

Interviewer: Lisa Smithe

Interviewee: Ruben Mendoza

Interview Held On: Wednesday, November 07, 2001, at Lincoln Place Community Center in Granite City, Illinois

{Begin Tape 1, side A}

Lisa Smithe: This is Lisa Smithe and I am interviewing Ruben Mendoza on Wednesday, November 07, 2001, at the Lincoln Place Center in Granite City, Illinois. Ruben, please state your full name and spell your last name.

Ruben Mendoza: Ruben Michael Mendoza. My last name, M E N D O Z A.

Smithe: Thank you. Where and when were you born?

Mendoza: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri. I moved over to Lincoln's Place (that's God's country), anyway I lived in Lincoln Place here for eight, for seven years. So that makes it eight years between St. Louis and here. And then, by then I had left with my family to Mexico. That is where my parents were from. Durango, Mexico. And I went to school there, and I also as far as sports I would play basketball and baseball. And for two years I used to walk to the school, and the boys were kicking a tennis ball against the wall on their way to school, and I was always wondering what, what kind of game they, you know tennis ball. Well they said it was called football. That is the name; well here in the United States it's called soccer. So we, I made a lot of friends there and they insisted on me coming out to watch and play soccer, or to practice soccer. And I kept on dodging them about that. But eventually after two years I did go to their practice at the stadium, and I sat there by the stands and their coach he is pointing at me. And all of his boys were 'round him, I guess they were having a meeting, and he was pointing at me and he said, "Who is that boy up there?" "Well that is Ruben Mendoza." "And what is he doing up there, isn't he about your age? Is that your buddy or friend?" "Yes, he's our buddy and friend and we go to

school, all of us.” “Well then,” he said, “how come he’s not here with you fellas? Why don’t you go over there and invite to your practice?” “Well, we did that a lot of times,” they said. “And he just won’t give in.” “Well, he won’t give in so that means you’re giving up. Well, we are not going to have practice today the practice is over if you think you’re going to want to practice without a boy that wants to practice, that wants to play maybe.” “No, he doesn’t want to play. We have insisted on him playing.” And there again, then of course as well. “We’ll see you for the next practice. This one, and there is no practice today. Unless you go over there and bring him down.” “Well ok coach.” And here they come, and they surrounded me and I said, “Uh oh. They are up to something.” And I started to run (laughs), and they picked me up, and they carried me over out to the field. And they said, “Ruben. Ruben Mendoza. Here’s your new coach or your only coach of soccer, of football that is.” And (laughs) I said, “Well what can I do? You guys are holding me down, I might as well do some, start practicing. And the coach said, “Well, that is what we are going to do.” So from there on, let’s see at that time I was about ten years old that’s right ten years old, and about two years later I was the captain of the team. And I really started enjoying this game so then I decided to just to play soccer period. No more baseball or basketball because I start loving this game. I really did love the game. And from there on I played for the school team. I played also for the high school team. And at the age of, let’s see I was in high school for two years, I was sixteen years old then and my mother says it’s time to go back to Lincoln Place. She said Lincoln Place; she always thought that the city was the name of it. It was Lincoln Place; no it was Granite City of course. So we came back to Granite City, and while I was here at Lincoln Place I thought I was through playing soccer cause there was no soccer game playing here. And for about six months here I read in the paper where a team called Liverpool, from England, they were coming over here to play against the St. Louis All Stars, that is in St. Louis, and I said, “Well, hey I didn’t really play soccer there.” And I came up with all kinds of questions of

where is this place. And they said, "Well, that's Public School Stadium." I said, "Well, how can I get there?" They said, "Well, there is a terminal street car." "Well, I haven't been to St. Louis here..." "Well, it's right over here it's only like two blocks over (laughs). Catch the terminal streetcar and you get off at terminal, the St. Louis terminal, right at the corner there the bus will stop and it will say Natural Bridge bus. When you get on it you ask the driver to let you off at King's Highway, Natural Bridge and King's Highway, and to let you know. He will probably point to you the stadium it's called Public School Stadium." That place was packed, that place was packed like 12,000 people, and I got there just in time before game time. And I felt I was back at home again, you know, but it was fantastic. But that is how I got started in soccer. I started going to parks all over, and then, I, one of the players, well not at that time, the main team, well that I played for was called Kutis. It was an outstanding team, but at that time it was called Zenthoefer. Zenthoefer, that was one, okay and then the next time they were called Mc Mann Pontiac. These were sponsors of our team, and this for four years now. And the other two teams, I think one of them the Raiders, that's the third team, and then the fourth team, that was the Kutis team. Half of the players formed a team a team called Kutis. And we won all kinds of championship medals and so forth. That was in 1950, 1951 so that was '48, '49, '50, and '51 was when we were called Kutis, and we won all kinds of titles. We played every year. We would play against a team from Germany, a first division team, top of the line.

