

Interview with Charlotte Lewis

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Interview: November 6, 2004

Interviewer: Ellyn Bartges

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Bartges: Good morning. It's November 6, 2004, and I'm interviewing Charlotte Lewis at the Carver Center in Peoria. Good morning, Charlotte.

Lewis: Morning.

Bartges: Where did you go to high school?

Lewis: Woodruff High School.

Bartges: Here in Peoria?

Lewis: Here in Peoria.



Charlotte Lewis

- Bartges: Did you play sports in high school? Lewis: Volleyball and softball.
- Bartges: Were those interscholastic sports or intramural sports or what they used to call play days?
- Lewis: Interscholastic.
- Bartges: So, you competed against other high schools here?
- Lewis: Um-hmm.
- Bartges: Volleyball and softball. You played after school?
- Lewis: Yeah, it was always after school, yeah.
- Bartges: Ever play on weekends or mostly during the week?
- Lewis: During the week.
- Bartges: What times were your games? Were they in the (unintelligible)?
- Lewis: Usually we got out of school like two something, then we had to be out there about 3:30, 4:00.
- Bartges: Was there a varsity and a JV [Junior Varsity]?
- Lewis: Just a varsity, just one at the time.
- Bartges: Did you play for all four years?
- Lewis: I think we only had a softball team and a volleyball team my junior and senior year.
- Bartges: Were there fans? Did fans come to your games?
- Lewis: Um-hmm.
- Bartges: Do you know if they charged to get in?
- Lewis: No, they didn't charge for a good while. Well, volleyball, they didn't charge for it. Softball was outside (unintelligible).
- Bartges: When did you graduate from high school?

Lewis: Seventy-three.

Bartges: What is the highest level of education you've attained?

Lewis: I've been to college twice, so it's been four years plus.

Bartges: Do you have a bachelor's degree?

Lewis: Yeah, I have a double bachelor's in Recreation Administration, Program Management, and then the sequence on it, Commercial Rec [Recreation].

Bartges: Is that like a certification that's over and above Commercial Rec? Or is that...

Lewis: No, it's another bachelor's; it's called a double bachelor's.

Bartges: Where did you go to college?

Lewis: Illinois State University.

Bartges: And both bachelors are from Illinois State?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Are you familiar with the postal tournament?

Lewis: No.

Bartges: Did you play sports in college?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: What sports did you play?

Lewis: Volleyball, track, and basketball.

Bartges: You mentioned volleyball in high school but not basketball. How did you get into basketball in college if you didn't play in high school?

Lewis: I played volleyball, and some of the girls from the basketball team came over to the gym and was seeing me batting or tipping the ball on the backboard. They asked me was I interested in playing basketball, and I told them I didn't like it. That was one sport I just didn't like. I had played a little bit before I

went, on the playground. They only always just used me as a rebounder or something like that. I didn't play very much.

Bartges: Were the sports you played at Illinois State—volleyball, basketball, and track—were those interscholastic sports you played?

Lewis: Yeah, um-hmm.

Bartges: Where all did you guys play, just a few examples?

Lewis: We played all over. We played in Kentucky; we played Wisconsin; we played down south, in Mississippi, pretty much, a little bit of everywhere, of volleyball. They all traveled...

Bartges: And did basketball travel like that?

Lewis: ... Oregon, UCLA...

Bartges: Did basketball travel like that?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: How did you guys travel?

Lewis: Most of the time, [it] was [in a] station wagon (Bartges laughs).

Bartges: I remember those days (Lewis laughs). Six of you in a wagon and a driver.

Lewis: Yes.

Bartges: And all your stuff.

Lewis: And your... [If] anybody had to study, [they were] in the back.

Bartges: Did you frequently go to the game on game day and then drive back, or did you stay over?

Lewis: It depends on if it was really long. If it was a long trip, then we left right after school that Friday, and then we played that Saturday. We come back by that Sunday.

Bartges: Was your experience in basketball playing five-player or six-player?

Lewis: Five.

Bartges: Did you ever play six-player?

Lewis: Never played six.

Bartges: Do you have any experience in any industrial leagues?

Lewis: No. You mean just...?

Bartges: Like Caterpillar would sponsor a team. Some of the big corporations would have leagues that they would play. They were almost like semi-professional leagues.

Lewis: Um-uh, we didn't have any of those.

Bartges: Did you serve in the military or the National Guard at any time?

Lewis: No.

Bartges: Have you taught or coached in a secondary school system?

Lewis: No. Well, yeah, I teach substitute teacher (unintelligible).

Bartges: Here in Peoria?

Lewis: Yeah, here in Peoria.

Bartges: When you were in high school, was your principal male or female?

Lewis: Male.

Bartges: Do you know if they were in favor or against any girls' basketball or sports, in general, on an interscholastic level?

Lewis: I think Mr. Wilkerson, at the time, he was kind of leery about it. But I guess it was some kind of challenge brought to the District 150, because women didn't have a basketball team.

Bartges: You mean like a legal challenge?

Lewis: A legal challenge. And they said, "If they wanted to play they had to play on the men's team." So that opened the way for the girls to try out for the men's

team, my senior year. This happened my senior year, which would have been in '72, '73.

Bartges: That would be the boys' varsity team?

Lewis: Boys' varsity or junior varsity, because, you know, they had both. So he said, "In order for you to play, you'd have to try out for the men's team." It was about five or six of us that went and actually tried out for the men's team. About four of us made it.

But then, when we made the team, they said... Well, then they took that back and said that we couldn't play with the men. So he had to come up with something for the women, because we had actually went through the trouble of making the team.

So we made a deal with him that, if we played... It was just a series of games we played, with like Bergan, Central—Manual wouldn't play us—It was Bergan, Central, Spalding, I think it was at the time, like three or four schools. We just played amongst ourselves.

He said if we did well on that... Our coach was our gym teacher, Miss Totten. She said... Let her coach, and then, if we did well, then he promised the next year that (unintelligible). I was going to be gone anyway, but I played. We won all our games.

Bartges: Did you play after school?

Lewis: After school, yeah.

Bartges: Did anyone come, fans, (unintelligible)?

Lewis: Oh, yeah. Yeah, a lot of the kids came to see that. They just wanted to come and see it. I think they was just interested to see what was going to happen.

Bartges: Even though you and several other girls made the boys' varsity high team...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... basketball team, you never played for the varsity basketball team?

Lewis: They wouldn't let us, right.

Bartges: Did that happen pretty quickly after it was determined that you made the team, that the principal said, "No, no, no, we're not going to do this."

Lewis: District 150 said it.

Bartges: Oh, the district?

Lewis: Yeah, it was the district that said, "Well, we're not able to let the women... The men are a lot stronger." They went with all the reasons why we couldn't play, but we actually made the team.

Bartges: Who was the coach that selected you or made the determination of who made the team?

Lewis: Engle. What's his name, Mr. Engle? I think that was his name, Engle.

Bartges: Is he still alive?

Lewis: He may be; I'm not even sure.

Bartges: How did the guys on the boys' team at Woodruff react to the fact that four or five of you guys made the team?

Lewis: You know what, they really couldn't say much. At that time, they really couldn't say much because the girls that made that team could really play on their level; they could really play, you know. They had physical attributes that some of them didn't have, so there wasn't really too much they could say.

Bartges: Now, this is your senior year, going into this, yet you had never played organized basketball.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: How...?

Lewis: Just on the playground.

Bartges: Just on the playground. How would you assess your skill level, or how did you get it?

Lewis: I don't know. I think I took a lot of the volleyball skills and used those, because... I mean, I didn't have no good defense or nothing like that. I wasn't really, really good. I just picked up a lot of skills from watching the guys on the court play a lot of times. Then they would just put me in there for height. Most of my skills come right off the playground.

Bartges: How tall were you?

