

Interviewer: Lisa M. Smithe

INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: Ruben Michael Mendoza

Date and Place of Birth: June 2, 1931, in St. Louis, Missouri

Address: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

Interview Date, Time, and Place:

Wednesday, November 7, 2001, at 4 o'clock in the evening at the Lincoln Place

Community Center in Granite City, Illinois

Interview Summary:

This interview was of a 70 year old, married Hispanic male named Ruben Michael Mendoza. The interview centers on Mr. Mendoza's life as a soccer player and coach. Mr. Mendoza begins his interview by painting a picture of what life was like living in Mexico, and his first encounters with the game of soccer at age ten. He moves back to Lincoln Place when he was sixteen. He tells about where soccer was being played back in the St. Louis area; describing his journey to the Public School Stadium where most of the soccer games were played. It was there that he reunited with his love for soccer, and decided to join a team in St. Louis. Mr. Mendoza tells about his experiences playing against teams from Germany, Mexico, Italy, and many others. His great soccer skills led him to be on the World Cup Team twice and the Olympic Soccer Team three times. He spoke of his knee injury when he was twenty-nine that caused him to step away from the game. Mr. Mendoza channeled his love for soccer into coaching. After asking around in Granite City at the local YMCA, he was able to establish several children's teams. Soccer became very popular in the local area. Mr. Mendoza helped to spread the sport to Alton, Belleville, Mitchell, Wood River, and even Springfield.

Mr. Mendoza backtracks and talks about several different occupations he held as a young man. However, the topic continuously came back again to the love of his life, soccer. Mr. Mendoza considers himself as a pioneer of soccer for Granite City and the

above-mentioned cities. Mr. Mendoza adds several anecdotes of famous soccer games, stadiums, and friends he made along his career. Later on, on side A of tape one, Mr. Mendoza talks about his family make-up and his opinions about Lincoln Place. Tape one side B, begins with more of Mr. Mendoza's thoughts about this neighborhood. One of the highlighted stories is of a bakery that used to be situated in this neighborhood. Mr. Mendoza speaks of the clubhouse (Lincoln Place Community Center) as the real heart of the neighborhood because that's where a lot of soccer and basketball practice took place. In the end, he tells a couple more stories about growing up in Lincoln Place. The interview ends with a description of soccer programs in Granite City High Schools and how they have evolved into how they are today.

Note and special circumstances involving the interview:

The interview was held in the Lincoln Place Community Center, an agreed upon meeting place. During the interview many voices of the youth playing sports on the other side of the building can be heard which muffles the sound of the interviewer and interviewee. Also, there were many tractor-trailers driving through the neighborhood that can be heard at times on the tape. This interview was a follow-up interview. The interviewer had specific issues he wished to speak about on this interview that may not have been mentioned in his previous interview on October 30, 2001. Please note that there are several breaks in the interview where the tape recorder was placed on pause per interviewee's request, which caused the interview to sound broken up.

Lincoln Place Oral History Project
Dept. of Historical Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Biographical Information and Family History

Current Information

Full Name: MENDOZA RUBEN MICHAEL
Last First Middle

Maiden Name: NORMA

Current Address: [REDACTED]

Telephone Number: (home) [REDACTED] (work) [REDACTED]

Best time/way to reach: EARLY MORNING OR AFTER 8PM

Family History

Years/dates lived in Lincoln Place: 1 YEAR IN ST. LOUIS, 8 YEARS IN LINCOLN

Address(es) in Lincoln Place: many addresses, moved to Durango,
Mexico and lived there 8 years - then back to
Lincoln Place

Date and Place of Birth: JUNE 2 1931 ST. LOUIS MO.

Current Marital Status:

single [] married [☒] divorced [] widowed []

Spouse's name and place of birth: NORMA - ARLAND

Mother's name and place of birth (if known): DOLORE MENDOZA
DURANGO, MEXICO

Father's name and place of birth (if known): JOSE MONTAÑEZ
DURANGO

Children's names: JULIE DAVID, DAVID SAMUEL, MARTA
III.

Received 12/4
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Biographical Summary

Interview of Ruben Mendoza

By Interviewer Lisa Smithe

Ruben Mendoza is a seventy-year-old married Hispanic male who formerly resided in Lincoln Place in Granite City, Illinois, as a child. Mr. Mendoza is considered in Granite City as the father of soccer. Mr. Mendoza was exposed to the game of soccer when he moved to Mexico with his family. He became immediately drawn to the sport and discovered he had a natural ability to play. He took his skills back to Lincoln Place when his family moved away from Mexico. When he was not playing soccer, Mr. Mendoza enjoyed watching soccer games in St. Louis at the Public School Stadium. It did not take him long until he decided to join a St. Louis soccer team. His skill allowed him to excel in this sport. He found himself playing against teams from Germany, Mexico, Italy, and many others. He had the opportunity to become a member of the World Cup Team twice. He was even recruited to the Olympic Soccer Team three times. He continued to play soccer until his knee injury at the age of twenty-nine. Although Mr. Mendoza hated to do it, he knew he had to step away from the game.

Later, determined to have some connection to the game, Mr. Mendoza decided to try being a soccer coach. Within a short time he was a success. His success eventually helped to establish children's soccer in Alton, Belleville, Mitchell, Wood River, and Springfield, Illinois. He owes much of his accomplishment to the Lincoln Place Community Center, which he refers to as the "clubhouse." Presently Mr. Mendoza can be

found refereeing at children soccer games throughout the St. Louis Metro area.