

Earl Dean with Roy Van Ness, 1982

Van Ness: Hello, I'm Roy Van Ness, Athletic Director of the College, interviewing Earl Dean, former Athletic Director. We're going to try and review some of the history of the college, the normal school and whatever, and see what happened and how athletics developed here. We'd like to hear some of these stories from Earl firsthand and maybe you can run right up to the current time and get some projections about where we might be going. Earl, suppose I start off with you, going back and see if we can't recapture some of the background of athletics and before we do athletics, will you tell us a little bit about yourself--what your training was and how you happened to come here to Trenton State.

Earl Dean: I came here because Dr. Gorsky was principal of the normal school in Trenton. I had been previously acquainted with him and worked with him. Dean Chazzee, Dr. Chazzee was head of the department or Dean of the School of Teacher Training. Physical Education and Athletics of the University of Illinois. Both of us attended a meeting of the National Education Association and Chazzee begged to get information and he didn't know the answer and he came back and one of the first things he did was check the Registrar and then he went to George Huff who was Director of Physical Welfare. George Huff was really one of the big men in the big town in Physical Education. He was not only in charge of all the physical education at the University, but he was chairman of the board, a director, of a university hospital, and that was not a small hospital, and then he was also Director of Athletics. They say when he retired they employed three men to take his place, and one of those men, I don't know about the other two, but one of those men wasn't too good.

Van Ness: There were the men, or this was the man, from whom you got your initial lead to Dr. Bliss. Incidentally, was this the Dr. Bliss for whom the hall was named?

Dean: Yes. That's right. He was the principal of the Normal School.

Van Ness: Then as I understand it, he contacted these people at the University of Illinois and this is where he became familiar with you.

Dean: Yes, that's right. He then went to Cyril Staley. Dr. Staley was in charge of

teacher education, physical education, and athletics, and then in all 10 men, and then contacted me. Those men, all 10, recommended me for this. (Van Ness: that's pretty thorough screening out there). And then Dr. Bliss then came to Urbana, Illinois, that is the University, and interviewed me, and he persuaded me to come to Trenton. I came here the fall of 1926.

Van Ness: 1926. And then when did you leave the Hillwood campus?

Dean: I left the Hillwood Campus the first semester--it was the close --in January 1959.

Van Ness: That's a long time in office, you must have seen a lot of change. Let's go back to what you saw in Trenton when you came from Urbana, Illinois, and what kind of organization you saw. Now obviously you weren't on Hillwood Campus. The school was downtown on Clinton Avenue. And what was it called then, Model School or Normal School?

Dean: It was called the Normal School of Trenton. --no, Trenton Normal School, Trenton, NJ.

Van Ness: Well, what kind of an organization did you have there, I mean I know you didn't come into a coaching staff or anything like that, there must have been some sort of structure. Maybe there was none.

Dean: There was. First there was an association of men and women students. I was immediately appointed as adviser to that. But how they got their position on that board, I don't know. But it did happen that with the men that the captains of the teams were truly the coaches of the team. Of course for almost a--I don't know what you call it--Jack Long was appointed. He was often referred to as coach but he didn't do very much coaching.

Van Ness: This sounds a lot like current intramural type coaching that takes place many times in the prep schools, and that sort of thing. So if I understand what you are saying there really weren't any --it sounds to me like you were the first athletic coach, per se, to come on board for a specific assignment.

Dean: "That's true. May I say, Dr. Bliss oftentimes, when I would come to him with problems, he would say "I don't know anything about it." You're the boss. I'll see if I can get the money for you.

Van Ness: That's a pretty fair proposition. How did you manage to save money at that time.

Dean: I inquired --there were actually 86 men in college, or Normal School. There were 500 women, about. Exactly I don't know.

Van Ness: I was interested in the 86. That's about the size of our current football squad." Now what kind of facilities did you have. I know one little story I want to hear about, tht little green box that I saw. There must have been other.

Dean: This thing I found was an office. It was about 8 feet wide and about --oh, I don't know, it was long. About 40 feet in length. And in that office was a desk, a chair, and that little box. It was known as the green box, but it wasn't green. It was simply white pine varnished. That's all it was then, and in it was all of the wearing apparel that was provided. A few football jerseys, a few basketball uniforms, a few baseball uniforms. There was nothing else in that to actually help a team to start a ball game. And most of the equipment that we wore was actually furnished by themselves. Helmets, football pants, shoes, all those things were furnished by the men themselves.

Van Ness: Was football headgear required back in those days?

Dean: No. That reminds me of something. I objected to men playing without a headgear. The man always responded "Well, it's my head."