Lewis: I jumped from... Let's see, my sophomore year I was 5' 8". I went to like 6' 1" my junior/senior year.

Bartges: That was pretty tall then, wasn't it?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: So after your senior year, the following year at Woodruff, they added girls' varsity basketball?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Do you have any knowledge of how big that team was or how successful that team was or who the coach was?

Lewis: I really don't remember. I couldn't (unintelligible).

Bartges: Yeah, and you were gone by then.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: When you got to Illinois State, did you feel that or perceive that you were at a disadvantage, having not played high school sports or high school basketball?

Lewis: Yeah, I was definitely at a disadvantage because... Like I said, all of my skills just came from them four little games and the little bit of ball I played with the guys. Most of my practicing and skill polishing was in volleyball and track. Them was the two things you concentrated on the most at that time.

Bartges: Did you play all four years, all three sports?

Lewis: All three sports, yeah.

Bartges: The teammates that you had, where were they from?

Lewis: South Holland, Lincoln...

Bartges: South Holland, Michigan?

Lewis: South Holland, Chicago. It's a suburb. Let's see, a lot of them [were] from like a lot of the small cities.

Bartges: Mostly Illinois though?

Lewis: Yeah, mostly Illinois, yeah.

Bartges: Had they played high school basketball?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: Did you get scholarship money?

Lewis: I didn't get a scholarship until my junior year, I think it was, junior or senior year.

Bartges: Was that a function of skill level or that scholarships weren't as common then?

Lewis: First person got a scholarship in '74 was Annie Meyers; that was the first one.¹ So, after '75 would have been the year that I would have got it, about '75.

Bartges: How did you end up at Illinois State and playing sports if you hadn't had a background in high school sports?

Lewis: I really just went there to walk on; I walked on. I walked on volleyball, and I walked on track.

Bartges: So you knew they had a team?

Lewis: Yeah, I knew they had teams, and I wanted to go there because it was close.

Bartges: But nobody ever recruited you, in the sense that they do now?

Lewis: No. No. Everybody was trying to tell me to go to Bradley [University, Peoria]. I ain't like Bradley (laughs).

Bartges: You wanted to get out of Dodge, huh?

Lewis: Yep.

¹ Ann Meyers Drysdale is an American former basketball player and sportscaster. She was a standout player in high school, college, the Olympic Games, international tournaments, and the professional levels. Meyers was the first player to be part of the U.S. national team while still in high school. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ann_Meyers)

Bartges: Have you ever participated in a National Sports Institute or a National Leadership Conference?

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: In 1971, the National Basketball Committee Experimental Rules became official. That's when we went from six-player to five-player. Do you think that had an impact on the sport in Illinois and the addition of basketball for girls at the high school level?

Lewis: The only impact I could really see is that it made all five players get the skills that they didn't have, because at that time, if I remember correctly, three played defense, three played offense, which **wasn't the thing**, mainly in Iowa. So when those players came out of Iowa to go to a college or something like that, wherever they were playing at, they were at a complete disadvantage, whereas all the other states—if you think about it—that played five-man, they had skills on both end. So, Iowa developed some good shooters; don't get me wrong. Really good shooters came out of Iowa.

But defensively, they were hurting, especially the ones that they just used for defense, and then those... I mean, offensively wasn't any good. So it kind of hurt. It hurt the game when they just made them just play one side or the other or specialize.

But when they all had a chance... When you take five players, and they all could do everything, it's a whole different game when you get out there. It's a lot faster, I think. It may be that three on three. I've seen it on TV, but it was kind of slow.

Bartges: Did you know people that had played three on three, six on six?

Lewis: Some of my teammates, when I played in a professional league. Molly Bolin, she played in six-man, and Connie Kunzmann and all them from Iowa, they played that.

Bartges: Did they like the five-player game better?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: For all the reasons you just mentioned?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: Do you think you had a role in getting interscholastic basketball added for girls, no matter how large or small, at the high school level?

Lewis: I think when we played that interscholastic thing that we did, I think it gave them a chance to see that people was interested, and girls, other girls besides just Woodruff want to play.

Bartges: How many kids were on your team?

Lewis: We had about ten of us that... When we actually got a chance to play girls against girls, it was about ten of us.

Bartges: Do you know if coach... Is it Totten or...?

Lewis: Miss Totten, Vivian Totten, yeah.

Bartges: ...if she had ever coached before?

Lewis: Not that I know of. I just know she was a good gym teacher. She was a good gym teacher.

Bartges: It doesn't seem like she stayed with it after that first year.

Lewis: You know what, I don't think so. If I'm not (unintelligible) reason (unintelligible) remember. But I think (unintelligible) somebody maybe from ICC [Illinois Central College] that coached or something, that came from ICC and coached, because I remember Coach Ramsey...

I've stated that before, that I said, "I wasn't never recruited." Yes I was, because [Lorene] Ramsey tried to get me there for the softball. She used to referee our games at Woodruff, and she was on me about coming to ICC for softball, because I was a pitcher at the time. Man, she was really on me, and I just wouldn't go.

Bartges: How motivated were you to push for changes, so that basketball would be added? It seems to me like you were highly motivated.

Lewis: Oh, yeah.

Bartges: You were willing to go to your principal and say, We want to...

Lewis: Let's make a deal...

Bartges: ... tryout for the boys' team, or we want to have a girls' team.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: What do you think motivated you to do that?

Lewis: It was a lot of us that was doing it, and we had to play or try to learn it in gym. Then everybody got interested and wanted to really learn. And I'll tell you something else; at that time, when you watched the Olympics and stuff on TV, [there] wasn't no basketball either. So it was a lot of people who was like, "Do they play basketball down South?" We got to ask a lot of questions about... It was like, "Yeah, down South they been playing basketball. Up North they been playing... It's just like Illinois."

Bartges: So you knew other states were playing basketball?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Did you know they had state tournaments?

Lewis: We found out a whole lot about it when Miss Totten went and looked into it, yeah.

Bartges: So she helped educate you?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: I'll come back to the Olympic thing in a little bit. Do you think your school was instrumental in getting basketball added or that they just followed the pack? Do you think the actions at Woodruff were leadership actions or follower actions?

Lewis: I think it was leadership because I think Miss Totten was the one who contacted the other schools and asked them, were they willing to play us for this little thing, to see if it would work out (unintelligible) next year? I think she did all the legwork on the women's basketball.

Bartges: You're not quite old enough for this question. One of the things that I'm asking older people that I'm interviewing is if they were active in the civil rights movement. Have you had any actions in civil rights and in civil liberties?

Lewis: Not really, not **right** here, no.

Bartges: Billie Jean King says that she hates labels and being labeled.² However, for the purpose of this interview, how did you or would you characterize yourself during this period of your life?

Lewis: Playing ball (unintelligible)? I don't know. I know they wanted to say that we were... Well, everybody that played ball was tomboyish, but I would say tomboyish, because that's what they were calling us.

Bartges: So you experienced people putting a label on you...

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: ...because you played ball? How did that make you feel?

Lewis: It didn't bother me none because I (unintelligible). At that time sports, when (unintelligible), when you got into college and all that stuff, and they would still label you as tomboyish. Then they would label you all your life (unintelligible). It didn't bother me **then**.

Bartges: Did it bother any of your teammates?

Lewis: Not really, uh-uh.

Bartges: Did you attend the first State Girls' Basketball Tournament at Horton Fieldhouse in Bloomington, the high school tournament?

Lewis: No.

Bartges: It was in 1977.

Lewis: No, I didn't uh-uh.

Bartges: Did you watch it on TV or anything?

Lewis: When that tournament was going on, I think we were... See, I was still there. So I think... Yes, yes I did; yes I did. We had to work it. Illinois State women's team had to work during that state tournament to help them out.

Bartges: What did you...

Lewis: We had to...

