

## EDWIN POPE

### BIOGRAPHY

Born in Athens, Georgia, Edwin Pope was raised on sports and began his journalism career as a newspaper typist at the age of twelve at the *Athens(Georgia) Banner-Herald*. After early jobs with the *Atlanta Constitution*, *Atlanta Journal* and United Press International, he moved to the *Miami Herald* in 1956 and has been there ever since. He became sports editor at the *Herald* in 1967 and began collecting a steady stream of accolades: the Red Smith Award (the highest honor for sportswriters in the nation), as well as induction into the National Sportscasters and Sportswriters Hall of Fame, the Florida Sports Hall of Fame and the National Football Hall of Fame. His books include *Football's Greatest Coaches*, *Baseball's Greatest Managers*, *Encyclopedia of American Greyhound Racing*, *Ted Williams: The Golden Year*, and *On the Line*. Many of his columns are compiled in *The Edwin Pope Collection*.

### SUMMARY

Mr. Pope talks about growing up in Athens, Georgia, during the Depression and his entry into journalism. He was, at age fifteen, the youngest sports editor in the country. He reflects on the usefulness of his journalism degree, in contrast with the amount of practical experience he gained over his career. He discusses the qualities important to being a good sportswriter, how sports serve as escapism to fans, and how television has altered sports over the past decades. Drawing upon his long tenure in Miami, Mr. Pope shares at length his thoughts on college sports, especially college football, particularly the importance of sports to Miami as a city. He also weighs in on issues

such as coaches' salaries and academics while reminiscing about some of his favorite sports memories such as the 1980 Olympics when the American hockey team defeated Russia.

Edwin Pope was interviewed by Julian M. Pleasants on February 16, 2002 in Key Biscayne, Florida.

P: Discuss your early life in Athens, Georgia and tell me how you got interested in sportswriting.

E: My early life in Athens, Georgia was paradise. I don't know how anybody could have had a better place to grow up because we had the University of Georgia there and all the attendant sports. Everybody in town was a football nut, but times were tough. We had a standing saying that we had no coal for the stove, no food for the kitchen, holes in the roof, holes in our shoes and no socks, then came the Depression. But everybody was poor so nobody knew the difference.... I learned to type when I was about six and when I was eleven, he [his father] gave me a an old, used Underwood. I'll never know where he got the ten dollars to buy it because ten dollars was a lot of money.... I just turned on the Georgia Tech-Missouri Orange Bowl game of 1940 and copied down every word that Ted Husing, ... a very famous sportscaster, ... said, including the commercials. It was about twelve pages single spaced. In my ignorance I got on my bicycle the next morning, rode it down to the *Athens Banner-Herald* and looked around for a guy who looked powerful and authoritative, and kept asking everybody, who's the editor? Who's the editor-in-chief here? I was eleven years old, I'm barging around this office. It got to be a joke, they'd say he's over there, he's over there.

Finally, I got the editor-in-chief. I said, do you need a running story on the Orange Bowl? He said, well, what do you mean? I said, here it is. I thought copying over the radio was a running story because I'd read them in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*.

I didn't know from anything. He looked at it and he said, no, we don't need a running story, but who typed this? I said, I did. He said, you want a job? I said, yes, sir. He said, we can't pay you anything, but we'll give you a lot of good experience and they did. He kept his promise on both counts....

P: At one point you were supposedly the youngest sports editor in the country.

E: Supposedly, and there was a reason for that. It wasn't because I was the most expert by any means. [In] 1943, every able-bodied man was in the service and nobody ever heard of a woman sports editor. That would have been laughed out of the town it was so outlandish, although they are all over the country now. Everybody was either drafted or gone off to work in the big town. They made me sports editor when I was fifteen....

P: Tell me about your journalism courses at the University of Georgia.

E: Frankly, I took journalism because they would excuse my classes when I would go off with the football and basketball and baseball teams and that kind of thing. We had a great journalism school. I don't think I got nearly as much benefit out of it as I could have and should have because I was getting up to go to work at 6:00 in the morning at the *Banner-Herald*. I'd have to make the fire and then light the fire. In the wintertime it gets cold in Athens. It would be so cold, I'd have to type with those old cloth gloves on. Just about the time the office was getting warm, before anybody else came in, I'd have to run off to school....

P: Do you think it's necessary for people in sportswriting or newspaper work today to have a journalism degree or is it just as good to learn by experience?

E: It hurts me to say this, but I do not think it's necessary to have a journalism degree. In a lot of cases, you can learn just as much in six months, a year, out of college about practical journalism as you could have [if you had] taken your major in [journalism].... I don't regret the journalism [degree]. I regret that I didn't apply myself more to it. I wish that I had taken more English and history, English literature, political science.... When you get out of college, you can learn the journalism, but once you get out of college, you're not going to learn the other stuff. You can't go back and get the other stuff....

P: Was working for the *Red and Black* [campus newspaper] pretty good training for a journalism career?

E: I think so, yes it is. It's really on-the-job training, where you have to make up and lay out and really get down to the nitty-gritty of reporting who, what, when, where, why.... I was working on the *Red and Black* while I was working on the *Banner-Herald* and I was also sports editor of the *Pandora*, which is the yearbook.... Then I was stringing for about five or six papers: the Albany paper, *Macon Telegraph*, *Atlanta Constitution* and *Atlanta Journal*, *Augusta Chronicle*....

P: What kind of athlete were you in high school?

