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**Ruben Mendoza Oral History Interview**

Jennifer Haselhorst, Interviewer

Lincoln Place Community Center, Granite City, Illinois

October 30, 2001

**Jennifer Haselhorst (JH):** My name is Jen Haselhorst, and I'm doing an interview today with Ruben Mendoza. The date is October 30th, 2001, and we're at the Lincoln Place Community Center, and it is about 4:30 in the afternoon and right now I'm going to ask Ruben to spell his complete name for me.

**Ruben Mendoza (RM):** R-u-b-e-n M-e-n-d-o-z-a.

**JH:** And right now, I'm going to do a sound check and make sure everything is okay.

[recording stops]

**JH:** Okay Ruben, you had mentioned earlier that you were born in St. Louis.

**RM:** That's right, it's over on 9th and Cass. Oh no, let's say it's 20th and Cass.

**JH:** 20th and Cass.

**RM:** And that's in St. Louis. I lived in St. Louis for only one year, then moved then to Granite City, and I mean what I mean by that, Lincoln Place. And I lived here in Lincoln Place until the age of nine. And then we moved from here to Mexico. The place is called Durango. What I mean by that is the state of Durango and the city of Durango. And I lived there for about seven to eight years, and then we came back to Granite City and let's put it this way again, Lincoln Place, that's God's country you know. And I was 16, and for about six months I thought maybe there would be more soccer in this area. But I'm finding out that the team from England, called Liverpool, they came over here to play for an exhibition game against the St. Louis Stars, and I got to go to that game, there were about 10,000 people there at the public school stadium, and was I elated about the whole thing, believe me. It's just like if I was being born again with this soccer ball, and I started to practice, and I started to also to go to St. Louis to different parks there, and I met some Mexican fellas that lived in St. Louis and they would give me a ride to the parks and we would all practice. Then I was approached by one of the players of the Zenthoefer Team, now this team played in St. Louis at old Sportsman's Park in the major soccer league there. And the games were played in the wintertime, rain, snow, or shine. I got a bang out of that because in Mexico I never did play in such a, such a cold weather. So, I had to get used to that. And I enjoyed it very much, after we played at old Sportsman's Park, that's where the old Cardinals used to play. Played there for four years, then we moved all over St. Louis area, different parks, like Oakland Stadium that was close to the arena, and we played there for four years and so during all of this time, what I really enjoyed the most that I had to compete to make the Olympic teams, the one in 1952 that was supposed to be held in Helsinki, Finland. And then the next one to Melbourne, Australia. And the third one was one, was one where we made the Olympic team,

but we were eliminated in the qualifications of the games, you know. Mexico always turns out to beat us in the finals, and they got to go to the Olympic games then. And the World Cup games also, that was held in 1954 and 1958. We had a lot of games before, well let's put it again this way, and see who would get to go, 'cause there's so many teams involved, so many countries. So, we never did make it in the finals. Mexico again beat us out. So, is there anything else that, unless, how much further do we have to go here? Before we go any further, let's go back to when, when I got hurt in 1959. (05:32)

**JH:** Okay.

**RM:** Oh no 1960, I'm sorry. I got hurt, and I tried in 1961 to make a comeback, and I just couldn't do it, so I just didn't know what to do then.

**JH:** When you blew your knee out?

**RM:** Yes, I did. And so, I didn't know what to do, so in the meantime I only lived right over here about a block away from the clubhouse and Lincoln Place. And there's a lot of youngsters in the lawn out there, so I decided to go out there and talk to these boys about playing soccer. Of course none of them knew, they didn't know anything about soccer. But then again, some of them would watch me workout all by myself, and they said, "Well you know, we've been watching you play, practice Mr. Mendoza. But we don't know anything about the game, but if you're willing to teach us." Well that made me feel good, when they asked for something like that, so I decided to help. And I would work them up, all these little guys, some of them five-year-olds, six, and seven. And sometimes I'd show them how to fake moving the ball, but sometimes the ball is moving by itself and the ball would be moving the other way and they didn't know which way to go, to either get the ball or get me, you know. But I had such good fake moves that I could pass it on down to these kids and then take on. After I was faking them, for just about a week I'd fake 'em out pretty good, but then they got used to that, and they started faking me out, and that made me feel good. Want to shut down that, stop that?