² Billie Jean King is an American former World No. 1 professional tennis player. King won 39 Grand Slam titles: 12 in singles, 16 in women's doubles, and 11 in mixed doubles. She often represented the United States in the Federation Cup and the Wightman Cup. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billie_Jean_King)

Bartges: (unintelligible).

Lewis: Miss Hutchinson, yeah.

Bartges: So, she said, "Okay you guys, we're going to work (unintelligible)?"

Lewis: Yeah, we're going to do this. We used to do little things in the community anyway. So we did that one, and we did Special Olympics every year.³

Bartges: Did you ever do any clinics or things for girls' basketball in the community?

Lewis: If we were asked, like if we had to do photo sessions or autograph things to bring a crowd for the high school teams and stuff like that we would do. We did some clinics. Where did we do the clinics at? Like at Normal High, Bloomington, different things like that. She'd have us active, pretty active.

Bartges: Do you recall making an assessment of the caliber of play in that first state tournament? You may not (unintelligible).

Lewis: Of the high school players?

Bartges: Yes.

Lewis: Yeah. I thought a lot of them. Man, I was looking at their skills in comparison to what I had when I came to Illinois State. I was like, "Man, they pretty good." But those girls, at that time, came up out of grade school, if you remember. They had already started a league here. I know they were playing already in grade school at that time.

Bartges: Yeah, the difference a few years makes is amazing.

Lewis: Yes it is.

Bartges: In your opinion, given the previous conversation and your own experiences, what do you think was the major reason that slowed basketball from being added as an interscholastic sport by the IHSA?

Lewis: The first, before it started you mean?

³ Special Olympics is the world's largest sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and physical disabilities, providing year-round training and activities to 5 million participants and Unified Sports partners in 172 countries. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Olympics)

Bartges: Yeah. What kept the IHSA from adding basketball the way they had added...

Lewis: Volleyball and softball?

Bartges: Volleyball, although volleyball was a little bit slow too. There wasn't that much of a gap between volleyball and basketball. But the sports the IHSA sanctioned at this time were tennis, golf, and I believe, archery. You didn't mention any of those sports, so I don't know whether your school had them, but you didn't participate in them.

Lewis: No.

Bartges: So, of the sports you played, they weren't sanctioned by the IHSA at that time, even though you played interscholastically?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Why do you think the IHSA would have been slow to add those sports, in your opinion?

Lewis: My opinion would have been, number one, because of society. They didn't think girls should be playing sports at that time. We used to hear that all the time. "That ain't what y'all supposed to be doing. Men supposed to play sports. Naw, naw, naw, naw, women can't play this. Women can't do this." And the fact that women didn't have any draw, the money.

They'd look at if we're going to spend money on sports, because men's sports, you know, they made money off of it. They could charge at the door. So they they didn't want to add something they're going to lose money on, at that time, which is what they're thoughts was. They didn't think they was going to get no money. So, with schools being strapped like they are, spend money to get nothing? That's probably what I think they were thinking.

Bartges: What do you think happened, in particular, to change that, or why did it change?

Lewis: I think the pressure of women and women coaches and leaders from other areas and... You're looking at coaches and things from other states going, "Illinois has all this (unintelligible) talent and stuff, but they don't have anything there." You [are] looking at the men having sports, the women not having nothing. I think Title IX and all them coming along later boosted it, but I think it was a lot of pressure because women didn't have equal opportunities as men. I think that's what the whole thing was.

Bartges: Obviously, your experience, it wasn't just maybe in school. You talk about community, so...

Lewis: Community.

Bartges: ... so the community would put labels or say that you shouldn't do this.

Lewis: Right, right.

Bartges: Was there bigger pressure than just in your school system?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: What role do you think homophobia played in the development and growth of girls' sports at the high school level, particularly for team sports like basketball?

Lewis: The whole thing on that is... First of all, they didn't want women to play it because they said it was a contact sport. And that [would] just be just like they could put basketball, along with the (unintelligible) football. Well, I don't think so, but that's what they were doing at that time. "Women shouldn't be playing no contact sports." That's what they **had**. They think that all the players that played basketball was going to be playing or look like guys.

They can't classify people like that, you know what I'm saying? Just because they're just as good as some of the guys or can probably beat some of the guys, because it's been done, they **shouldn't** classify people.

Bartges: Do you think that there was an undercurrent of that?

Lewis: Yes it was, quite a bit at that time.

Bartges: Do you think any one particular group... I'll name some groups, kind of give you guidance: administrators, coaches, parents, players, the community. Were [some groups] more concerned or vocal about mannish behavior than another?

Lewis: Mannish?

Bartges: I use that word; it's... A lot of sociology text write about... If you look historically in the development of women's sports, from say, the turn of the century, from 1900, that's the word that they use. It has to do, I think, with appearance: dress, hair...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ...maybe something as simple as... We wouldn't think of it today, but people who smoked...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ...wore shorter skirts, whatever, those things that they labeled as unfeminine.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: I'm not a sociologist; I'm a historian, but the unfeminine side of it, they turned that around to make it even more of a label and put mannish on it.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: I don't know if you felt like there was some group that maybe were more vocal about sports promoting mannish behavior or were more fearful of that. And you may not...

Lewis: Not really. It was just pretty much what the people or most parents and stuff themselves...the parents and the community again. It goes back to the community, basically, what the parents thought of their child or their female child playing. If they didn't think that they should be playing because, "No, that's mannish; they going think you a boy," they put pressures on you like that, or your friends or your peers.

So, I would say it's mostly within the school and outside the school because most of us played sports in our communities, like we would play... The sports I didn't play in high school were played like in the areas that you from, like the [Peoria] Heights had a baseball team, Taft Homes, (unintelligible).⁴ And they had a big league in Park District. We played for the Park District. So, it was not just in the schools; it was outside the schools.

Bartges: When I interviewed Coach [Lorene] Ramsey, she talked about...⁵ She had a word for it; it was a covert league. It was like a secret church thing for basketball... (Lewis laughs) That was played over here in Peoria, not

4 The Taft Homes are a public housing project located off the Illinois River in Peoria, Illinois. In total there are 200 apartments in Taft, housed in separate wood framed buildings.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taft_Homes)

5 Lorene Ramsey, a pioneer in women's sports, is one of the most successful college coaches of all time. In 1968, Ramsey joined the staff of Illinois Central College, a community college in East Peoria, Illinois. There, before the passing of Title IX, she started the women's athletic program.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorene_Ramsey)

(unintelligible). That was run out of some churches. Do you know anything about that?

Lewis: You know what? I heard it was some church teams, but I never seen them or actually play (unintelligible).

Bartges: She said she had, I think, ref'd [refereed] some games there.

Lewis: She probably did. I believe her. She'd be everywhere.

Bartges: She was very interesting to interview. Do you think the American Medical Association endorsement for vigorous exercise helped change public or educational policy towards interscholastic sport? It used to be that the Medical Association said that exercise and sports and athletics were bad for women; it was negative to their reproductive organs...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... and they weren't strong enough and all this stuff. In the late '60s, the AMA changed their view on that. Do you think that that (unintelligible)...

Lewis: I think that might have had a lot to do with it. It made sports more acceptable, or exercise and stuff like that more acceptable. I think, if they made that change, then once they allowed it to be done in the high schools and the gym classes, then it gave it a chance to go a little higher level because if you were good... If you learned the skills in the gym class, for example, and it was good for you in the gym class, it would be even better for you on a higher level, if you could specialize in sports and stuff. That's what I think.

Bartges: That's where your first real exposure to organized basketball...

Lewis: Would have been in gym...

Bartges: ... (unintelligible) and things like that.

Lewis: ... in the gym class.

Bartges: Would have been PE class, okay. So, that was important for you?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: How do you think Title IX affected girls' basketball in the long run?