Smithe: Wow.

Mendoza: We beat, we won in those five games. In every year we won every game against the... I was so proud of our team. I just couldn't wait until we could play another German team coming over, you know, and well not only Germany, but we had teams from Mexico that came over we would play

them and we were pretty successful there too. Then they decided, the Germans decided, to send a team called let's see...

[Break]

Mendoza: Kaiserlautern. This was one of their best teams ever. Germany they won a lot of championship titles there. And this time Germany was going to send probably their best team ever, and that was in 1957. So the game started, they had a big crowd there. In fact, there was a lot of people from Granite City. My parents were there and lot of my friends were there. That was some game to watch, but they only got to see me for five minutes. I, so there was a ball, or a pass, or a ball kicked out of the backfield, and I ran after it, the center area, and took a high bounce. And I kept running. And I ran and I jumped up high for that ball, and I thought I had had it but this... this center back, he came from the side and he beat me to the ball. And all, we touched foreheads and I, I got twelve stitches on my forehead after, I mean during, that time so I was taken out of the game and I they took me to the hospital. They stitched my forehead anyway, came back about half time to watch the second half of the game, and just by watching my team play I was very proud of them. Although we did get beat 5-2. But we outplayed them the second half their goalie was outstanding. They had eight players from the World Cup Team, the one that won the World Cup in 1954. They had a lot of good players there, so, but anyway, I always did look forward to, to playing these kinds of games, you know. And I miss that. Let's see now, we are talking about, about St. Louis, oh by the way in St. Louis when I first started playing soccer there, we played at old Sportsman Park. That's where the Cardinals used to have their team there. And that was in 1950, 1948 through 1950, for four years, and then we were called Kutis team and we played most of our games at Public School Stadium or at Oakland Stadium, close to the arena, the old arena, you know. And then we won eight championship national titles, national titles through the years of the '50s

then there were so many games that we played in St. Louis. We traveled all over. I made the Olympic Team three times and the World Cup team twice. We traveled all over. We didn't get paid but they sure took good care of us. It was quite an education for me. I learned a lot. Then at the age of 29 I got hurt. I was hurt, bad injury to my knee. And then I tried to make a comeback in 1960 and I just couldn't do it so I had to give it up. And I did not know what I could do. Then I had a job but I missed playing the game so, so here in Lincoln Place, I only live only at the clubhouse. I live about a block away and I would come out here and I would work on the right outside on the playground, very small. And then the little ones would come out and watch me play and I would say, "Why don't you just come over and let's workout here ok?" And they started enjoying it. And I started teaching them how to play the game and mainly I would teach them how to fake. You know all these fake moves, and I would fake them out. I mean I would have like four or five after going after the ball and I would just fake them out then eventually, later on, it didn't take long they started to fake me (laughing). And I was very proud of them. It made me feel real good about that. They thought I would get mad. I acted like I was really mad at them, but not really. But I would try to make them feel much better, you know, and that's how it started here in Lincoln Place. Then I started with programming. That's when I went to the Y. They wanted to talk to me about, about forming a league and I said, "Fine. I'll do just that." I did ask them for some fields I did but they had Mr. McMillan the guy in charge. He said, "No, we don't have any soccer fields. You are going to have to get them. I am pretty sure you are going to have to get them. I am pretty sure you are going to have to do it." So that was my job to find soccer fields. To, one thing about the YMCA, they let me use the, Mr. McMillan let me use his office and telephone. I made a lot of calls and eventually we started getting some teams. And I know that in Lincoln Place we had three teams right at the beginning. We had three teams from St. Louis. There were two divisions certain age groups. Like, for instance, the older ones were like the 11 and 12

year olds and yeah like 11, no I am sorry, 12 and 13. And the younger ones would be like 11 on down to nine year olds. There were two divisions. Then the following year we added four more, no there were eight teams already, we added eight more teams that made it 16.