[recording stops]

**JH:** Okay you were just talking about teaching the kids, the five, six, and seven-year-olds about playing, where did that progress from there, how did you actually evolved into teams?

**RM:** Well, when we first started with, from here it was easy, right here in Lincoln Place and that's when we formed two teams and then the following year another team, that was three teams. They had different age groups.

**JH:** And what year was that?

**RM:** I would say that... when was that, what year? I would say that was back in 1960, '61. In 61 was when we really had a group of three teams instead of just two. And by then we already had two divisions of four in each, four teams in each, then our second year we came in with another eight teams and made it two more divisions. And then from there, that's when we needed more fields, because the first time when we first started, the first, the field that we started was in Coolidge, at Coolidge there, and that helped a whole lot. Then the second year we had Coolidge, we had two fields at Coolidge. And at that time we came up to 16 teams, that doubled up, and then on the third year we had to come up with at least another

field, and we got it over from, at St. Elizabeth's, and that's when St. Elizabeth's came in with about six or seven teams to where the following year, on their second year, they came up totally to ten teams, which was great. St. Margaret Mary also at the same time, they came up with about eight teams. Mitchell, they finally made it to, they started about a year after St. Elizabeth's, and they came up with about seven teams and then eventually to nine or ten teams, so we had something really good going there, just three places that came in, three areas that came in later by the second year or the third year. And we had already with those three that were, we had at least ten teams in each one of them, like about thirty teams, that was great. (11:08)

**JH:** And what were the different age groups?

**RM:** The different age groups there, well gee, that was like, the older ones were like thirteen-year-olds, then the next one going down, twelve, then eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, down to six, and maybe to five. So, it was only one year apart. They were all one year, that was fantastic. Out of all of the teams, like Lincoln Place, most of their teams were, there were three teams, they would come in like one year. Yeah one went in that first year and that's it, they stayed that way. It was just outstanding. And if we needed any more new teams coming in, they'd have to start at the age of five or six. Then, we spread out to another area. Now, we had like Willi Seim, a German, great player,

**JH:** Seim you said?

**RM:** Seim, S-E-I-M. Willi Seim. He came in, and so did Lazlo Zeilish. Lazlo Zeilish, a Hungarian. And he lasted a long time as a coach, I think he's still coaching probably. And he just loved to coach. And Willi Seim, Willy had his son playing, and then Willy, he was with us for about five years, then he moved to Collinsville, Willi Seim. And he needed some help, I gave him help to start a program in Collinsville, first he stayed here with about three teams, and went up to about like eight or nine teams, and then he moved his teams out, and he told me that he had to start his own program in Collinsville. And he was thinking about maybe I got a little perturbed about it, on the contrary, I really liked that idea, see of soccer, just keep on moving, spreading out, so Collinsville got to be a powerhouse eventually like Granite City.

**JH:** And now they're enemies.

**RM:** Competition maybe, not really... maybe the players, but I doubt it, you know, there was a lot of competition at that time, and so for Granite City they were really glad to have Collinsville with so many teams and good players, and at the same time I had moved to Alton to start a league there, and this is like about a year, about a year after Collinsville had started their program, and then a year later Alton needed some-, wanted to start a program, so I took about like a dozen of the kids, different ages, okay, like five-year-olds all up to eleven, up to eleven. And they were going to demonstrate for the little ones there in Alton, and only about nine or ten players showed up. Now this was on a Monday, but we still had four more days, it was supposed to be until next, the following Friday. By Friday there were like about, a hundred and, more than 150 kids, and they started their own program. (15:15)

**JH:** Wow

**RM:** Alton. And then we kept on going. So, they called me the father of soccer, but I think I've done a lot of good as far as being a... how would you say it, a pioneer. Of course, I kept on going. I went to Springfield, Wood River, Belleville, all over. And look at it now, look at all these high schools, we started, we got those high schools started.

**JH:** And that's one of the big powerhouses.

**RM:** Yeah, that's right.

**JH:** In the St. Louis area even.

**RM:** That's right, and not only Granite City but Collinsville. In fact, Granite City had two teams and two high schools in a matter of ten years. And they, Granite City North, they won here in the area, and then they went to Alton for the finals. They didn't win it, the finals, but they had a terrific team, you know, just to go there, to Chicago was fantastic. And then, well, there's so many teams all over now, competing all over. Chicago is really coming on strong, they're playing, they're doing a good job. Now lately, Edwardsville, the fact that they're in the finals now I think, aren't they, are they over there in Chicago now?