Lewis: I think it was a good thing. I think it gave us equal chance in all the schools because, like we said Illinois [it was] late—oh, they was so late—but all the other states already in.

Bartges: You're the first person that I've interviewed that was actually in high school when Title IX was passed.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: How quickly did you see any change, or were you aware of Title IX being passed when you were, what, a sophomore, '72, junior in high school?

Lewis: Yeah, we were aware of it. We was like all happy and everything. We was hoping then that they would say, “Well, (unintelligible) going to have a basketball team, uh-huh.”

Bartges: Did that motivate you to try and tryout someplace?

Lewis: Exactly. I think that's what pushed the issue, because they said, “We got the right to have it, but we don't have it.” So, when you get to talking to a lot of parents and a lot of the coaches out in the neighborhoods and the community and stuff, then they said, “Then you take it to your principal. The principal's got to be the one that make the decision, and the principal will take it to the board.”

Bartges: The board?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: The 150 board [School District 150 Board of Education]?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: Were parents pretty involved in that kind of activity?

Lewis: Exactly. There were quite a few of them. They were the ones that paid for our uniforms, because the school, at the time, had no budget. So when we did that little tryout, that little trial-and-error league that we did, they bought our uniforms and everything, right down there.

Bartges: The parents?

Lewis: Yeah, the parents bought it right down there.

Bartges: Was it like a booster club or just the parents (unintelligible)?

Lewis: No, just the parents went out and bought each of us uniforms, and then Miss Totten took and got the numbers put on them for us. There was a community store, Solomon's Clothing Store, like down here on (unintelligible). They gave us the uniforms, practically, gave us the gold shirts, the shorts, gym shoes.

Bartges: When you practiced for your limited interscholastic your senior year, did you guys practice after school or...

Lewis: After school.

Bartges: Did you have to fight for your gym, or did Miss Totten have to fight for (unintelligible)?

Lewis: No. You know what he did? We practiced sometimes with the guys. He let us practice a little bit with the guys, and then we had the girls' side and the boys' side of the gym.

Bartges: One of those dividers (unintelligible), right down the middle?

Lewis: Exactly. So we practiced in the girls' side of the gym when we got a chance, unless it was a game. If it was a game going on that night, we practiced early in the morning, before school.

Bartges: Those gym dividers are dinosaurs. They don't exist anymore (laughs).

Lewis: Yes, (unintelligible) at Woodruff.

Bartges: We had one in our gym.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: How did you travel? Did you take a school bus when you went to your games your senior year?

Lewis: Let's see; what did we do? We did take a bus, yeah, took a bus.

Bartges: Marianna Trekell in her book, *A Century of Women's Basketball*, stated that she felt that Title IX forced the issue or role model for girls in women's sports towards a more competitive, male model. Do you agree or disagree?

Lewis: (exhales) If it forced it toward a competitive male model, it didn't intentionally do it. I think it was because people said, "If you're going to have a women's team—but they [are] already saying that we can't play like males—most women [are] going think that they going need the skills of males. To even succeed him, you have to be good as a guy."

So, what they did was... Even with us, when we were playing in the high school, little trial league and in the Olympic games and even at college level, we played against the men.

Bartges: Regularly, you practiced (unintelligible)?

Lewis: Regularly, yeah. You practiced with the guys in order to get the skills that they got. You get quicker. You don't want to have the slower skills of the girls; you want to get the skills that you'll be able to beat the ones on the same level. So if Title IV pushed anything, what it did was make us have to work hard as men in order to gain the respect that the men had. That's the only thing I can say.

Bartges: Do you think athletes work that hard today?

Lewis: (laughs) I don't know. It depends on the coach—you understand what I'm saying?—because I've seen some women coaches and men coaches push them like we were pushed, and I've seen some men coaches and women coaches don't push them as hard as we were pushed. But you have to think, at that time we were trial and error. You used us like trial and error.

Bartges: Did you feel pressure to succeed, that you were the first...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... part of a group of the first and that you had something to prove?

Lewis: I believe, yeah, because if we failed, I believe that was going to be it for women's sports, women's basketball especially.

Bartges: Despite not playing a regular interscholastic schedule in high school, you went on. You said you were sort of recruited to the basketball team because of your volleyball skills and your size, your height, and that at Illinois State you played for four years on the basketball team.

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: Through that process, and you were a freshman in '97... ?

Lewis: Three.

Bartges: Three.

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: You said earlier that basketball didn't exist in Olympic sport.

Lewis: It didn't.

Bartges: For girls, for women?

Lewis: Women, no.

Bartges: For women. When was basketball added as an Olympic sport?

Lewis: Let's see; it was '76.

Bartges: Was the first...

Lewis: Seventy-six was the first, the first actual game.

Bartges: So (unintelligible)?

Lewis: Right. They had the World Championships. I know they had that, but they didn't have no... It as an Olympic sport, because I remember in '73, after I went to the national, we received our invitation to try out in Maryville, Tennessee, I think it was. That would have been early '74.

Bartges: When you say you went to the nationals. Explain for me what that is. You went to the national championship for basketball?

Lewis: Right, my freshman year. The first year I got to Illinois State and the first year I ever played, Illinois State went to the nationals. We played against Delta State, Queens College, all them. We ended up, I think, twelfth in the nation.

Bartges: So Immaculata [University in Pennsylvania], all those schools...

Lewis: Right, were first and second like that.

Bartges: That's quite a feat for a bunch of young women that hadn't played a lot of games.

Lewis: Exactly, exactly.

Bartges: When you got an invitation to try out, was it for the...

Lewis: It was for the world championship...

Bartges: (unintelligible)?

Lewis: ... Yeah, world championship team.

Bartges: How did that evolve? Was that something that your coach sort of tried to, how would I say, promote you? Or was that something that the officials... What was the structure?

Lewis: What it was is, once they choose the coaches for the United States team...

Bartges: And who were the coaches?

Lewis: Billie Moore—I think Billie Moore was there—Cathy Rush, she was there. I think it was that particular year; it would have been Cathy Rush was the coach, I think. I didn't make it that year because, in my inexperience...

Even though I played better than some of the players there, they had experience. They wanted girls with experience. See, most of the girls, I would think... I think the girls from Illinois know (unintelligible) Illinois. Most of the other (unintelligible), they had experience like California, down South and all that, Tennessee and all that and everything.

Bartges: You mentioned experience, and I didn't ask you this question earlier. How many games do you think you guys played your freshman year at Illinois State?

Lewis: Twenty, about twenty to twenty-six, I think, if you count regionals and everything. Your regular season game would have been about twenty to twenty-three, and then I think we played... because we went to regionals, and then we went to state every year, all four years I was there.

Bartges: And this was under the umbrella of the AIAW?

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: So no Illinois women made that team?

Lewis: That team, no.

Bartges: So that would make it '70...

Lewis: That was '74, yeah.

Bartges: When was the next tryout, '75?

Lewis: The next tryouts would have been for the Pan-American Games.⁶

Bartges: In...

Lewis: That was in '75 in Mexico.

Bartges: Did you try out or get an invitation to that?

Lewis: I tried out, got an invitation, and that's the team I made.

Bartges: Who was the coach of that team?

Lewis: Cathy Rush.

Bartges: And how did you guys do?

Lewis: We won. We got a gold medal.

Bartges: You won the gold medal at the Pan-American Games?

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: Now, you're still in college?

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: And Pan-American Games are usually in the summertime?

Lewis: Right.

⁶ The Pan American Games is a continental multi-sport event in the Americas featuring summer sports, in which thousands of athletes participate in a variety of competitions. The competition is held among athletes from nations of the Americas, every four years in the year before the Summer Olympic Games. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pan_American_Games)

Bartges: There wasn't a conflict there, and you come back the next year, still playing at Illinois State. When did you find out that basketball had been added as an Olympic sport for women?