Smithe: Wow.

Mendoza: And then we started going from there. It wasn't long after that, after those 16 teams, that it really, oh gee, quite a few teams from, I would say from St. Elizabeth's. We had like what nine or ten teams in matter of about two or three years. St. Margaret Mary had about eight teams of different age groups. Mitchell, I tried to get them to come in at the same time as with the Catholic Schools but the coach said, or the guy in charge, that's Harvy Breckner. He said he'd let me know. They were going to have a meeting that night. So about two days later he called me and said, "Ruben, I am sorry but they decided to play to play bowling to bowl (laughs)." "You mean little youngsters like that have decided to play have decided to bowl? Well, okay. That's the way you're going to be, well alright." But he came back a year later and they said, "Ruben, we are ready for soccer." So Mitchell took about two years and eventually had like about nine or ten teams. Also, so you can imagine how big the program is getting, but in a matter about five years. So total it turned out to be very good, but that's where Lincoln Place comes in. Quite a few of the youngsters they went through with three teams and they were all from Lincoln Place. We got them some uniforms. I went to Mexico and brought some uniforms back, and Harry Keel, a friend of mine, he did the same thing. He brought some more uniforms back. And we had enough uniforms for three teams, and we just kept on going from there. Eventually, I was a barber you know at the telephone company in St. Louis.

Smithe: No I did not know that.

Mendoza: Yeah, I was a barber. By 1968 or '69 I decided to put up a sporting good store right here in Lincoln Place right by the American Steel in front of Ernie and Annie's there. Yeah right there. And I was a barber in St. Louis Telephone Company but I would get off early; I would get off, I would go to work at about eight o'clock and be there at eight and be back at home at one. And I did a lot of my coaching from the YMCA then. And in a matter of about three years, around 1970, that's when I had to quit being a barber. Even though the owner there, Andy, Andy Stanizlaw, he used to go with me to all the games like to Chicago and all over the country, when we were traveling he would love the game, but he was the owner and he found out that I was on the league and he said, "Look Ruben, I don't want you to leave. Wait at least one more year and you can have the barber shop." Just like a shop that had six barbers in there... Boy, that was he was a swell guy. But even with that, the help that he was going to give me, I said, "No, I think I better I owe everything else for soccer." And in 1970 is also when I started, or '69, I started a sporting good store in front of Ernie and Annie's. I told you about that didn't I? So after I moved over here no more being a barber we moved to 2700 Madison. That's a bigger place. And then just kept on going. Just kept on adding up at that. How long after then, or let's say before then, I think it was in 1967 or 1968 around there, that the Granite, that the high school starts up, and they won their first state championship. It was the one high school back then I think. Was it in 1970 that they formed two or they had two high schools? Something like that. They had two high schools; they had enough soccer players for two high schools. And we won state about like ten times, State Cup. We fed the high school. Dean Baker came over from St. Louis. Remember him do ya?

Smithe: Uh-huh.

Mendoza: Yeah Dean Baker came over and says, well he knew what we had here and that is why he wanted to come over. And that's why he wanted me to coach

at the high school. The other one there was South High School and the other is North High School. That is where Bob Kehoe is, another good friend of mine. In fact Bob Kehoe and I were teammates with the old Kutis team getting back, going back in those years. And he was doing a good job coaching over at North High School. Of course now also Collinsville, also started a program at the high school that was before the '70s. I think it was around the late '60s when Willie Sein and his family, they moved to Collinsville and they needed help. He said, "I need your help, Ruben. I don't want you to be mad at me because I am moving." I said, "Oh no on the contrary if you move in that is much better for soccer for the area. If you move to Collinsville, before you know it, you'll be moving to other places. So I am with you. If you need some help I'll be right with you." So he had, they had a good, good program going also at the high school. About a year after they got started in Collinsville I went to Alton on a Monday to give them a... There were more and more instructional players from our program different ages. There were about 11 or 12 of them that I took over to Alton. And there were about ten players there that came out for the clinic. That was on a Monday; by Friday by the end of that weekend, that week by Friday, there were probably about 150 kids. And they started their program. And then, what is the name of this one town close by? Wood River. That is another one they got going. Then I went to Belleville, went to Springfield, I went all over.

Smithe: That's amazing.

Mendoza: I went all over like a pioneer. I would rather be called a pioneer then, then just the father of soccer of one city. That's what they call me, the father of soccer. But anyway.