**JH:** I think so.

**RM:** Yeah Edwardsville is doing very good with their athletic program, not only soccer, but just about everything else, football, basketball, whatever. And they are doing a good job, and of course the school, is there a high school there with Edwardsville, at Glen Carbon?

**JH:** No, they're joined together.

**RM:** That's right, now Glen Carbon goes to the high school at SIU right?

**JH:** At Edwardsville.

**RM:** I mean at Edwardsville, I'm sorry at Edwardsville. And that makes it even stronger, you see, they're doing a very good job. And I sure wish 'em luck, I hope they win in Chicago. But things have gotten bigger all the time, you know, and we've had a lot of great players all of them, and that time in Granite City was when, they won it nine or ten times, I think.

**JH:** State?

**RM:** Yeah, state. A lot of the students, big scholarships through soccer, a lot of big scholarships.

**JH:** I knew a guy that went straight into professional.

**RM:** Why sure, was that Trittschuh?

**JH:** Um

**RM:** Is he from Granite City?

**JH:** Mm-hmm.

**RM:** What kind of professional are you talking about, John van Buskirk, no? No.

**JH:** It starts with a P.

**RM:** Uh, it starts with a P. Let's see we've got Trittshuh, we've got John van Buskirk, you've got, oh, oh yes

**JH:** Petroski.

**RM:** Petroski, oh yes, beautiful player. He is in Germany playing, and so is that John van Buskirk. Trittshuh played in Czechoslovakia, and then he came back. Trittshuh also when he got back, he played in the Major Soccer League, MSL, and he was ready to retire, and he says play one more year and they wanted him to keep on playing. He played then as a back, center back, sweeper back, or as a fullback, he was very good. He did a good job there. And I think he's retired now from soccer, as far as the Major Soccer League.

**JH:** Now when you were playing, what position did you play?

**RM:** I played, at that time it was called inside left, inside, there's two of them, number ten is one, that's on the left side, and number eight is the other one, and I would drop back. Looby was number eight I think. He would stay in between the center forward, and I would drop on back, and we could form a triangle. And Looby is the one that scored the most goals. I got my share of goals, but I was more supporting in the back of the midfielders we were with, see, so actually the system that we have was called the WM system. Okay? WM system, that means two forwards, one in the center with me, on the wing, two center forwards here, and then left wing, left and right wing, that would be the, the uh (20:52)

**JH:** W

**RM:** W, the one on top. And then on the bottom, the M system. The M, with the W, it was called the WM system. Terrific, back in those days. That system could be used now at certain times. Some of the teams still use that system, not all the way through, sometimes they change into another system. Sometimes you use two kinds of systems to, to help, you know what I mean? So, what else next?

**JH:** Now, when you went to the Olympics, that was in fifty...

**RM:** Now that first time, that was in 1952. Yeah

**JH:** And that was when it was...

**RM:** We went to Helsinki, Finland, yeah. We didn't win there. I'll tell you how it was back then. Then, it's not like it is now. You know, they prepared these teams, had plenty of time like six months to a year. Back then, they only prepared us for about one week, maybe two at the most.

**JH:** For the Olympics?

**RM:** Yeah, after you're with the team, then maybe once or twice, one week or two weeks, and then get ready for the Olympic games. To go to the finals. The first two times it was strictly, you're on right there, the finals already, you know. So that time it was with sixteen countries. Now it's up to 32. And we, they just did not prepare us like they're doing it now. They are really doing a good job. What I like about the way things are working out, they have a Major Soccer League, we have a lot of, there's some foreign players that are here for about five years, and they can play on our national team, but this last time, this last one I was glad to see that there were only two foreign players on the national team, only two this time. So, probably won't be long, it'll probably be all American-born players. I like to see that. Not saying, not to put the other team or the other players out, you know, I mean as far as the Europeans and so forth, they have done a lot of good by coming here, and they have been helping us as far as competition for our players. The way it looks now, our players are so many now as far as college players, college teams, and so forth, it's fantastic, it's really coming around. It's not like the women, the women came around sooner, you know. Really helped them. Of course there's less teams for the women, but they sure look good.