Lewis: We played the Pan-American Games, and I think right after that we were... After we won that, we were at our own individual colleges then, and I think somebody... We got a letter in the mail or... I think that's how I found out that they were going to have these pre-Olympic trials. We were like, "Pre-Olympic trials, Olympics?" It was like, "Hey, the only way you can go to these games," they said, "was be... If you won the World Championship, you had to be the number one, two, and three spot. Those automatically went.

That was at the world championship, which we won. But I don't think we were... The '74 teams wasn't up there, which means we had to try to qualify. They had to have eight teams. The other positions were wide open.

Well, because we had won the Pan-American Games, we automatically received an invitation. So that would have left us... Cuba, I think, was in the second place; Mexico, and then any other team that wanted to try out. But we were all invited from the Pan-American Games.

Bartges: Where were your tryouts for the Olympics?

Lewis: For the Olympics, it was in Colorado.

Bartges: It was then?

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: Who was the coach of that team?

Lewis: It was Billie Moore and Sue Gunter.

Bartges: And Sue Gunter. Did you have any trouble making that team?

Lewis: None.

Bartges: By then you were a junior?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: So, you had no trouble making that team? How did that team do?

Lewis: In the Olympics, we took silver. We took silver medal to Russia. Russia got first; we got second.

Bartges: Do you know what the score was (unintelligible)?

Lewis: I know they beat us by seventeen.

Bartges: I remember watching that game.

Lewis: Yeah, they beat us by seventeen, and we just couldn't... For the first five minutes, we didn't hit nothing. I got the tape. You look at the tape; we couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. And all of a sudden it was it. Lucy made that first basket, and it was on.⁷ We came all the way back from being thirty-one down. We were down thirty-one points.

Bartges: Wow.

Lewis: And we came all the way back to within seventeen, sometimes, and we pushed it a little closer. By seventeen, we lost it by.

But we went back and beat that same team. I didn't get to play. If I remember correctly, I didn't play because I went my junior year, when I came back to... That junior year, I had broke my leg in Iowa, and they went right down there, and they beat them.

Bartges: After the '76 Olympics, you played another year of college ball.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Then you had an opportunity, must have been the early '80s...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... to play professional basketball.

Lewis: Okay, after my junior year, I played another year, (unintelligible) games.

⁷ Lusia ("Lucy") Harris-Stewart is a former American basketball player, considered to be one of the pioneers of women's basketball. She played for Delta State University and won three consecutive Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) National Championships. In international level, she represented the United States' national team and won the silver medal in the 1976 Olympic Games. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusia_Harris)

Bartges: In '77?

Lewis: Under Miss Kyvallos, Coach [Lucille] Kyvallos, out of Queens College. That would have been '77. Then, after that, left Illinois State and went to France. At the same time that was going on, was the first draft for the first women's pro league.

Bartges: And what was the name of that league?

Lewis: That was the WBL, Women's Basketball League. I got drafted on the first team that was bought, that Coach, Mr. Nissen of Nissen...

Bartges: (unintelligible)?

Lewis: Yeah, Mr. Nissen, George Nissen. I was the first one drafted on the first team, but I didn't know nothing about it. I'd already said that I was going to go across seas and everything.

My agent wasn't too particular about it, because he was like, "Well Char, you got good opportunities. You know that opportunity is there, over across seas." But he said, "But if you go and play professional here, then that's going to make you ineligible to play over there, because the United States don't send pros over there; they send amateurs."

Bartges: Not to assume, but when you say you were talking to overseas in France. There was a professional league in Europe?

Lewis: That's right. Now, they're professional, period. They've been professional all this time. And any league from... everywhere, from South America to Brazil and all them all the way over here, they've been this here way for ages. They've been playing for ages, and that's 365 days a year. That's (unintelligible).

But if we go over there... When we go over there, we're still considered amateurs, under FIBA, because there's like sports ambassadors; [they] are amateur basketball players.

Bartges: Of course, now you're talking about when you were...

Lewis: Because there wasn't no such thing, as no professional league here in the United States.

Bartges: And that has changed with the addition what was the ABL [National Basketball Association] and then the WNBA [Women's National Basketball Association].

Lewis: Right. And (unintelligible) then, because what happened was, I went over to France, and I played. I had told Mr. Nissen, when I went to France, that I appreciated everything that was going on and everything. He said, "If you decide to come back and come back to the United States, would you play for us?" I said, "I tell you what, I'm going there this year, and if the league is still going strong when I come back, I will play for you." So I played three years, as a matter of fact, one, two, two years...three years for Iowa, and then the whole team was moved to Nebraska.

Bartges: Did you play in France for a year, and then you came back...

Lewis: One year, right.

Bartges: ... and played on the Iowa Cornets for two years?

Lewis: Two years and then Nebraska Wranglers.

Bartges: Raiders?

Lewis: Wranglers.

Bartges: Wranglers, that's right.

Lewis: Uh-huh.

Bartges: How long did the WBL exist?

Lewis: Seventy... Let's see, '78, and it ended in '81, '82, because we were the last champions, (unintelligible) Nebraska.

Bartges: The Wranglers. What caused the WBL to fold?

Lewis: Nonpayment of players. They wasn't paying the players. I think there were... It was like sixteen teams, and all the owners wasn't holding their own, even though they had like a pot or a kitty. Other teams was helping other teams. Because I remember Nebraska, Mr....

The people that owned Nebraska at the time were trying to help Virginia, and the people were trying... Different teams were helping these teams to try to keep the league going our final year. They was upholding their end of the bargain with the players and stuff.

Bartges: When you began playing for the Iowa Cornets, what was your contract? What amount of money did they pay you and for how many years?

Lewis: Eleven thousand.

Bartges: Eleven thousand?

Lewis: Eleven thousand for about six months, I think. We played just about... from the time we started practicing, about six months.

Bartges: That was in a normal basketball season? It wasn't a summer season, it was...

Lewis: No. Normal regular season, yeah. We had to report in September, yeah, end of August, September. And we played until whenever the finals were.

Bartges: Now, from this period of time, from say, 1973, when you were a freshman at Illinois State, to now you're a professional, and the fact you played in Iowa, obviously, there were other people from Illinois.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: How had the skills changed or evolved?

Lewis: Oh, it was fast. It was a fast game; it was a physical game. It was a lot of... You'd meet girls with a lot of different skill, good shooting skills, good everything. You had actual, good coaches then, and you had a lot of men coaches that had been coaching men's teams.

Bartges: Who was your coach on the Cornets?

Lewis: It was Steve Kirk from University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

Bartges: And how about on the Wranglers?

Lewis: The same one.

Bartges: Same one?

Lewis: Yeah, I had the same coach all three years.

Bartges: In France, the coaching situation in France, were they mostly men or mostly women?

Lewis: I had a woman coach. Her name is Yannick [Souvré], and she had been playing. She's a player coach as a matter of fact. At the time I was there, she was like thirty-nine. Yannick, oh she could play. She was little bitty though. She could play, but she's a good coach.

Bartges: Were there a lot of women coaches in Europe or no?

Lewis: Quite a few, quite a few.

Bartges: When the WBL folded, what did you do, in terms of basketball?

Lewis: I kind of got back with Bruce. Bruce Libby was my agent, out of New York, and he was trying to get us set up again, to go and play. Then he said, "You know they're starting another league," which they were, in the United States. Right after that (unintelligible), I was sent to Chicago for the Chicago Spirits, and I was playing under Coach [Rich] Maack from Triton College [in Chicago].

Bartges: Triton, yeah.

Lewis: He was our coach. And to my surprise, it was Vonnie Tomich that was my teammate. (unintelligible) Illinois State, who was going to be the assistant coach up there. When they called me, they was like, "You want to be a player coach? You got to help us out with the players and stuff like that." And I was like, "I don't know because..." I asked to talk to Bruce about it.