[Break]

Mendoza: Did I say it right or what? (laughs) Oh you want me to tell you another one?

Smithe: Yes, I would.

Mendoza: Let me tell you. Okay we are getting back to this game about the U.S.A. against England the biggest upset of soccer history. Anyway, I explained everything about what went on in the game, now before that, before the World Cup was coming up, or was coming up, Demick Skidmans asked them about covering, asked the Post Dispatch. He was a terrific reporter. He knew the game of soccer. This guy lived in Chili for five years.

Smithe: What was the reporter's name?

Mendoza: Demick Skidmans, write that down and we'll make sure we got the right name, anyways Demick Skidmans says, "Why don't you people send me there? Why don't you send me there and I'll cover." They didn't send anybody. None of these journals, or ah none of these, nobody sent anybody over there a good journalist. And then Demick Skidmans was the right person for that. Why they didn't send him, so guess what. He went on his own. He paid on his own and he covered the whole thing. Isn't that something?

Smithe: Yes, that is.

Mendoza: And they kept, and then that game they would send it by telegraph you know.

Smithe: Uh huh.

Mendoza: By telegraph. And they would say, it would say on the, what do you call it? The telegraph thing. Well anyways it shows (showing with his hand where

the score would have appeared on the telegraph). By telegraph it shows England zero United States one. And they would say, "Ah no they got it wrong. They must have it wrong. Nah. There is no way." About five minutes later they send by telegraph again England zero United States one. "Oh there we go again. Why didn't they put that one in front of the zero like they're supposed to then if it is ten to one then we can understand it. That's what it is." So they let it go for another five, ten minutes (laughs) they called back, they send it by telegraph again and it says the same thing zero for England, one for the United States. They said, "Oh we better look into this." They had to call somebody I don't know they had to find somebody finally found out that United States beat England 1-0 (laughs).

[Break]

Smithe: All right. Mr. Mendoza I thoroughly enjoy all your different stories that you've had from growing up with soccer, but you know what I think we need to go back just one moment I think I missed what was your date of birth?

Mendoza: My date of birth? June the second 1931.

Smithe: Okay. As you were talking about living in Mexico and living in Lincoln Place, between the two, what was one of your most fondest memories from childhood?

Mendoza: They were both.

Smithe: They were both?

Mendoza: They were both about the, just as equal I think. When I went to Mexico I couldn't speak Spanish much. Not much Spanish at all very little and even

though my mother and my dad they spoke Spanish all the time. But it's the English here that I had it going pretty good pretty good so when I moved to Mexico I had to pick this up Spanish and I really, it's like it's quite an education just being there and the kids there are just like the ones here. They're all very, some of them are (laughs) are like here

Smithe: Mmm-hmm.

Mendoza: They can get out of hand in certain ways the same way in Mexico they do the same things. So, but I enjoyed it in Mexico. Then when I came back here to the United States I was a little bit older. I was let's see, I was about sixteen years old. And that's when I started to work at about sixteen. And then I got me a job washing dishes at Ms. Holland's Cafeteria.

Smithe: Okay.

Mendoza: And I though I was going to get rich. Believe me. Six months later I didn't have a penny to my name in fact I owed more than what I made.

(Simultaneous laughing)

Mendoza: But that is how it goes and so I quit that job and I went into another one, better jobs, every job I think there was about three or four of them. that I was getting pretty good jobs by then. So then by the time well I went into the service, I was in Korea for two years, well not two years, 13 months actually. And then when I came back that's when I started getting different jobs, better jobs and then while I was working I went to barber school and it took only about a year and then I had, I was a bartender for about fifteen years. How about that?

Smithe: Oh my.

Mendoza: And then I moved, then that's when I moved and I began thinking about the program after I got hurt playing soccer, about the program that's when I uh...

[Break]

Mendoza: Then at the age of 29. Is that what I told you?

Smithe: Uh huh.

Mendoza: That's when I got hurt. That's when I decided to start a soccer program here. I didn't know what was going to happen after that injury that I had. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I kept coming over here to the clubhouse (Lincoln Place Community Center). Well I would come here anyway to play basketball. Sometimes in the summer I would come over here to play softball, baseball, whatever it was a small area and I would practice over here all by myself. And so by the time I stopped playing in St. Louis because of the injury then that is when I decided to work out with the kids then I said to myself, "Gee maybe I should maybe form a team here." But it wasn't long after that when the YMCA got a hold of me and I started the program through the YMCA.