**JH:** Crazy how.

**RM:** Can we listen to that now?

**JH:** Sure

[recording stops]

**JH:** Now, you had mentioned that you were born in St. Louis and you moved over to Lincoln Place, God's Country.

**RM:** That's right

**JH:** And then you had left and lived in Durango, Mexico for eight years you said?

**RM:** About eight years, yeah.

**JH:** Can you tell me a little bit about what you did with soccer and? (25:01)

**RM:** Well, I was, let's see, I was either seven or eight years old, I think I was eight years old. And in no time, you know, you can always make friends, you know, like, get to know people. And then, I'm watching these boys kicking a tennis ball around as I'm going to school, and they are going to school, but they're kicking that ball around against the wall of these houses, and I said, "Well what are you guys doing here? I mean aren't you supposed to throw that ball like a baseball?" "Oh, baseball that's in the summer time, right now its soccer time." Soccer, oh football, well they called it football. I said, "Well, okay, well have a good time." "Well why don't you join us sometime, why don't you come up to practice at our practice." Well I said, "Ah, nah." So that went on for about two years until I was ten years old, anyway they finally talked me into going to the stadium where they practice, football, soccer. I said, "Well okay, I'll go with you guys. But don't, after I go this time don't bother me anymore, alright?" So we are at the stadium, and these players are out there practicing on the field, and the coach got 'em all together, and I was sitting at the, on the stands there, and I don't know what the coach was telling the

players, but what I heard was that he said, "Who is that guy up there, sitting up there in the stands." And they said, "Oh, that's uh, Ruben Mendoza." "Well, is he your age? He looks like he's your age." "Yes, he is, you wanna play?" They said, "la escuela uno tres," that's school number three. Anyway, so he said "Well, I'll tell you what, why don't you guys bring him down here." "Oh no, no, coach," they said. "We tried, he won't, he won't come." "Oh, is that right? Well I'll tell you what, you guys can go home now if you think that you can't bring him down here, then you might as well go home, and I'll see you guys at the next practice." "Oh no, wait a minute coach, we're just starting to practice?" "I said I'll see you guys at the next practice, unless you guys want to bring him down, you better hurry because I'm ready to leave." Oh, they rushed over there and they got around me, and they sat right around me and I said, "What's on your mind?" Oh I sensed it, and I tried to get away, but it was too late, they had me surrounded, they carried me out there on the field. And the coach says, "What's your name?" "My name is Ruben." "Ruben huh? Okay, listen we want you to practice with the boys, I'm the coach," and this guy is very articulate, you know.

**JH:** And what was his name?

**RM:** His name was, oh you had to come up, what was his name, it's been such a long time, Alfonzo Beloria. Beloria I think it's in one of these, well it might not be Alfonzo. Well anyway, he says, "Well, I'll tell you what, you get out here and I'm going to have some training here, and then you do what I tell you to do Ruben, okay." So when we got through all of that, then he got us all together, and he says, "Hey fellas, how would you like Ruben to join our team, he could be on our team just like that. He has a very good move, he's like a natural type of a player. And I would sure like to see him play with you guys, wouldn't you?" "What do you think we've been doing coach? We've been trying to talk him into it." "Well, Ruben, I guess I better do the talking instead. How about we want you on our team, on this team here, and I think you can help a lot. And I think you can enjoy this game, and if you don't then you can get back with your basketball and your baseball." I said, "Well that's, okay I'll try; I'll try to be here next time." So then from there on that's how I got going.

**JH:** That's how you got started.

**RM:** A year later they named me the captain of the team, a year later.

**JH:** Never playing it before.

**RM:** But not because, well I notice it's because, not because I was a good player and really picking it up, just that I took charge as far as, they all looked, they always looked up to me, my friends, you know. But, go ahead.

**JH:** If you don't mind, I'm going to switch the tape over before it runs out on us.

**RM:** Why of course, okay.

[End of side A]

[Start of side B]

**JH:** ...quick

**RM:** I was getting, okay I'm sorry.

**JH:** It's going, okay.

**RM:** A year later I was getting to really enjoy this game, so much that baseball, as much as I really loved baseball and basketball, I dropped those, I dropped off, I just completely dropped them off, I just wanted to play soccer. After a year's time, and so the name of la pica that came right after all that, la pica. They gave me a nickname, that means a person that's always in training, always by himself practicing at times. Then he's ready for his team, he's always there for his team, and then when there's no soccer season or football season, they call it, there would be baseball and basketball, well I would still be with my soccer ball, and I'd go to the park, and I'd workout by myself. I'd use the walls, high walls, and that's one of the best things for these kids, is a moving ball as it comes to you with your left and your right foot, with either foot. It's fantastic and you use it against the walls. That helped me out a whole lot, and then over here when I came here, that's when I used all of what I know about coaching, about training, and that really helped the boys here and the girls later on when they start coming in. And then the coaches. I had to teach them how to play, or at least how to coach. And that was very important. And that came through also. Okay, you want me to go back again now a little bit?