I was trying to get back across seas, and we were looking at the situation there. We was talking to FIBA. At that time, if you had played in that league, in the WBL, you had to buy back your amateur status. And when they say, "buy back," you had to pay back all the money that you earned as a professional back, before you can get your (unintelligible).

Bartges: So, \$11,000 from your contract with the ABL or whatever the (unintelligible)?

Lewis: Eleven thousand and all the money that I earned for those three years. It wasn't much to have to pay back on the last year, because we didn't get paid either. Nebraska didn't get paid at all. We played for pride. (unintelligible) of me, Holly Warlick, Susan Taylor, of us (unintelligible). We just played...

Bartges: I'd forgotten Holly played for (unintelligible).

Lewis: Yeah, she played with us, yeah. Genia Beasley, all of us we played just for pride.

Bartges: Holly's funny.

Lewis: Yeah. Sister Green, Vivian Greene. Who was it, Kim Jordan, Smoking Jo from Tennessee, (unintelligible) Tennessee. We had some good players.

Bartges: Do you think your experience would have been different if you had had the opportunity to play high school basketball?

Lewis: Well, I don't know, because I think I would have still had to walk on because scholarships wasn't given out then. I think I probably would have been more ready to play basketball than I was. I mean, I just learned it at the same time I was (unintelligible) volleyball. I was going to volleyball practice, then going to basketball practice.

Bartges: Now, we talked about '76, because you were still active during this period. Were you on the 1980 Olympic team?

Lewis: We didn't have it.

Bartges: They didn't pick the team? I know you didn't go.

Lewis: No, I didn't go, uh-uh. No, I didn't go to that one.

Bartges: I'll show you this. I kind of want your reaction—because you were a player, and you played at some different things—about how far we've come.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: That's the women's celebration for the WNBA and was issued in their first year. Did you guys have anything like that in leagues that you played in, media? I know you had media guides, because I've seen those.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: And I actually saw you play on the Cornets at DePaul.

Lewis: Okay.

Bartges: There was a game there, and I went to (unintelligible).

Lewis: Yeah, the (unintelligible).

Bartges: Yes. We saw the Cornets play the Hustle, so I'm sort of familiar with that sort of a venue. But I don't recall... There's some trading cards there that were products of the ABL, the American Basketball League.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: And some of these people are still around. It happens that the one that I grabbed this morning was Teresa Edwards.

Lewis: Okay.

Bartges: And she's still playing.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: How do you feel when you see stuff like this?

Lewis: What, this?

Bartges: Yeah.

Lewis: It's kind of weird. It's different because we hadn't media and stuff. We did pretty well on the attendance and stuff. I mean (unintelligible). But you have to think, too, that the NBA got the money to (unintelligible). We didn't have NBA backing.

Bartges: That's true.

Lewis: See, we had nobody, so I think it's great.

Bartges: Does it just sort of indicate progress to you?

Lewis: A whole lot of progress, even the Olympics status. You have to think... Look at the Olympics. We got (unintelligible). What was it, \$6.00, \$7.00, \$8.00 to \$12.00? They get \$50,000. We didn't get nothing.

Bartges: (unintelligible)?

Lewis: No, they got \$50,000. Yeah, yeah to play on that team.

Bartges: And you guys got lunch money.

Lewis: (laughs) Yep, (unintelligible).

Bartges: I'm really looking at the period of time in high school ball. It seems to me like you had an influence, not only in your school, but here in District 150, which is the Peoria School District, because a group of likeminded individuals, like yourself from Woodruff and from these other schools that you mentioned. Do you think—and I don't know the answer to this question—do you think that the main impetus for high school girls' basketball came out of the central part of the state, the central and the northern, the suburbs. Or do you have much recollection of people talking about basketball, high school basketball, in the southern part of the state?

You can use your exposure from when you got to college to answer that. I don't know what you saw when you got to college. Were there kids from the southern part of the state that were more skilled or had played competitive basketball differently than you had?

Lewis: Yeah. See, when I got to college... I'm just thinking, even, about the players on my team, the northern part of Illinois, like South Holland where (unintelligible) **and all of them were** and maybe the southern tip of Illinois, those players were pretty... well, pretty good-skilled players.

Central Illinois, I think, pretty much was them ones that didn't **have very much**. Players out of Chicago and all them were already playing. I think, just like Peoria and District 150, we didn't have nothing. So I think Central Illinois was pretty much left out what northern and southern Illinois had.

Bartges: I was just curious what your thoughts were. Is there anything that you can recall that might help me to understand the history of girls' basketball in Illinois, that we haven't touched on, from this period that we talked about, pretty much from 1972 to 1977, in that era. Is there anything that I haven't hit on or that occurs to you?

Lewis: Not too much. Just the conception of it. I know that was in like '74, was the first ones here. I know the first basketball here, and then the first scholarships and all that stuff came along around that time. Other than that, I think we pretty much hit everything.

Bartges: Well, I really appreciate your time.

Lewis: Okay.

Bartges: Thank you very much.

Lewis: All right.

(pause)

Bartges: I don't know what to do with this thing. Let's just close it (Lewis laughs).

(end of transcript)

Bartges: I haven't had an opportunity interview Coach Hutchison yet.

Lewis: Oh boy.

Bartges: I kind of am saving her because she has a little different perspective, and she wasn't active in high school...

Lewis: No.

Bartges: ... at all.

Lewis: No.

Bartges: But she was...

Lewis: She was active in college. Woo, was she (unintelligible).

Bartges: She was also active in the first state tournament...

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: ... which I'm very interested in. So I'm glad you mentioned the fact that you guys worked at tournament.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: It's unfortunate. I'm sort of constrained, time wise, for a period. Otherwise I could go on indefinitely (laughs).

Lewis: You ain't kidding.

Bartges: Some of these people that I know... Now, I know Holly; I worked Pat's camps for six years. Holly is just... She's so easy to talk to.

Lewis: She's funny.

Bartges: She's so personable.

Lewis: She is so funny (laughs).

Bartges: She really is, and she has not changed a lick.

Lewis: Nope (laughs).

Bartges: The year they won—it must have been in Charlotte, the National Championship—they had ten losses that year. I think that was a hard year for her. She looked worn out that year (unintelligible).

Lewis: Pat will do that to you.(both laugh). That's Pat there now. That's (unintelligible).

Bartges: You played with Pat?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: Pat was on the '76 team.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: Some of the questions I ask you because I have to ask the question, because the camera can't assume what my knowledge is...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... in order to draw that out. But Pat was on that '76 team. I didn't think that Cathy Rush coached.

Lewis: No, she didn't.

Bartges: She was on the Pan-Am...

Lewis: She was a Pan-American [games] coach. It was Billie Moore on the Olympic team.

Bartges: That's right.

Lewis: Billie Moore and Sue Gunter.

Bartges: Yeah, (unintelligible).

Lewis: Pan-American game was Cathy Rush and Billie Moore.

Bartges: I worked with Rene Portland for a year at Penn State. That's how I know Cathy Rush and Marianne Stanley too. I coached at Penn State, and then I was at UNC-Charlotte, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, for six years. So I worked with... Do you know a fellow named Ed Baldwin?

Lewis: It sounds familiar.

Bartges: He's from North Carolina, so he never did much, up here in Illinois. But it was a good experience, and I've had the pleasure of being able to meet a lot of different people.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: And I played in the first girls' tournament, here in Illinois. That's really where my interest came from. I was a freshman in high school in '74, and our coach brought us down to see you guys play.

Lewis: Oh, get out of here (laughs).

Bartges: I'm serious. You had a big fro [Afro].

Lewis: Yeah I did, yep (laughs).

Bartges: That was my first time seeing live college basketball, and I've been hooked ever since. It was one of those things that... It's just sort of sequential.