Smithe: What did your parents think about all of this? How you took up to the sport so easily were they very, following you around to all the games?

Mendoza: Well.

Smithe: Your cheerleader?

Mendoza: My parents, my dad and my mother, sometimes they would go to the games but not always they couldn't understand the game of soccer as it was even though they were from Mexico. But they couldn't understand the game but they would come out because of me and the one where I had that injury that's what hurt me the most by having my mother watching this horrible thing.

Smithe: Did you have any other brothers and sisters?

Mendoza: I have two brothers and one sister. The sister, the young one, that's Ophelia. My oldest brother, his name is Juvenal Hoover... Juvenal. These are all Bible, comes from Bible school names. My brother Hector, and then my sister her name is Ophelia. Ophelia in Spanish (says sister's name in Spanish) all of these names sound better in Spanish really, Ophelia, Hoover, Hector, Ruben (says all names in Spanish) those are the names my mother gave us as names. From there on as I started the program I got married when I was thirty years old thirty or thirty-one. I better check that out again otherwise my wife let me know hey watch out. So anyway so see what happens...

[Break]

Mendoza: This guy who is a blonde headed (points to photograph of sport team where brother Hector is present) he has blue eyes. I have family where some have blue eyes that is from my mother's side. Now in Durango where I lived the northern part a lot of tall people there. Quite a city.

Smithe: Were there any special traditions or any celebrations that you had within your family either from nationality wise or religious?

Mendoza: I don't think I have. I can't come up with any right now.

Smithe: That is perfectly fine.

Mendoza: We have to concentrate on this thing here then we'll have to add...how do you like this picture? (points to a photo of him and two other soccer players right on top of one another going for the soccer ball)

Smithe: It's very impressive. It's funny though; just the way people are piled on top of each other.

Mendoza: That's when I when my knee was out. Okay? And that's the same time I think its, I am not sure about the knee. Look at this one (points to another photo where Ruben is in the back behind competing players, and his body is up in the air prepared to hit the soccer ball with his head). This is two weeks after that Kaiserslautern game. Look how high I am. Where am I?

Smithe: You seemed to bounce back pretty good.

Mendoza: Look at that Look at that Look how high I am! He is taller (points to same picture where a player directly in front of him) he's a, you know goalies are tall. And look at that I think that is no that's his leg right there...maybe mine I am not sure. Let's see, where is that other one I wanted you to see (flips through album) and it goes with that one picture. Where is it? Where is it? This one here I am not sure if that's the same than the one I was showing you. Let's see. See the stadium (points to photo of a stadium) that's in Brazil that is the 1950 World Cup. Do you know how many people it holds?

Smithe: No.

Mendoza: 199,000.

Smithe: Wow. Is this the day of the game?

Mendoza: And some is right maybe about ten people and that would be 200,000. That's not that same game there this one is in Rio this is Maracanã stadium was called in Rio de Janeiro. The other one was another area where the U.S. team played you know where they called Frank Borghi "El Magnifico" That's Frank.

Smithe: Oh.

Mendoza: I can't find that one.

Smithe: Did you want to mention anything about your children at all? (looking at photo of his children in the same album)

Mendoza: Oh boy I sure would like to. 'Cause this guy done a lot of this, this year Sammy, good player, also they were all good players they won State Cup but...won it like three times I think David won it twice, Daniel won it... Daniel was the boxer but he was a terrific soccer player good athlete. Who was the other one? Now all the girls Marta, Julie, and Leah she's the youngest she's a teacher Leah. They all played soccer. I don't know why. I can't understand it see? It is hard to figure out right? Try to find the, this is the, you know where this is at? That's in Hong Kong. Hong Kong.

Smithe: Did you ever know when you started soccer that you would be going to so many different places around the world?

Mendoza: I sure didn't know that. I went to Mexico like four times. Yeah. I love Mexico. Well where is that one? (still flipping through pictures) Its gotta be here somewhere. Let's see if I have a knee guard like this one it's the big

one there (points to photo) then it must be that same game. Maybe not. Where I was lying down, I was on the ground and looking back seeing if the ball went in after I kick it over my head. You didn't see, did you see that one? (points to photo of Mendoza in a bicycle position in a soccer game)

Smithe: Yes. I sure did.