Van Ness: It's interesting how it's changed so much. The attitude and we spoke briefly about sports medicine. And the great advances in protective equipment. This must be quite an interesting transition to you over the years. I know you have a strong background in physiology.

Dean: I think that it is very, very difficult for people today to even conceive of what existed at that time.

Van Ness: I think that I can share some of that with you. I know many people--the turnover, for instance; in the population on campus, the students, like you have over a quarter of your normal, your population, this turns over every year. And anything that went before, you can't assume that they had knowledge of, because it wasn't part of what they came from. Now if you went back 10, 15 years, and ask somebody to understand it, it's almost impossible because you can assume that it was always that way and I guess that's the nature of the art. Now let's get back to you. How about the ladies. Were there any and one more thing. You said football, what sports were played.

Dean: Football, basketball, baseball. I introduced track the second year I was here.

Van Ness: Did you have a track?

Dean: No. Didn't have a track. I used four men as a nucleolus of a track team. Each one was permitted to enter at least three events. And if we couldn't field a team for entrance to an event, we just wouldn't schedule that event.

Van Ness: I remember when I came here you were coach and I was coach, and remember we'd go to a track meet in two cars. (Dean: that's right) But things changed and now we go on a bus. So times have changed, and interests change. But now we go to the ladies. How about the women? Anything—

Dean: There was no extracurricular women's athletics. The women's department was in physical education were strong followers of the national organization which prohibited women from participating in athletics.

Van Ness: Recreational--any sort of strenuous activities back in that period as I recall, was prohibited. It was thought to be physiologically unsound and unladylike, and so on. How about funding for your programs. You said that Dr. Bliss said to you that you come up with the ideas and I'll try to come up with the money. Was there anything like a student fee or anything that was designated for extracurricular activities?

Dean: No. That shows how little money we got. They did charge admission to athletic contests and they sold season athletic tickets. That was all we had to deal with and the possibility of admission was very, very low. So we had a little money.

Van Ness: You must have had a basketball quarter. Dean: I should tell you there one of the

things that I found. Yes we did have a big box for playing basketball, there was a running track around the room. The backboards were actually fastened to that, and the men could not take the corner shot or to turn the track because of the turning track. That's right. And the man sitting in the --the substitutes sitting on the bench on the side actually had to pull their feet back under the bench so they didn't go beyond the line.

Van Ness: I can remember playing on some of those courts when I was in college. It was like an old YMCA gym. An all purpose facility and you probably had a couple of ropes hanging down and –

Dean: We had the flying rings and to have basketball games you had to have a hook and wire that would get the ring and take into the side and out of the way. It could be gotten partially out of the way, not all the way.

Van Ness: I remember when I was playing ball for you at Montclair's old gym. They used to have a stairwell in one corner and it was a perfect place to have a six man zone because you always had the stairwell over there to take care of that corner. At Glassboro, as I recall, we played on a stage (Dean -at Glassboro?) at Glassboro. We played on a stage and somewhere else we did that, I don't know if it was Jersey City or Newark. At Newark it was like playing in a coal bin.

Dean: Absolutely, and one--the ceiling at one end was much lower than the other.

Van Ness: As I recall there was always a piano in the corner too. That was the advantage of the all purpose gym. It made a challenge.

Dean: I always thought in all those cases it made it very difficult for a person to go at a high rate of speed and still stay in bounds and not hurt himself. He usually reduced his speed before he got to the boundaries.

Van Ness: Let's go back and talk a little bit about the moving from Clinton Avenue out to the Hillwood Campus. When you came out to the Hillwood Campus, what was here? Bliss Hall was the first building here?

Dean: No. The old gymnasium was constructed before Bliss Hall. (Van Ness: the old gymnasium was Packer Hall?) No.

Van Ness: which old gymnasium was that? Where was that located?

Dean: Do you remember ? That building was first intended to be for gymnastics and so on.. That's what I was referring to. That building was constructed before Bliss Hall. It was never intended to play basketball in but yet it was.

Van Ness: I understand that there was a lot of compromise and we still have to go through the building in front of Packer Hall. It looks like it never happened because there is no real entrance and several other design features. There's no way to go from one end of the building to the other without walking through a locker room or a gymnasium, and this I know had to go. But we made some great strides and it must be a pleasure to you to see the growth that we've been able to achieve in the development of the facilities. Now come back again. Come back again to these buildings here. You said that there was this gymnastic building and what other buildings were here?

Dean: Of course the Old Inn was here. Green Hall--no--the inn was Hillwood Inn. (Van Ness: It didn't belong to the campus?) Yes it was on campus. When this property was purchased, that building was in it. Yes. But the campus had been enlarged. When the campus here was first purchased at the very beginning there was arrangements made, deposits made on the purchase of other ground when we moved here.