Lewis: Right. It was kind of neat. It was a lot of coaches, bringing their kids down there. Then we'd have to autograph. We was like, "Man, we don't want to (unintelligible) (both laugh). Miss Hutchison make you stay there and talk with them though, because she thought that would give some esteem or want to push them to make them want to (unintelligible), and [for] recruiting purposes, of course.

Bartges: Yeah. That whole thing changed so quickly...

Lewis: Yeah, it did.

Bartges: ... with recruiting.

Lewis: Yes, it did.

Bartges: I know Bea Yeager, who was the coach at Western Illinois University.

Lewis: Uh-huh, yeah, Bea.

Bartges: Bea is (unintelligible). She spends all her time riding horses now.

Lewis: Do she? She was funny. She was a funny coach too.

Bartges: She has a real basketball background too. She played at Iowa Wesleyan, which is one of the earliest (unintelligible) for women's basketball. But talking and knowing how fast that changed, like within a period of... Once Annie Meyer got her scholarship...

Lewis: Right, it was over with. It was like, man, boom, boom, boom.

Bartges: Not everybody was as fully funded as other players...

Lewis: No, no.

Bartges: ... But as soon as money became available...

Lewis: You got your room and board. You didn't get full scholarships, maybe—like Annie had got the first one—but I guess it was according to what the school could afford. I think it was on a budget. (unintelligible) pays it out [of] their budget or divide it. They had to divide it amongst what? Ten, twelve players, so...

Bartges: Right. And they would find other ways of funding too.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: AIAW was a little different than (unintelligible).

Lewis: Exactly. Illinois State was... We had four teams, if I remember. We had a A, B, C, D team, yeah.

Bartges: Wow.

Lewis: The A-team never played Bradley. C and D played Illinois Central.

Bartges: (unintelligible).

Lewis: Right. So we didn't never play them, except for on a fun, on the fun basis, because she kept on saying, "Why don't you come down and play us? Why don't y'all put us on your schedule?" And Miss Hutchison was like, "No, no, no, no," (Bartges laughs) because Miss Hutchison kept saying, "We would blow them out the water. If they were having problems with our B, C, and D team at that time, they (unintelligible)," man.

We went over there on our own one day; Miss Hutchison let us. We went over there—me, Vonnie, Cindy Slaton, Cindy Ellis, all of us—we went over there and blew them out the water, just five players. We played them until they got tired.

Bartges: Their tongues were hanging?

Lewis: Man.

Bartges: Did you guys play U of I?

Lewis: University of Illinois, yeah.

Bartges: I'm trying to remember. First exposure to them was [when] we went to a Cathy Rush Camp at U of I, and their players worked, some of them. But there were other college players from back east, from Maryland and from Pennsylvania.

Lewis: Uh-huh. What about Carol and all them? Was Blazejowski with them?

Bartges: Blaze was not at U of I.

Lewis: She wasn't; she didn't come?

Bartges: Monica... Shoot, what was Monica's name? She was from Maryland. I remember her.

Lewis: I know Cathy. She usually used to pull Mary Ann O'Connor; she used to pull Sue (unintelligible), Blaze. She used to pull (unintelligible); what's her name? We call her Miss (unintelligible), Gail...

Bartges: Gail, I know Gail.

Lewis: Yeah, you know Gail.

Bartges: (unintelligible). No, not that (unintelligible).

Lewis: Not Gail. (unintelligible) was our...

Bartges: Trainer.

Lewis: Our trainer. Gail Marquis.

Bartges: Marquis, yes.

Lewis: Yeah, (unintelligible) and all of them. Them [were] the players she would pull to do a lot of clinics and (unintelligible) and stuff like that.

Bartges: Gail, I think, was there.

Lewis: Gail Marquis.

Bartges: I ran into Gail Marquis at Northampton, Massachusetts when I was working a camp up there.

Lewis: She's still doing stuff.

Bartges: Yeah. I think she does commentary for Penn State radio.

Lewis: Right. She sent me a card (unintelligible). We keep in touch. We try to keep in touch. Matter of fact, I kept in touch with a lot of the pro players from the old league, through other players, because I got... Sharps called from, Denise Sharps. As a matter of fact, she played for Indiana State, and then we went on to play in Iowa together. Then she was transferred to Minnesota. I think she played for Minnesota, traded to Minnesota. And Tanya Crevier, (unintelligible).

Bartges: Oh yeah, from South Dakota?

Lewis: Yeah, all of them, yeah. All of them have. She's been able to contact quite a bit of them because she went to that reunion that they had, the WBL reunion...

Bartges: I was going to (unintelligible)...

Lewis: ... last September. I didn't go, but it was a lot of players there, she said.

Bartges: I wondered; I wondered. I was going to ask you if they had a reunion.

Lewis: Yeah, they had it September, last September. I think I was working; I couldn't get away. And I was wondering if... because I was calling and asking her. She called me and told me who all she had seen there, and I was wondering if she had seen Liz Galloway and all of them, because we got kind of tight when we were up there, playing for Chicago Spirits.

We used to play (unintelligible) gym up there, to practice and stuff like that. We used to still play anyway, even after that ended. We would (unintelligible) the gym every Sunday, and a bunch of us from the old league—Carol Anderson [?], Laurie Byrd, all of them—was still up in Chicago at that time. We'd go up there and play (unintelligible).

Bartges: I never saw the Spirits play.

Lewis: Yeah. We played out of Triton College.

Bartges: I know Triton.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: I knew some people that went there.

Lewis: Right. We played out of there, under Coach (unintelligible).

Bartges: I'm from Hinsdale originally, a suburb of Chicago. That's where I was first exposed to it. (unintelligible).

Lewis: We played DuPage College.

Bartges: COD [College of DuPage].

Lewis: Right. We played out DuPage, and we played out of... It was DuPage and DePaul.

Bartges: Yes.

Lewis: I think them was two colleges we played out of.

Bartges: [Doug] Bruno wasn't there then, no?

Lewis: No, no, no. We was even practicing with... Matter of fact, we was (unintelligible) with Coach [Raymond] Meyers' team.

Bartges: That's when they had some good teams.

Lewis: Oh yeah. That's when they had Strickland, and all of them was just coming in, and what's his name? [I] can't recall his name. Marcus... He was a really good player. But we practiced against them, full court every other day.

Bartges: (laughs) That'll make you good.

Lewis: Oh no, we practiced. It was a good practice too. The women's team, we had a big girl. Matter of fact, now she's in the [Chicago] Bull's office. She works out of the Bull's office. So, we had some pretty good players.

Bartges: I was glad to see Anne Donovan's team win the championship this year.⁸ Annie's been around for so long. I remember seeing her in college too.

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: Old Dominion [University] came into Drake [University] for their Harvest Classic, back when...

Lewis: Right.

Bartges: ... Lorri Bauman was playing.⁹ I don't know if you (unintelligible).

Lewis: Right, right.

Bartges: That girl can shoot.

Lewis: Yeah, she could.

Bartges: Oh, my God.

Lewis: Yes, she could.

Bartges: And she was **unconscious**. She could have her back to the basket, and she'd throw it up there, and it'd go in.

8 Anne Theresa Donovan was an American women's basketball player and coach. From 2013 to 2015, she was the head coach of the Connecticut Sun. In her playing career, Donovan won a national championship with Old Dominion University, won two Olympic gold medals, and went to three Final Fours overall. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_Donovan)

9 Lorri A. Bauman is a former American basketball player for the Drake Bulldogs. She was the first woman in NCAA history to score 3,000 points and at one time held the record for NCAA Division 1 women's basketball points scored in a career. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorri_Bauman)

Lewis: And it'd still go in. But she knew that backboard real well...

Bartges: She knew.

Lewis: ...because she used that backboard really well.

Bartges: But Old Dominion came in for that, and Chaney State [College], when Vivian [Stringer] was still at Cheney, and Wanda Ford.¹⁰ I don't know if you know Wanda.