Mendoza: You did?

Smithe: Yes. You pointed it out and you had mentioned about what the kids called it.

Mendoza: The kids? Yah the Ruben. Let's do the "Ruben."

Smithe: Yes.

Mendoza: (laughs) Beautiful stadium. That's Hong Kong. Beautiful stadium ... we traveled one time I think it was in 1956 no yah because the first time that was supposed to be in the, what do you call it? I can't think of it now I'll come up with it.

[Break]

Mendoza: Did I have a knee guard on that one? Let me see if it shows on that big one. Okay. Does it show like there is a knee guard there? Some...right there. I think they had the knee guard. I think that was the game also. Yeah that's that same game that I played in. Let's see where are we? This is New York we won the Open Cup we played the final game in New York we won that. New York. I was in San Antonio this is in Helsinki, Finland, that's the first World Cup, I mean the Olympic games. This is Ireland. This is back right before that were for Mexico I used to watch or listen to the ballgame on the radio. Oh and they always talked about Dizzy Dean, and this was all about

the Cardinals but they were all talking about Dizzy Dean so I left for Mexico when I was eight, came back when I was sixteen, then I started listening to the ball game. And all the and they kept talking about the Cardinals, Cardinals this the Cardinals that and I said, "Who is the Cardinals? What ever happen to Dizzy Dean that team, that team called Dizzy Dean? That was the team that was my favorite team (laughs)."

[Break]

Smithe: Coming back to Lincoln Place again, Mr. Mendoza, describe to me what was it like as a child? Were there a lot more businesses around?

Mendoza: Well, not really. You know back in those days, the Depression days, that's when I was here during my years of one to eight. I don't know how I could say about changing it. Back in those days I think every kid here in Lincoln Place they just loved it. Especially with the clubhouse being here (referencing the Lincoln Place Community Center) the clubhouse was quite a place to have for any, any city. I enjoyed it so much you could play basketball, you could play ping pong, you could go outdoors and play softball, Indian ball, cork ball. All of these kinds of games. And also I could work I used to work out by myself when I first got in from Mexico. All by myself I'd work out like an athlete. This is what I enjoyed about Mexico, about Lincoln Place. Also what I enjoyed what I liked about this place so many people from different countries Armenians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, there were some Italians here not too many. Then a lot of Mexicans here. All kinds of denominations. So I really like this place more so this place. There was no place I don't think a neighborhood has a place like this one here...

Smithe: Is there anything you would like to see changed at all? Or would...

Mendoza: I wouldn't want it, well, right know it would be hard to make it change cause there is no space here. In fact when I was doing some soccer here when the program started it was a very small place but again it was very useful and I enjoyed it.

{Begin Tape 1, side B}

Mendoza: Yes and it was so easy to get along with any kind of nationality in fact that the...they were the Depression days there were houses the houses were never locked at night time. Oh there was nothing to steal really back in those days (laughs) but we got along just fine. I would like to, if I were to live someplace for this long growing up as a kid I would like to start all over in Lincoln Place. One thing I would do instead of all of us, a lot of us moving out of this neighborhood, we should've all stayed and really worked on the neighborhood, on the houses and so forth. I think we would have been much better off.

[Break]

Mendoza: One, another good thing here about Lincoln Place is well the bakery shop. It is just right here (points behind me to the street) right next to the clubhouse that bread was just, that Pita bread it was called was fantastic bread. At home we had about four of kids and we'd take turns everyday. Every week we'd take turns going there and if you'd went twice instead of only once you were much better off because twice is when you go and you stick your hand in that Pita bread. Stick it and get the insides, some of the insides, and eat some of that while you are ready to go, when you are on your way home to have supper. So that is why we did not get mad about it, we did not argue with our parents about going to get the bread (laughs). Isn't that something?

Smithe: Yes, it is.