**JH:** Sure.

**RM:** Okay, now, going back, it's something that's got to do with sporting goods, you know, when I when I had a sporting goods store 25 years ago, back there it was earlier. I did not have a sporting goods store then. I was just a kid of course. I was about eleven, and twelve, and thirteen years old. And I want to tell you something, I was really very poor then, very, very poor. I couldn't come up with any money, so I would go to stores, and if we needed any uniforms for our team, first we were trying to get somebody to donate, you know, people to donate, and so that we could buy uniforms. And they were poor too I think. So I was very good at that, and being a thief, really, I was.

**JH:** Being a thief in what aspect?

**RM:** I'm sorry?

**JH:** Being a thief in what aspect?

**RM:** Well, in the stealing of soccer equipment you know, uniforms, soccer balls, my first soccer shoes [laughs] I stole, oh I don't mind saying this. I was one of probably the best at it in Durango.

**JH:** Now did the other kids...

**RM:** They called me also the Durango kid, I think. [laughs] But, let me say this though. When I came back over here, you know, I was sixteen years old, and I was working at Miss Hulling's cafeteria washing dishes. Making six, let's see, sixty cents an hour. That's how much I was making. Well I thought I was going to get rich. You know, I compared that peso with a dollar, man I'm going to be a rich man. Six months later, I think I owe, still yet to the bank I owe them some money still. I said, "I can't save



anything," you know. But anyway, as I got different jobs and so forth, I was like about 17 or 18-years-old, and I was at the dime store on Washington, the one at Washington, in front of the Washington Theatre, and I was there walking around, and then I see something on, I started to reach and I looked around and my hand started to shake. And I walked out of there so fast, I mean I never have stolen a dime. In fact, I paid back twice or maybe three times as much when I owned a sporting goods store for 25 years. How about those apples, huh? The one upstairs, always, he sees that we make sure we pay back. (05:44)

**JH:** Yeah.

**RM:** Yes, but there's so many good things about this whole thing though, when you're poor, sometimes that's a good life. I think it was a good life, my mother was a good cook. It doesn't take much as far as Mexican food to prepare. you know, and spend a little money into it. It doesn't take much. But she was not getting enough money from that. But anyway, you don't have that anymore. But anyway, it's really good, that's life's important lesson. And it was an awkward time for planning too.

**JH:** And what would that be?

**RM:** The beans has a lot of iron, you know.

**JH:** And protein.

**RM:** Yeah, and then the protein, other one, beans is one of the proteins right? Also, the other one is potatoes, corn. Corn in Mexico is the best. All of that had a lot of good things for a young soccer player, and that pushed on, and I was good. I always tried to tell them what kind of food to eat, and I'd say, "You're growing," and it'll help 'em a whole lot. you know.

**JH:** Now speaking about food, me being an athlete too, I know that I would have certain rituals and certain things that I would eat, and certain ways to mentally prepare myself for a game, did you have your routines?

**RM:** Yeah, that's a good thing. See and I'm glad you mentioned that, could you add onto that a little more? Maybe you don't have to, 'cause you already came up with some pretty good things there. Go ahead.

**JH:** Well I know like myself. You know I would get up early and run the day before, the day of the game, and run in the morning, and I'd loosen myself and just mentally think about what to do, and that to prepare myself before the warm-ups and everything. Did you have your own routine that you did? (08:22)