Lewis: Wanda, I played with Wanda.

Bartges: Wanda Ford.

Lewis: Me and Wanda played in Brazil together.

Bartges: Oh, really?

Lewis: Yeah, we played on the same team in Brazil for two years. Me and her played together down there.

Bartges: Wanda was amazing. Wanda was ahead of her time, and in Des Moines she was way ahead of her time.

Lewis: Right, right.

Bartges: And so strong. Wanda spiked the ball off of Anne's face, like three times, went out of bounds. Three different times ball [went] out of bounds, and she would dive and go in for it.

Lewis: Yep.

Bartges: After the third time, Anne went after her (both laugh).

Lewis: Anne, yeah.

Bartges: Who are you going to bet on, Anne Donovan or Wanda Ford?

¹⁰ Wanda Ford is a former American basketball player for the Drake Bulldogs. She was the first woman in NCAA history to collect 1,500 rebounds and set the NCAA career record with 1,887 rebounds. She also played 16 years of professional basketball in Brazil, Italy, Spain, France, Sweden and Israel. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanda_Ford)

Lewis: (laughs) Yeah.

Bartges: You go like this to Anne (blows), she falls down.

Lewis: Well, Wanda, she's a good player. She wasn't tall. I got a good picture of us too, me, her and Brenda Hill from Auburn. All three of us played in Brazil together and...

Bartges: Where's Wanda now?

Lewis: Wanda's in North Carolina.

Bartges: I'm sorry.

Lewis: Yeah, she's in North Carolina.

Bartges: Oh, she could play.

Lewis: Um-hmm.

Bartges: That was a good team, that Drake team that had Wanda and Lorri Bauman and Kay Reed.

Lewis: Exactly. They were tough.

Bartges: They were very good.

Lewis: Matter of fact, she led in rebounds that year. That was a tippingest when I first met her. She came on at Brazil. Now, I was a good rebounder; they knew it, and she knew it. She was like, "You just go up there and just get the ball." She said, "I got to tip, tip, tip, until I get the ball." She was the tippingest kid I ever seen in my life. She got a nose for it. And if she couldn't get it on the first hit, she'll keep tipping it until she get it. She wouldn't quit until she got it.

Bartges: No. She was like a (unintelligible).

Lewis: (unintelligible) was like, "Man, she had the..." She wouldn't quit, man.

Bartges: She was one of those kids that was a natural rebounder because she watched the shot off the hand and got into position and made contact...

Lewis: Exactly.

Bartges: ... and then went after the ball. See, that's so hard to teach kids.

Lewis: I could believe it. She was a really good player, being short as she was, she was a good player. But she played for us down there; she played off guard.

Bartges: Really?

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: Wow.

Lewis: She played off guard, and I played small forward, big forward, and center, depending on what's happening with the players. Me and Brenda both played center forwards. We didn't have like what you would call a true center. We had a big, big girl, but she wasn't coordinated, as far as the coach was concerned. She was like, maybe about 6'6", but she got better as we went along.

Bartges: I don't remember. Nora is your sister?

Lewis: Nora is my baby sister.

Bartges: What a difference.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: Is she eight years younger than you?

Lewis: See, I'm forty-nine; Nora is thirty-eight, seven or eight, thirty-seven, (unintelligible).

Bartges: What a huge difference in not...

Lewis: Huge is not the word.

Bartges: But in experience.

Lewis: Yeah because she came up from Mark Bills [Middle School, Peoria, IL] playing. She played at Mark Bills. She played all through grade school, Irving, Mark Bills; she came all the way up playing. And she played with us—little as she was—out on the playground. She played (unintelligible), down on the playground. She didn't care. We had a little...

In Taft Homes, at the time, they had just put them new little rims up, between the sliding board and the swings. She would be out there everyday, (making noise), and she would be hitting it, hitting it. I'd be like, "Girl, you can't (unintelligible)." She said, "Come on my turf." Her turf was that playground. Man, I (unintelligible). I would chase her all over. But she'd get on the teeter-totter and bing. I'd be like, "Man," I said, "You going be tough." But she was so skinny. [I] said, "Girl, you got to put some weight on you, [or] you ain't going to be nothing." Didn't make her no difference.

Bartges: She was thin always.

Lewis: Yeah, she was tough.

Bartges: She was tough. (unintelligible).

Lewis: And could shoot; man, she could shoot. She made sure she learned every phase of the game. In college, I think that (unintelligible) at that time too. You (unintelligible) center or a forward. You didn't get to learn, you know what I'm saying, like...

Bartges: Yeah, there was no crossover.

Lewis: When she come up, she ran guard for Richwoods. She ran forward, then she ran center, whatever position needed the boost at that time, wherever they could find a mismatch, is what we called it. So you learned your skills. I didn't learn nothing about really outside shooting and all that stuff until I got... See, on the pro team, I got a chance to play forward because we had a better center. That was Rosie Walker from Austin.¹¹

Bartges: (unintelligible).

Lewis: Rosie Walker (unintelligible). Rosie Walker was the stuff, boy, Rosie Walker.

Bartges: She played at Texas?

Lewis: She played in Austin, um-hmm, yep. She's tough. She's one of the best players come out that year, as a matter of fact. She was drafted first that year, when she came out, and she was our center. At that same time, I remember Lucy came back into the league, right around that time. After she had had her kids,

11 Rosie Walker, Texas State Center and Former Ladyjack basketball player, is a member of the National Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, played on the 1980 U.S. Olympic team, and represented the United States at 1979 Pan American Games. (<http://www.givetosfa.sfasu.edu/alumni.php?id=26>)

she came back in the league. Between her and Lucy, boy they was two of the (unintelligible). And they played just alike, her and Lucy (unintelligible).

Bartges: Yeah. You know, when Lucy wasn't playing well, that affected that team.

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: And that was a good team.

Lewis: Yeah, all Lucy had (unintelligible). When she played Delta State, they (unintelligible). And we were their twins. Matter of fact, we played against them at nationals. We played the same offense and ran the same defense, and they called us the twin, the twin teams. They had it in the newspaper like that, too, the twin teams.

Bartges: (unintelligible).

Lewis: It was pretty good. Then I went to the... If I remember, we played my freshman year, and I was in awe of her, because she had all these skills and all this stuff.

Bartges: She was very skilled.

Lewis: She was really good. When I got to the world championships that same year, we were roommates, going to the tryouts. Then we ended up being roommates at the Pan-American games and roommates at the Olympic Games.

Bartges: Oh, really?

Lewis: Well, no. We were roommates at first, and then they took me out of there, and they put me with little bitty trouble. You know who that was, [Nancy] Lieberman.¹² Me and Lieberman was the closest two in age. They put me with Lieberman. And boy, I tell you, she was a handful.

Bartges: Yeah, and I think she still probably is.

Lewis: Oh, yeah.

12 Nancy Elizabeth Lieberman, nicknamed "Lady Magic", is an American former professional basketball player and coach in the Women's National Basketball Association who is currently a broadcaster for the Oklahoma City Thunder of the NBA, as well as the head coach of Power, a team in the BIG3, which she led to its 2018 Championship. Lieberman is regarded as one of the greatest figures in American women's basketball. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Lieberman)

Bartges: She did some of the commentary from some of our television games. I never really got a chance to talk to her much because we were coaching.

Lewis: She's funny.

Bartges: Yeah. What a roller coaster ride her life has been.

Lewis: Yeah, you ain't got to tell me. It's been something. (sounds of activity) Who's that?

Bartges: Oh, are they supposed to be in here?

Unknown: I guess.

Bartges: Oh, I'm sorry.

Lewis: Yeah, (unintelligible).

Unknown: (unintelligible).

Lewis: Yeah.

Bartges: We'll stop.

Lewis: Yeah, we're through.