Mendoza: Another good thing about this place here, Lincoln Place we have the clubhouse here. I know it was good for soccer. I got it started. It was a lot of help. And also going back a little further, basketball here we anybody could play basketball here. I am telling you. But what was good about this place it would train, it would basic train for basketball play it almost everyday in the winter time summer time it doesn't matter they would be in here playing basketball. We all loved to play basketball. In fact we won the State. We won that one time, of course that is with Andy Phillips. He just lives only half a block from the clubhouse here. And about seven or eight others that were Armenians there or Hungarians that were here and played basketball. And on the basketball team when they won state. There were four starters from Lincoln Place, one from uptown. So this place here really helped in that way. So, it also helped the soccer. There was a lot of them from Lincoln Place playing on the soccer team on the state when they won the State Cup. They won the State Cup ten times that's fantastic. And this was the main start right here. Andy Phillips was a very good friend of mine I used to follow him when...I used to follow him when he played in St. Louis a long way back I used to watch him practice the last team he played was with the Celtics the Boston Celtics. He played for only one year that's when he was getting up in age. They begged him to play at least one more year. And he did play. And he was like the sixth man on the team. The sixth man is like a starter in basketball. He was fantastic. Andy was quite a...quite a guy. He played also, oh he played the Chicago Stags. That is when he came over and played against the Bombers that was the first time I think I was only like sixteen or seventeen years old when I went out there to watch him play. Then basketball started picking up pretty good and then he played for pro...he also played, well he played with couple other teams and he got around pretty good. Oh, before he played professionally he played with the Wish Kids from what were they called from Illinois the Ilini. Yes,

that's in Champaign. He became the lead and became the All-American. Before he turned pro. He was quite a player, quite a player. But anyway.

[Break]

Mendoza: What I'd like to say here I've got I am trying to get a hold, I got a hold of a couple guys that could get me pictures and names of the players that we had back then when we first started. There were a lot of players. Don't have to really have their names probably, but it would be it might be a good thing. But there were a lot of them that played on the high school State Cup and that's ten years so that is quite a few from Lincoln Place. A lot of Mexican boys and Armenians, Bulgarians all... a lot of them came from Lincoln Place that played soccer for all these years. That's where this place right here, Lincoln Place House club, right? This club done a lot of good.

[Break]

Mendoza: I can remember from Lincoln Place we would walk all the way downtown.

Smithe: All the way downtown?

Mendoza: All the way to the Washington School. This was on a Friday that's when our parents got paid. No, that's when we got paid. Let's put it that way. We would get fifteen cents. I think they were all in cahoots all the fathers, they were in cahoots (laughs). They, every one of us would get fifteen cents. Then we would ask each other how much did they give you? Well, everybody would say, "Fifteen cents." So they were altogether on how much we should get on our second Friday of the month. So anyway, we would get the change and everybody would put a penny in. We made sure there was ten or eleven, eleven put a penny, eleven of us, and everybody would put a penny in we would have eleven cents and go to Washington School and one

person would go in buy the tickets, buy ten tickets cause they cost only for one penny would buy only one ticket with one penny would be ten cents I think that's how much it cost to get in. So he would get in. As he gets in, he's looking around he knows where to go he's going to the one door on the side, or its in the back right. And all of us are standing behind Washington School (laughs) we are all in one line because we all have to run in there like Olympic runners you know. So he would he looked around and then he would open the door and then we'd all go in we'd run in like I don't know we'd go upstairs then go on the other side from upstairs then go downstairs from the other side. Then like, be like we, like everyone already bought their ticket. (laughs)

Smithe: Oh it sounded like you had one heck of a time.

Mendoza: Sometimes though, the boy that is going in ready to open the door, and then there is Chris Pashoffe, Pashoff, or something like that. He would be over there with his arms tied up then he' look over there by the door and he would act like he didn't see us. Then he'd let us go. But he saw us. But then there's times that he'd look at the door over there then he'd see the manager, his boss, then he'd come over here and hollered, "Get out of here you little...crazy guys get out, get out." That's the only time (laughs). I'll tell you.

Smithe: Oh (groan).

Mendoza: We used to have some great times out there (laughs). But by spending only one penny out of fifteen cents how much did we have?

Smithe: Fourteen cents left.

Mendoza: Ok. Four cents you don't have to spend four cents to really get a lot. I mean you don't have to spend fifteen cents or whatever. For four cents out of the fourteen cents you'd use that to buy, okay (laughs) you can buy all kinds of candy, popcorn, soda, for four cents (laughs).

Smithe: Wow.

Mendoza: That's back in the Depression days (laughs). We had some great times man oh man. Another one I'll tell you about. Is that still on (points to tape recorder).

Smithe: Uh-huh.