**RM:** What I had, my own routine, the one I liked the best was early in the morning, before going to school, I used to get up at five o'clock in the morning, and sometimes, most of the times the door was closed, for me to get out of my own house. My mother didn't want to see me at five o'clock in the morning going when it's still dark. But I would go up the little wall, the chimney, the wall, and then go up to the front and then come down on the window and make it, and then make myself come down on the window, and then I'd run from there to the park, which was like about ten to twelve blocks, that's pretty far. So, if I would leave at five o'clock, by the time I'd get down the street it'd probably be about ten, about 5:15, because it was hard to make it down there in time. Then I started running. And I'd get to the

park, and I've have my soccer ball. I have everything all lined up, you know, my regular shoes, you know, tennis shoes, actually. And I'd use this, this, the wall in front of me, and that was way up high to about 20 to 25 feet, about 25 feet high. And then you had the other one which was actually like a jai alai, you know, do you know the name of jai alai or fronton or something like that? That's what they called it in Mexico, that wall in front, then on the wall, the corner, they would count straight down and back. And see I could play also the corners. I trained myself that way, to hit the corners and then I'd see where it's gonna hit, then I'd gotta really hustle the other way, the way I think where the ball is gonna go. I did a lot of that. And also straight ahead on the wall, there was a marker there, a line, about like three or four feet high. It was ideal for me to aim at that with my right foot and left foot, keep on switching, you know. And then I'd be getting further back, and I'd have to use some more power to it. But either foot, and that is very important, that's where a lot of coaches are not coming through, you know, for these kids. And what you have to do if the kid is only a right footer, and he doesn't, he hasn't been using his left foot like I told him, use it at home, practice, use that left foot, keep using it, by juggling the ball also, the left and right foot, it's very important. I know when they are not practicing. I know that, and I get very mad at 'em, you know, and I say to them, "You're going to have to get over here and show me, all of this that you are lacking. And you say that you are going to be good." You know, I keep telling these kids, "Look, I'm telling how much I care for you, if you don't care for yourself tell me now and I'll let you go home. In fact, you can be off the team." Oh, then their eyes get so big, "What do you mean I'll be off the team?" "Well, how many times do I have to tell you to do certain things, you know, that's on everything, on heading the ball, on diving for the ball," then there's another one called, what do you call it, from the sidewinder, the sidewinder, man I'd tell them, "You guys have to do that, I used to be good at it." This is only like two years ago with the [unintelligible]. I used to be good at that. The sidewinder, and then the over the head, that is not exactly only for scoring, sure you like to score, but mainly it's the, it's your timing, your coordination, that's fantastic for every one of you. Over the head kick, the sidewinder, then there's one that's even tougher than the other one, that's one where I'm facing the player, okay from here to there, and I'd throw the ball up in the air and he's going to watch it and it's going to go over his head and it's going to come down but he's gotta turn for his left foot, you know, but he's got to turn, pivot on the right, watching the ball, it's going over his head, and it comes around and he pivots and he shoots with his left foot. You've got to time it and kick that ball in as it comes on. That is very hard. Very, very hard. Believe me. But, there again, coordination, timing, that's fantastic, all of that is right. Some of these kids, you keep telling them how much it means to them, what, how much practice they have to do. I am still going to the YMCA, and I go up on the second floor, I get there six o'clock in the morning, I go up there with my soccer ball, I go up there to the second floor and they have three, what do you call that, the14:18

**JH:** Racquetball?

**RM:** The racquetball courts. I get the one in the middle every time I go in there. And, I use my left and right foot with a soccer ball that is ideal for something like that, you know. It's great. And I used first, I start using the in step, I time it. On the second bounce, then I get further back, and I keep on timing. As it hits the floor on the second bounce, that's where the idea, now as I'm getting further back then I start using the left foot as it comes, and then it hits on the second bounce, left foot straight in, and then you sort of lean like that with the outside part of the foot. Then again with the right foot, then the left one, then if you've been doing it two or three times with the left foot, then it's time to mix it up and get over with the right foot and do it again on the right, and start like catching up. Fantastic. That is great, I'm telling you. (15:25)

**JH:** And you still do that today?

**RM:** I'm going there tomorrow morning again. I go and do that like three times a week. Monday, I'll switch, Tuesday one, but I went there today, then Wednesday, then I won't do it Thursday, but Friday. Like three times, sometimes I'll do four, but three is the best. But I time it, and I'm trying to get, I got it over 50, it was about 5, you know I had a hard time making it over 25. Try to make it over 25. Today, this morning, over 50, like 53, something like that 54. Fantastic. And what it does for the legs also, your timing, and with the laces like this, you know, when I coach, I use my hands. "I want you to go like that, yeah then the sidewinder you go like that, on the ball, and the ball will go that way." You want me to tell you a good one?