Van Ness: When you came out--let's start again--when you came out, physically you moved from Clinton Avenue. What buildings were here?

Dean: When we moved into the old gymnasium, Green Hall, a portion of the library, Sumner Hall, there were three of the women's dormitory buildings that had been constructed. I think that's about all Bliss Hall was constructed after the move here.

Van Ness: Where did the students eat their meals? At the Old Inn?

Dean: In the Inn, yes. There was a sort of a porch to the Inn that was reserved for the faculty at noon to go there to eat lunch.

Van Ness: I remember that, sure. The porch sort of wrapped around the lake side and we used to hold our athletic banquets there. That was quite an interesting experience. All the ladies had to

get dressed up in the evening, put their silk stockings on and high heels and Vernetta Decker held fort. She deserves a great deal of credit because she was always a “class” person. She did everything she could to make them young ladies.

Dean: Yes, I think she did a good job.

Van Ness: That was an extracurricular activity back in those days too. Tell me, any special games that come to mind? Sometimes there are so many, you have to sort them out.

Dean: Yes, there are several games. One was Arnold College we played in Connecticut. At that time it was in New Haven. It's changed somewhere, don't know where.

Van Ness: That was a physical education school, is that right? And that may have gone on to become part of the University of Bridgeport as we know it now.

Dean: That's right. I'll give you a picture of what happened. Trenton was in the lead 6 points. Arnold scored a touchdown, Trenton received, the kick actually went to, the man was set to catch the punt, but Phil Banks, he was center back and was the speedster, a good runner, could dodge, sidestep and so on, he went over, and as that ball came down, he actually took that ball from him, he ran for a touchdown. Trenton won the ball game as a result of that, 13-7.

Van Ness: 13-7. I know over the years ...

Dean: In that respect, the first game that Upsala? I'll show you on this table. The captain at that time was Phil Banks. He asked me what he should do in the event of toss. Well, if you win, kick, I hope you lose, I hope you get the kick. And that's just exactly what happened. And the team that chose to receive Upsala faced the wind because we had chosen to take the wind to the back. And I think the ball was kicked to about the 20 yard line. They attempted the play very much and tried to kick. We obtained the ball on Upsala, oh I'd say somewhere between the 35 and 40 yard line. That's where it was killed and we had as a ... the man that did the kicking... that fellow was good, Tom Phipps. Tom Phipps could kick with the best of them. He was known for it. He got back in a punt formation but instead of punting he went around the right end and Tom went over the goal line standing up. No, he went around with Montclair it was very interesting.

Van Ness: So he faked a kick and then he went around the end.

Dean: Right. Then after the touchdown they chose to receive. Again.

Van Ness: They chose. They had the option.

Dean: After having a score they did have the option of choosing whether to kick or receive, and they chose to receive. It repeated somewhat what had happened when they first received. But the ball was killed actually near the sideline and Trenton tried --you might say a line plunge--then they didn't attempt to gain on the next one but they were going forward but they intended to go to the side, which they did. Got the ball over to the side, near the side away from the bleacher. And they did the very same thing. Tom Phipps got back in position, ran the ball and on that play scored a touchdown. The beginning. I'd like to tell you a little bit about the last score of that game too. This was in the last quarter, in fact the game ended shortly after that. They kicked, but the wind was so strong that that ball instead of going forward and then going down went up into the air and curved back. Charles Shellcross who was playing left half ran up, caught that ball just when it hit the ground and bounced, he jumped into the air, caught the ball and ran into the end zone for a touchdown. At that time the score was 31-13 in favor of Trenton. Frankly, the Upsala team was as good as Trenton.

Van Ness: That's an interesting thing. They must have done something right. There's something I thought about but I didn't want to interrupt you. Back then you didn't have inbound lines on the football field. How close could you go? If the ball went out of bounds on the sidelines they just brought it in five yards or something?

Dean: If the ball went out of bounds it was more than 15 yards. However, if a ball was killed within reaches of the sidelines that's where it was played and the team that was on the side that part wouldn't be out of bounds in an ordinary lineup on the side.

Van Ness: And back then you were allowed to have secret plays and that sort of thing, weren't you? What I'm alluding to is when you were close to the sideline there, the thought occurs to me immediately that this is a good time to split an extra person or unnoticed person. You didn't have any restrictions on standing outside of the lines either. You'd stand right up to the line and you wouldn't know who was on the field and who wasn't.