Mendoza: Another one I'll tell you about is the dime store (laughs). The dime store we'd go in the dime store and one guy somebody at the dime store says, "Hey why are you guys, this is summertime why are you wearing those sweaters?" "Oh we're gonna, that's the way our coach told us at the school told us how to workout, you know. We have to wear like a sweater and work up a sweat that's why." "Well, you don't have to workout in here do you?" "We're just coming in here cause we want to buy some candy." And that, you know soda, and then we keep on running outside. Well no, that's not (laughs), that wasn't the thing to do. The real thing is one guy will put like about ten or fifteen comic books under the sweater somebody else would probably get something else. Everybody took there turn. And we'd walk out of that dime store like as if well can I say that? No, I can't say that, well, well like if we were pregnant (laughs).

Smithe: Oh what a sight that would have been.

Mendoza: I'll tell you those are the greatest those are the good days, believe me. Good days. Then there's the YMCA that's a good play to go. I go over there now

three times, three times a week I workout this is when all the kids learning about soccer. Like at the YMCA I used to workout at the gymnasium floor I used to use the walls, and as the ball comes to me a moving ball use the right foot. the next time left foot. Keep on trying to switch almost every time and that's the way to do it. There are so many ways of teaching these kids now. For instance, now also, now and I just found out about two months ago that I can use the racquetball court. I had though they had already taken it down. I says, "Oh ok. Alright." So I bring my soccer ball with me and I use the walls and use the corners of the walls and that really makes you hustle balls. And there again, left foot, right foot. Things like that. Beautiful. The outside part of the foot, outside or instep. I'm telling you it would help lot of kids to do this. So I am still doing something like that. I learned all of that in Mexico using the wall, using the wall, I learned all of that by myself I used to get about 5:30 in the morning get up to the park over there I used to run first I didn't have a bike I couldn't afford it. Anyway, I used to run its like about 10-12 blocks I used to workout there this is early in the morning about 6 o'clock. By 7 o'clock I am running back home and then to school. I am telling you that's when I learned how to use the Court. That's like the...it gets the ball way up high front wall the wall is way up high then the side wall kinda starts going way back. Beautiful. It really helped me a whole lot. But that's where you gotta spend a lot of time like that, that's where the kids. Ones from here from Lincoln Place they learned a lot. They got so good that they'd fake me out real easy sometimes (laughs).

[Break]

Mendoza: As far as all the cultures came out and the program got started the parents were well the parents were a lot of help. And they all wanted to help not only to do one thing like coaching they would also volunteer as a to mark the field, cut the grass, set up the nets, they all took turns and they would all plan to really help and also to become to be coaches and they learned how to

be good coaches a lot of them did and some of them were good referees too. They all were. The two main ones that really helped with the program as far as Lincoln Place were two youngsters Stanley Valencia and Stanley do you know him? Valencia? And the other one was Terry Valencia his older brother a year older and they I had to run after them they'd always run and hide from me once I'd caught them I had them help out from the beginning. Putting up goal posts setting up nets, every thing. I am telling you and they were all in the program and they were all playing in the wintertime cold weather. And they all enjoyed it. They clearly enjoyed it. Those two. And then of course, you had fathers so many kids that came in through the clubhouse here to learn how to play soccer or basketball or whatever. But the program turned out so good that when the high school started they won State Cup ten times. And I had players I had one thing at home that says real good that says how many times like every three or four years they tell me about the players then another four years later then another four years not all at one time you know what I mean?

Smithe: Right.

Mendoza: and the high school was fed real good with outstanding players, good players. Good coach was Bob, Bob Kehoe North High School and Gene Baker at South. Fantastic. Well North never won State Cup but they went to the finals three times. But one time they almost won or maybe two times but anyway they were a good team. Collinsville won about four times so far. Alton didn't they didn't come through but they had some pretty good teams. We had a good program very well set up it's like the minor leagues of soccer you know they were well trained. We had a lot of good coaches foreign coaches like Willie Sein. Willie Sein was the one that moved to Collinsville to start a program there I helped them over there in Collinsville and they got going good. That, once I saw that going all over like in Alton, Wood River, Belleville all of these places and then at Springfield then we

were I was taking teams over to St. Louis to play over there the ones that were like thirteen and fourteen year olds that's middle school well in middle school here Nameoki or Grigsby they had football teams, there's no soccer there so lot played football but the ones that played soccer, and I would take them to St. Louis, they were the good ones I mean most of them were the best players in soccer and that's why we did a very good job with them.

Smithe: And that concludes the interview with Mr. Ruben Mendoza.