**JH:** Sure.

**RM:** I was playing, this was over at Wall Stadium, Hokeland Stadium they called it, that's the one that was next, they came and tore it down, but they, it was next to the, close to the arena. I don't know if you remember the arena, they tore that down also, you know. But anyway, there was a game, we had a game and the ball was coming to me from the right side, and the right winger gave a cross on the ground, a hard one on the ground coming to me, and I came in from the other corner. Came in towards the ball real quick, it was so fast that my timing, I was supposed to kick with right foot, and my timing was off with my right, so I ended up like coming in with the left and I'm going straight at the ball, and I came down like this, like that. No no, like this, like that okay. And the timing was going like this, and then I followed through quickly, it's on the line and a penalty. And hit the ball up in the air, high up and my foot went way up high, the people in the stands, they thought that I was just kicking it towards the stands, you know. The goalie stood there, he was in the middle of the goalpost, he stood there right at the halfway mark, and he said, he thought maybe I was messing up or just kicking it towards the stands. My own players thought that, "What in the world was I doing?" And I explained it to them later on, that I came up, the timing, that ball went like this, started curving, curving, and then the goalie starts seeing that it's coming in towards the goal at the corner, and the goalie starts going over there, and it's too late. That ball went right in. [Both laugh] That ball went right in the corner and in the goal. Everybody was surprised. I was the...

**JH:** Were you?

**RM:** No. You know, well, I was surprised, but this was, I had to do it that way. But the reason why it worked, because the ball first of all was kicked hard, and shoved hard on the ground towards me, and I'm running like at top speed and that's why my timing was off, I was supposed to kick with the right, I kick with the left, I really, right away I hit that up like that, and it came in, and I went like that. You have to go in on it and not to make it go up and also curve. That was amazing.

**JH:** It sounds like it.

**RM:** It was amazing, that ball just kept on curving. And goalie, "Hey, what was that meteor?" I scored a goal like that one time in Chicago. About 40 yards out. From way out. And I was going in with the ball, and this guy from the Schwaben team, we played that team so many times. They never did beat us, no they, no wait a minute, wait a minute, I'm sorry. No, they beat us two or three times, and we beat them

about seven or eight. And then about another two times it could have gone either way. But anyway, he was a good goalie. With my left foot again, I favored my left, but I could do it with either, but I favored my left. I'm going in and the ball is taking a little bounce, just right, and I'm going in and I see, I look up at him, and then I look up and down and for the next bounce, and I got it with the outside part of the foot and boy you really wind it up and make that foot go up high, that ball just takes off. This was a line drive, one of those, the only way to make that work, a line drive straight like that, that'll keep on going, is that, is that your right foot has to be in front of the ball. Kick it like back here and man, really follow through with a lot of power. And the goalie was just like this, he kept on just watching, looking at the ball. And then suddenly, the ball took a curve. [laughs] (21:34)

**JH:** Now what year was that do you think?

**RM:** That one was, I think that one was in Chicago... around 1950... about '56 around there, 1956 I think it, no I'm sorry, no this is early. Because that was not the previous team that I was playing for, they picked me up, they wanted me to play on their team. With the cup. This was uh, at that time there was that amateur cup that they had, I was only seventeen years old. Yeah, I remember that so well. Or 16 maybe. Yep, I got here when I was 16. Either 16 or 17. Anyway, and that's when I kicked that ball, and they were complaining, that uh, see this was an amateur cup game, and they were complaining that I was a professional. They kept on saying it, these German guys. "He's a professional." I said, "Now wait a minute." I signed on an amateur contract because that's what everybody told me from the older guys and everything, said if you sign that you get to play form you get to try out for the Olympic team, and also by being in the amateur status you get to play also in the professional teams. Now, if I didn't sign that, then I wouldn't have been able to play amateur games

**JH:** In the Olympics?

**RM:** At the Olympics, especially. Especially the Olympics. That was a good idea. In fact, our whole team, whole team signed that after, see right after that one, see, I think it was 1950... no, 1950...1947 is when I started. Okay '47, '48, '49, and '50. 1950 is when we started with the Kutis team. But we had different teams over here. From that first team, Zenthoefer, I think about half of those players were on the Kutis team. Then it was some other ones who were coming in, for the Kutis team.

**JH:** Now this was the Kutis over in St. Louis?

**RM:** Yeah, fantastic team.

**JH:** How did you migrate to St. Louis? How did you hear about them?

**RM:** Oh, after I went to watch, oh did I, I didn't tell you the one about when I first got here and I went to the stadium.