Dean: You were allowed to run a lot of plays you couldn't run now. There was some of that and that's one of the things in organizing you actually had to make plays for that. There is one thing that is very, very different between today and what it was when I coached. The substitutes and the coach had to sit there on the bench. They were not allowed to even get up and walk along the sideline, otherwise your team was penalized 15 yards. Or if you would even shout in anything to do with a play, you again were penalized 15 yards. No conversation. Another thing, if a person was playing in a period, even taken out for a substitute, he could not re-enter the game during that period.

Van Ness: Were there quarters or halves?

Dean: The period then, that period was considered half. The game was played in quarters.

Van Ness: The whole half, you could re-enter...

Dean: That's right.

Van Ness: That sounds like some of the soccer rules are going through the same kind of transition. Some of the women's games, field hockey, I guess, are similar to that and the restraints. What's the logic of that? Do you think...

Dean: The logic was, in my opinion now, I'm just giving an opinion. I believe that the idea was for the coach to teach, in other words, the coach was a teacher. The coach was to teach what to do in a game. I feel that every game was actually a test for the coach.

Van Ness: That's fair enough. Tell me along that particular line, back when you were also a full time teacher, as I recall you were an adviser to Phi Epsilon Kappa and you were the Director of Athletics, you were the adviser for the Men's Athletic Association, and carried a full time teaching load along with teaching football, basketball and track. That's my recollection. That was quite an assignment.

Dean: Doing all that, frankly, a person couldn't really coach. They gave organization but yet the men had to pick it up themselves, you might say, very largely.

Van Ness: By the time you were on campus, by now we are a teacher's college, right, and we

were essentially an elementary teacher's college, and that was the biggest block. And as I recall this meant that any semblance of recruitment, and I'm sure that you didn't have any time that resembled recruitment. Anyone that came here wanted to be a teacher and in greater likelihood wanted to be an elementary school teacher. As I recall, this variation, I recall Montclair, for instance. Their emphasis was on the secondary education and there was always a greater likelihood that a man would want to be a secondary teacher, a greater likelihood, than he would an elementary school teacher, so this made a difficulty until the physical education and what was then industrial arts came along, I guess this must have put a smile on your face, mustn't it to see these programs develop?

Dean: Yes, at one time the captain of four sports was from the Industrial Arts Department.

Van Ness: You mean one single person was captain?

Dean: No, the captains, four different captains, all from that department.

Van Ness: Now the college has become so diverse there are still a lot of athletes that come from the physical education department. Not as many, nearly as many come from what is called DIET, which is the Department of Industrial Technology. A lot of it has to do with course work. They have a lot of lab work that is late in the afternoon that would interfere with practicing. And just the nature of things has changed, but it's interesting--our athletes come from; especially the men--the come from a broad base. They come from all over the campus.

Dean: I think that the way you are talking actually refers to a philosophy that I have of the subtle activity of mankind wherever mankind has inhabited the earth, he grasps, he pushes, he sits, he crawls, I want to stop on crawling, people so often make a mistake, induced crawling. Don't penalize childhood crawling by teaching him to walk. It takes time from crawling and remember you had as many, many teachers of walking because everybody he sees, every adult, walks, as a result he learns to walk. Crawling develops body coordination--induce it as much as you can. There are several activities that you can go into that really all of these activities become, for instance, running, jumping, throwing, and so on. All men do that sometime. They are the very basis of the Olympic Games and they are universal, but there are other things that regulate the activities. You know they always develop some kind of game of tag and analyze any kind of game you know of. It really is a game of tag. And there are other things that enforce the type of activity you get into. They don't ski in Florida, they don't fish or sail in the Sahara Desert, they

don't sunbathe or bathe in the waters north of the Arctic Circle, they don't ski on the Plains, wherever you are, topography, climate, all have their influence on the activities. People in political boundaries have likes and dislikes in why they tend to choose to play something. For instance, a football game with a team that's developed in Mississippi may play a football game in Minnesota. However, Minnesota doesn't just go across the line to play a football game because their football game is different. Therefore they don't take that. Wherever you go you will find that the game was taken up, for instance basketball, the very ____ of America. Basketball played in Russia is not played the same as played here. Their rules and techniques are different, right. However, the ____ is very much the same.

Van Ness: I couldn't help but think about when you were talking about the influence of topography how technology has changed a lot of those things, some of these things --you can create a whole new atmosphere--the Super Bowl game coming up this weekend will be played in a synthetic climate as it were, a synthetic field, and so on and so forth. They do have some ability to change some of these things. Let's get back to you a little more. What are you doing with yourself these days?

Dean: Well, right now surprisingly it takes a lot of my time, my wife is in a nursing home, she's been there for --well --ever since April of 1980. I've been over there every day but once since that time. Don't kid yourself, it takes a lot of time.

