman deals with that constantly. That's one reason that the financial aid program is as strong as it is, to develop some diversity within the student body. That continues to be a challenge, and again, university-wide, we think athletics helps bring about more diversity on campus because of the more open recruiting, and again, our admission is a little different than the university as a whole in the sense that we would like to recruit student athletes who are top students, students who we know can be successful at Furman, but we're also considering their athletic abilities as well. Again, we feel that it provides a very nice fit for Furman and gives an opportunity for more diversity as well.

WILLIAMS: As far as a lot with affirmative action and with a lot of the, I guess, the recent twenty years, the two decades before us...did that ever, in your thirty-five years here at Furman, did it ever affect federal funding or any kind of state funding, or funding from the Baptist Convention. Was there ever any pressure put on, as far as recruiting, as far as from the administrative standpoint?

DR. CLARK: I'm not aware of any pressure that was put on. We've always had the opportunity in the hiring process, for instance, to hire the best candidate. Now, what we feel we have an obligation, a moral obligation as well as a professional obligation, is to be sure the candidate pool is as strong as possible to ensure that we get the very best candidate. We want to be sure that we include everyone in that candidate pool, and we do make efforts to be sure that we're very inclusive in that process. Again, it's traditionally in athletics you run into a good old boy network. Coaches get promoted, you know, from work through the system, and that's important, those kinds of experiences are important, I should say. Not the good old boy network is important, but we make a conscious effort to see that we don't succumb to that sort of process, that we want to be sure that the process is open, inclusive, and identifies the very best candidates.

WILLIAMS: A more recent story: the first African-American head coach of a male team was Jeff Jackson, recently, for the basketball team. We didn't know, as far as candidates, which you've kind of already addressed that, candidates for that, is that...well, I don't know if you just want to talk on that issue at all, is him being the first.

DR. CLARK: Sure. In fact, of course, Dr. Sam Dickson was our first African-American head coach of the women's basketball team. In both cases they're great example of what I was just talking about, that we hire the absolute best candidate that we have in order to be successful. We don't particularly worry: is the candidate white, black, pink, and so forth. Again, as we look at both of those gentlemen and the record that they had prior to coming to Furman, their background and so forth, yeah, we thought they were both great fits at Furman, just as we thought Bobby Lamb was a great fit when we hired him as our football coach, and so it really...I guess the difference, of course, the success we've had in football, it made sense to us that we had somebody in-house to perpetuate that continued success. In our other two programs, we're trying to develop that sort of longevity of success and so forth, and so we obviously went outside in both of those cases. In doing that, and in doing the search, what we were looking for was, as I said, to provide the best candidate pool.

Now, for the most recent search, we actively sought out and looked into several candidates. There were two guys who had been associated with George Mason, of course, mid-major most would argue, although the resources they have, I'm not sure that they aren't closer to a major than a mid-major, but with the success, they had been in the Final Four in the men's tournament this year. [We were] very interested to see who was on their staff [and] who might fit into Furman. That's certainly the kind of success we would like to have, so we looked into that. There was an assistant that's their top assistant there now; we talked with an assistant who left last summer who recruited all those players on that team that's a top assistant at Providence right now. We also talked with a fellow that had been at Wake Forest and Stanford, who's now with Golden State Warriors [He] obviously had coached in settings very similar to Furman. [We] talked with a few other coaches, again, along the same lines. So what we were looking for was those kinds of experiences we thought would help provide the kind of success we want.

Now, in that case, about half of the pool ended up being African-American, half the pool ended up being white, and so that doesn't surprise me. I think we're at a time, I would hope that we're at a time, where those numbers are more similar and that enough African-American former players and so forth have had opportunities to get coaching experience, and that sort of thing, so again, the affirmative action, I hope, is not necessary as much today. If we're doing our job it shouldn't be, is the way we've approached it.

BARKSDALE: Now, before you were the athletic director and they were hiring former coach Larry Davis, we've heard, and it may be a rumor, that there was a black candidate that supposedly would have gotten the job but a booster threatened to pull his money from, his donations or whatnot. Is there any truth to this? Do you know anything about this?

DR. CLARK: Well, actually, I don't. I mean, it was before I was here. If it happened, I think it happened, it wasn't when Coach Davis was hired. It may have been earlier than

that. I know that there was actually an African-American candidate that Furman pursued pretty aggressively when they hired Coach Davis, and that candidate turned the job down, and fortunate for us he was out of a job four years later on the job he took, and he was very unsuccessful. I don't know how that works, but as I said, so if that occurred it was earlier. My guess is. . .oh, I don't know, it's only a guess. If something along those lines happened, that the issues were probably more than just racial. I would find it hard to think that Furman would not have hired a coach at that point in time. Now, certainly earlier in Furman's history, maybe so. Again, different time, different culture, but I would think that late, that if they didn't hire the coach it may have been for reasons other than race, but again, that's pure speculation on my part.

WILLIAMS : As a final note, this might be a little more difficult. You might not have any stats on him, but we were wondering if you knew any of the, like, general stats comparing, like, the percentage of black athletes here at Furman playing sports to the percentage of, you know, black athletes in general at Furman, or like a team specific, or if there's any, if you had any stats...

DR. CLARK: I don't, really, off the top of my head, have some specific stats, and I'll probably get myself in trouble here. I think that the African-American students at Furman who play athletics make up half to two-thirds of the African-American student population. That's the sense I have, and we could check that to see if that's accurate. I think the overall minority population at Furman is somewhere between nine and eleven percent, I think, something along those lines. Now, team by team: the football team [and] men's and women's basketball teams historically have had the largest number of African-American students participating on their teams. I think just about all of our teams have had an African-American student at some time or another. Men's golf may be an exception, and women's tennis. I'd have to go back and look. I'm not sure about that. Women's soccer has had an African-American player...student; Brittany, I shouldn't have tried to say her name because I've just gone blank, but [she] was a defender that finished about three or four years ago. It might have been just before you guys got here, in fact, but women's golf has had an African-American student on their team. So again, obviously, our coaches are recruiting the best athletes that they can recruit, and a part of that is just a function of how many African-American students are playing those particular sports in youth programs and their high schools and things like that.

BARKSDALE: All right, I think that concludes things. We'd like to thank you for your time and all the information you've given us.