**JH:** Right, you did.

**RM:** I did tell you that one, right? Yes. Well, I started playing for, let's see, for Zenthoeffers, and then for the Raiders, first the Raiders and then Zenthoeffers. And then after that the Schulte team.

**JH:** And how old were you during this?

**RM:** I was seventeen, I could've started playing at sixteen, I should've done that, but I didn't know that there was soccer over on that side, see. I didn't know we had seven teams. And when we were, in 1950 was when we started with the Kutis team. Or 1951, one of those two. You know, and then after that I made the Olympic team, the World Cup teams twice, and then the Olympic teams three times. I feel good about it. (25:29)

**JH:** I'm sure you do.

**RM:** And also, in the '50s, now this is the one I like the most, a lot. In 1950, the Zenthoefer team, they were another team, because we were just getting ready to go with the Kutis team, but the Zenthoefer team, we played against... uh... against a team from, oh, Eintracht Frankfurt, okay. First division team, pro-teams, first division. We beat 'em 2 to 1, okay. Then we played after that, we played another team called, called, let's see, we've got, I'm trying to, well that doesn't matter which one they were, okay. Offenbach that was later on, I'll tell you that one, I'll bring that up later. But Offenbach, okay might as well explain to you about Offenbach, they were supposed to come to St. Louis and play us, that was the second year, or third year. But Chicago got them on a contract to play in Chicago against Kutis, us, because every time we went to Chicago we didn't lose, okay. So we played against Offenbach. We beat 'em 4 to 1.

**JH:** Where was this at?

**RM:** Huh?

**JH:** Was this in St. Louis?

**RM:** That's in, no, in Chicago. One of their stadiums over there, okay. Like about 20,000 people there in that stadium, and we played very good against Offenbach. Now at that time we were called Kutis. Then, Knox Murloc[?] who would play on the World Cup team for Germany, he played on this team from Germany, first division, called, I can't remember the name of the team, I'll come up with that later. But we beat them 3 to 2, one terrific game. I assisted in all three, and that game, I did not score in that game, but I assisted there. For the Eintracht game I scored one goal, that's when we won 2 to 1. Oh, we beat Schwaben of Augsburg. We beat them 3 to nothing, I scored one goal in that one. The goalie comes out, and there's a cross from the back cross, not from the corner, a cross like a line drive and the goalie is coming out, and I'm going in and I beat him to the ball. I headed the ball and it went over his head and in. But he let me have it right, right about in. Blood is coming out of my nose; I didn't feel it. You know when you score a goal you don't.

**JH:** You forget the world.

**RM:** That's right. Anyway, that was Schwaben of Augsburg. That's what you call them. Who else did we, oh we beat also Stuttgart. We beat them, we won five, we beat five first division teams, professional teams.

**JH:** And you were still the amateur?

**RM:** Huh?

**JH:** And you were still at Kutis?

**RM:** Well, you know we're still the amateur, I've always been the amateur after all but it doesn't matter, but I liked playing the pro teams, I always looked forward to that. Also, let's see, who else. Okay Kaiserslautern then came in, in 1957. It's one of their best teams ever. Of all time, they're tough.

**JH:** How do you pronounce that again?

**RM:** Kaiserslautern. I'll find it for you right here someplace. Ah, here it is. Kaiserslautern. Want me to write it down?

**JH:** Yeah.

**RM:** May the 8th of 1957. Anyway we played them, and the place was packed. Public school stadium again. And a lot of people from Granite City, especially here from Lincoln Place, were there. My parents were there, my mother was there. Five minutes into the game, a ball is coming this way, and I went with it and it took a high bounce, and I went after it, I put a lot of speed into it, and then I went way up and I didn't see this guy, what's his name, he's a center back, on this Kaiserslautern team, they had eight players from Kaiserslautern on the World Cup team that won the World Cup in 1954. Before this game here. There was eight of 'em. And this guy's coming from the side, and I'm going in to head the ball, he beats me to the ball, and also, he got me right here, twelve stitches, and I, and he didn't get anything there, you know how Germans are, are you German?

**JH:** Mm-hmm.

**RM:** You Germans, hardheaded.

**JH:** I'm going to switch this really quick before it runs out.

**RM:** Do that. Alright.