Van Ness: I often see you going down the road.

Dean: It takes time to go. My house is not as my wife would have taken care of it by any means, but I have to spend some time out back, in fact right now, well I won't have time this morning to do it but I will this afternoon when I go home, I'm going to wash out the dishes that I used yesterday afternoon.

Van Ness: Why don't you try paper plates? How about gardening? You used to be very active in gardening. Do you still?

Dean: Yes, I do a good deal. I have 80 some rosebushes. I used to spend a lot of time taking care of them, but now it's all gone to pot.

Van Ness: Well, you're obviously keeping busy now. You're certainly looking in fine shape and

so on. Let me go back in time a little bit again. Let's hear some more about this teacher/coach and we have now an Athletic Department, the coach is different. My coaches now carry on an administrative line in contrast to an academic line" That transition has taken place over time now. Coached three sports too when I first started. It's impossible. Two sports is often a burden.

Dean: Most of them are only one sport isn't it? And there are a number of assistants, aren't there?

Van Ness: Absolutely. And you see what happens, take soccer for instance, that's played year round now. It's played in the primary season in the fall, there's indoor soccer, and then you have a spring soccer schedule. Of course you worry if you're an administrator how far you want to go. Just how much can you do? But it's a difficult decision in some ways. It certainly is complicated. 1981 has been a great year, as you know, for us here. We've had three national championships, wrestling, women's lacrosse, women's field hockey, and... Now that doesn't just happen. That reflects recruiting, it reflects a lot of good teaching and coaching as you've alluded to, and capable personnel to pull this together. We enjoy it obviously, but it's a lot of work and very demanding on the coaches and the student/athletes.

Dean: When I was competing in athletics, they did not recruit. When I say they did not recruit, their prospective athletes were interviewed, but that was it! They tried to sell the institution to the athlete. There's nothing else in a person like myself--I had to work my way since I was a youngster. Going to college a man interviewed me and he, the President of the College, the head of the department of chemistry, saw the note that purchased the paper from me. They even employed the boy that threw the paper. All I had to do was collect and pay the bills. But I had to work.

Van Ness: It must have been difficult to--there are certainly less opportunities than there are --what I'm trying to say is (unintelligible)...

Dean: I believe a person at that time had more opportunity to work while attending college and earned his keep than they do now. I think now it's more difficult.

Van Ness: The earning power of a student is way below, and though our earning power was low then, the dollar went further for one thing. Admissions and so on weren't nearly so expensive.

Dean: The costs and so on have increased a great deal, yes, so the expenses increased a good deal

now in comparison. Then a person got so much. I've worked for \$1 ~ 10 a day, in fact I worked for 50 cents a day and had to pay my own for six days a week from 7 in the morning until 6 at night. But times have changed a good deal.

Van Ness: Our baseball field where the Student Center now stands, was that built by the WPA?

Dean: The first baseball field that was near the College, near the main entrance, that was built by WPA. They did that in front of the divisions of the athletic... I think that baseball was the most correctly established of any of the things that were introduced.

Van Ness: What is now Dean Field, I forgot to allude to, we're about ready to wind up the discussion here, but I forgot to allude to the fact, at least I don't recall whether I did or not, that you were the recipient of the Athletic Alumni Award and also you were a member of the initial inductees of the Athletic Hall of Fame, and our field, the football field, Earl Dean Field, is named for you, but as we often talked about, that field is improperly oriented. It goes east and west rather than north and south.

Dean: It should be north and south, yes. Any playing field should be north and south.

Van Ness: We'll try and fix that. We have, just to look down the road, we have some ambitious plans that should include some recreational and athletic facilities. If they materialize, I think you'll be quite pleasantly surprised. We're in the midst of it and I guess I shouldn't allude to it too much other than to say that it's an ambitious plan and I'm very optimistic about it at this point. I will say one more thing, I spoke to you briefly about, I had some initial talks with one of the local hospitals on getting involved, getting the college involved in sports medicine and it sounds very exciting to me and I hope that it can materialize and we'll know more about that very shortly, and again I know that you will be very interested in that. Well, Earl, it certainly has been interesting to talk with you again, I like to talk with you off and on. I know you attend the football games, you're up there in the stands. Please don't hesitate to call me if you have something on your mind and it's really been a great pleasure for me to know you over the years. I really want to congratulate you on your fine achievements as a teacher and a coach.

Dean: I'd like to say one thing about attending a football game. I enjoy watching a football game. I come down primarily to see a football game, but I do enjoy very much meeting someone that I had known before.

Van Ness: Thanks again for coming down. I certainly appreciate it.