

DAVE BING INTERVIEW

588

*Preference  
to be OK.*

DAVE BING: My first experience with Detroit actually occurred before I had ever visited Detroit and was a senior in college. In 1966 I was drafted by the Detroit Pistons as their number one player. However, I had mixed emotions at that point in time because I didn't know anything about Detroit. I had the impression that I would be going to New York with the Knicks and didn't know anything about the Piston's organization or the city.

On my first visit to Detroit I didn't really want to be there. Having been born and raised on the East Coast, and with New York city being the mecca, if you will, for both basketball and for media coverage, that's where I thought I should be. But getting drafted by the Pistons really turned out to be a blessing in disguise. A very unique experience occurred when I first came to Detroit; none of the folks wanted me here. The player they wanted, and rightly so, was Cassie Russell who was a great player at the University of Michigan and was the number one overall draft choice into the NBA. Most folks here had seen Cassie play from a collegiate standpoint and felt that he was what the Pistons needed to bring the organization back. It didn't happen that way. Therefore, I had something to prove immediately; and that was

that I had talent, I could play. And I had to win folks over by performance. Through the years it's been a love relationship between myself and the people of the city since.

A real rude awakening in my first year here was the civil disturbance of 1967 and I saw this city come apart at the seams. In 1966, I lived out in the Eight Mile and Greenfield area, and that was considered a nice area of Detroit, where there were no real problems to speak of, and it was a good mixed neighborhood, with well kept homes. The value of the homes were still pretty high at that time. I didn't realize until the third or fourth day the magnitude of the disturbance because the Light Guard Armory where a lot of troops were gathering, was very close to my home. I could hear the heavy traffic and the tanks going up Greenfield as well as on Eight Mile. For the first time, I realized just how serious the problem was. Based on what I saw on TV, and when I had a chance to go out afterwards to see the devastation, it really put me in a different kind of mind-set. That mind-set was there was going to be a hell of a lot of work to rebuild the city because it was torn apart.

The following year, I remember vividly that one of the healing processes was Detroit's amazing sports franchises.

The Tigers won the World Series in 1968 and all of a sudden all of the negatives that occurred because of the disturbance seemed to start healing themselves. Black, white, suburb and city started to come together for a common cause, and that was to root the Tigers on to a championship. We have been rebuilding ever since 1967, and we are still going through that process. ~~111~~

My family came from the south and had absolutely nothing. My father went to the seventh grade; my mother went to the ninth grade, but they were resourceful people because in the times that they grew up, they didn't know where their next meal was coming from. They didn't know how they were going to make a car payment or house payment, and educating their kids above the high school level was something that was unheard of. Out of my sibling group, I was the first one to go to college, and that was a big thing. I went to college on an athletic scholarship; and even though my parents had always pushed academics when I was growing up, one of the things that was real rewarding to me was that my father came from a family of thirteen, and I used to sit and listen to a lot of the stories they would tell about how tough times were and how difficult it was to get out of the South and then try and make a new living in the North. About five of them came to Washington,

five went to New York and two went to Philadelphia, so most people came east. A lot of the second generation remained in the South. During family reunions or family visits I remember them sitting late at night. You would play like you were asleep and listen to the adults' conversation, and you would learn a lot. I found out that the very best education you could get was from older people, people with experience.

There was a lot of gamesmanship that folks had to go through. Things that you did and said and acted in a certain way so that you could get by, so that you wouldn't be looked upon as a threat. You learn early on how to respect your elders because those folks were pretty smart to have no formal education and to be in the South and to survive it and get out and start life all over again. You just pull your roots up and go somewhere where you don't know a damn thing about the area. You don't know anybody and you start and you make it. A lot of the things that they talked about, the sub-par wages, the way folks were treated, the way you were looked upon and all of it was negative. In spite of that, those folks made it and they always kept their dignity. I think that's extremely important.

Regardless of how educated you are and how much money

you've got, that doesn't give you dignity. You can be poor and uneducated but you can be dignified. You go back to the old folks; and they had a work ethic, I think, and a respect for themselves, for family, for human life that is damn near non-existent today. Obviously that's why we are having a lot of the problems we are having. The extended family was norm. It's forced upon some folks but that was a normal thing. You looked forward to having aunts and uncles, cousins, grandfather, grandmother; whether you were in the same house or a stone's throw from each other, you always had the support group. Now we've become bourgeois or middle class or whatever and you want to disassociate yourself away from that where, in my opinion, that was the real strength. Today it is common practice that if you're middle class, both parents are working in order to maintain that. Back then, mothers weren't working, families were together. The breakdown of the family has been our quest to get these material goods. You've broken the family down completely. My mother never worked, we weren't rich. We were poor and didn't know it. We never had to worry about food on the table, a roof over my head, clean clothes to wear. That was never a concern of ours because my father, coming from the South, learned how to work with his hands early on. Getting a good job was never a problem for

him. There was a work ethic there. We get to the next generation and I see it constantly, the same mistakes are being made it over and over. It happened to black families but now I see it happen to middle class white families also.