

An Oral History

with

Mr. David M. “Boo” Ferriss

(Excerpt)

Correro: How did it come about that the Red Sox [signed] you?

Ferriss: I had offers out of high school; chances to go into pro baseball, to sign right out of high school. Of course, back then there was no draft in baseball. It was just, everything was open. Scouts were combing the bushes and everything, looking for prospects and such, but it was ever who could find who. You might say. And you could sign with any club. So, out of high school, Cleveland, the Yankees, and the Phillies were interested in me, and it kind of got to the talking stage and all, but my dad put a damper on that right off. He said, “You’re going to college. You’ve got a chance to go to college and play ball and develop. You’re not ready for pro ball.”

He had been a longtime semi-pro manager and umpire for years. And I guess that’s where I got my baseball from at an early age, through his interests and his participating in baseball semi-pro circles here in the Delta. And so, certainly he was right in that way, for me to go on to college. That was the thing to do. And over at Alabama, when I went over there and talked to them about going to school there, the coach was named Happy Campbell, and he was considered a fine college coach. And Alabama at that time was kind of the kingpin of SEC baseball. They won the championship about every year, and back then you could be a—also along with coaching, you could be a part-time scout. And he was a scout for the Red Sox. And he knew me from my high school going over there, but I didn’t go with them, of course. I went on to Mississippi State. So, I played against Alabama my freshman year at Mississippi State in baseball, my sophomore year. And after Coach Campbell saw me, he used to talk with me when we would play Alabama. Of course, they were the kingpins of SEC, and he was telling the Red Sox about me, to keep an eye on me.

And after my sophomore year, my first varsity year—that was the summer of ’41—the Red Sox through Coach Campbell wanted me to go to a good college league in Vermont, an eight-team college[?] league which later became—it’s known today as the Cape Cod League. But this was an outstanding college league with good college guys from, really, all over the country. Just like a lot of your leagues are today. Even then. So, they arranged for me to go up there to Brattleboro, Vermont, through Coach Campbell, and I got to work out with the Red Sox. After the season was over, they brought me to Boston; I stayed with them ten days pitching batting practice. And they had some of the greats of the game: Ted Williams hit 406 that year, and they put me in a locker dressing about two [lockers] from him, and I was just bug-eyed, of course. Bobby Doerr, Hall of Famer. Anyhow—manager Joe Cronin, shortstop Hall of Famer. Anyhow, that was a great experience, ten days with them. But I went on back to school, of

course, in September, and then played my junior season, spring of 1942, and had a fair amount of success. And Pearl Harbor had come on in the meantime, December of 1941. And I really had every intention of playing my senior year at Mississippi State, going on through and finishing there and getting my degree, but with Pearl Harbor coming on, I knew that I might not—I knew I was going to be drafted. I'd have to go in the military, serve in the military service, and that put a damper on my aspirations to turn pro. I'd have to wait longer, so, the Red Sox were willing; they wanted to sign me. And I had some other offers, too, but I signed with the Red Sox on June 7, 1942.

Correro: June 7?

Ferriss: June 7, one of the farm directors who was one of the great pitchers with the Red Sox and the Yankees, a fellow named Herb Pennock. He and his top scout George Toporcer came to Shaw and signed me on the front porch there, with my daddy. My daddy had to sign the contract, too. I was twenty years old. And so, that's how I got to the Red Sox. They sent me to Class B Piedmont League, Greensboro, North Carolina, which would today be considered, probably, a Class A League. But back then you had Double A all the way down to Class B Leagues, but this was a B, so I stepped into pretty fast company, pretty quick.