E: That's an interesting question. I wasn't any kind of an athlete in high school. When I was little, at the Athens Y [YMCA] until I was about twelve or thirteen, I was a pretty good athlete, but I just didn't grow.... When I got to the university I was on a boxing team.... I did have a wonderfully tragic-comic experience as a boxer, though.

While I was boxing I was also juggling all these other jobs, [and] going to journalism school.... Then the season rolled around and I happened to be up in... the information director's office one day, leisurely opening a letter [which said]... undefeated NCAA champion Doug "Little Adam" Ellwood, [was] slated to make his 1947 or 1948... debut. Unbeaten in 250 fights. I realized that was who I was going to have to fight. I said, oh, God. They had just had a little article about me in the *Atlanta Constitution* about the fighting writer or the writing fighter, whatever. I was trapped. I went down and went to work out that afternoon. I told our coach, who was an old professional lightweight,... [and he] came over to me and he said, "Edwin, I don't think you ought to fight Saturday night. This guy's had a lot of fights." He was like twenty-nine years old and I was about eighteen. I'd never fought anybody, except around town, a couple of college bouts. To say I was pedestrian as a fighter would be giving me all the best of it. I said, Pete, I know I shouldn't fight this guy, but they've had this story in the paper. If I don't fight now, everybody will say I'm yellow. I said, I know I'm yellow and you know I'm yellow, but we don't want all those people out there to know it. He says, okay. Then he said something which greatly added to my self-esteem. He said, it's your funeral, and walked away.

I was the smallest guy on the team, so I always had to spar with somebody bigger than me. I arranged to spar with a middleweight first, trying to get myself incapacitated. Failing in that, I asked for the heavyweight who happened to be a good friend of mine, but he had a terrible temper and I hit him as hard as I could upside the head while he was just toying with me. [He was] so infuriated with me, he just launched this right hand and hit me in the nose and blood started pouring everywhere. To make a long story

less long, they took me to the hospital and x-rayed me and found my nose was broken and it was the happiest day of my life when they told me. The guy comes out and he says, Mr. Pope... I'm afraid you won't be able to fight Saturday night. I said, oh that's too bad....

P: Some professional athletes claim that many sportswriters are frustrated athletes and when they report on football or professional basketball, they are not as knowledgeable as they should be because they haven't played the game. How do you answer that charge?

E: First of all, I would say that they're right in that almost all the sportswriters I know are failed athletes. I have seldom run into a sportswriter in sixty years,... who didn't either try to be an athlete or want to be an athlete or had some ambitions thwarted. As for the professional athletes saying they [sportswriters] don't know what they're doing, I mean, a doctor doesn't have to have cancer to diagnose it. That's my answer to that. A lot of times the people who are the sportswriters know more than the athletes do about what they're doing....

P: Did you always write about sports?

E: At the UP [United Press], I had to do a little bit of everything. There was no such thing as just a sportswriter then.... I'd... have to rewrite all the news from all over the South. I was like the Southern overnight editor at the same time I was Southern sports editor. But that was good, that was a great learning experience and it was tough....That's the most beneficial thing, career-wise I've ever done. I was only there for a couple of years, but then a new sportswriter came to town, Furman Bisher.... I was just so taken and enchanted by his writing. I had never read anybody who wrote

that well. I just threw out all of my ambitions to go on with the wire service and I decided that's what I wanted to try to be....

P: In 1950, you went to work for the *Atlanta Constitution* and worked for Furman Bisher?

E: I did.... I meant to tell you one thing that was sort of funny in a nostalgic way about the *Athens Banner-Herald*. It was an old wooden building and the editor was a fellow named Hugh Rowe and he was sort of a distant figure. He didn't truck with the guys on the second floor. [The] second floor was sort of second-class. He had his own office downstairs.... Hugh Rowe wrote a column called *A Little Bit About Everything and Not Much About Anything*, which I thought was a great title for a column. Everything was so technologically backward. The composing room was on the first floor, we were on the second floor and to get copy down, they sawed a hole in the floor and had a rope with one of these big huge paperclips on the end of it. If you had copy, you'd pull up the rope, put the copy on the paperclip and let it down and then lean on the bell, to the great distress of the head of the composing room. They'd take it and spread it out among the linotype operators. Then, when they'd have proofs for you to read, they'd send them back up to you by putting them on the clip at their end and leaning on the bell until you felt like going down there and killing them. That's how we got the copy from the so-called newsroom to the composing room. As ancient as it was, it was fascinating and it had a romance that's pretty hard to attach to journalism today. Every Saturday night I would go down and watch those old flatbed presses run.... I was absolutely enchanted, just in rhapsody watching that. The whole thing was a great adventure.

P: When you were at the *Atlanta Constitution*, were you still covering the University of Georgia sports?

E: Occasionally. [I] covered everything, Georgia, Georgia Tech. I was doing stunts like riding with stockcar drivers and going up on flagpoles with flagpole sitters. Anything that came along. As I say, it was the last thing from specialization. It was a small staff, we only had, I'd say, maybe ten people on the whole staff. Now a comparable paper would probably have at least forty, with all specialists....

P: In 1956, you leave Georgia for the *Miami Herald*. Given your affection for Georgia and Athens, why would you leave the state to go to Miami?

E: First of all, I had just written a book called *Football's Greatest Coaches*, which turned out to be surprisingly successful, largely because Ed Sullivan [newspaper columnist and broadcaster, host of radio and television variety shows] plugged it on his radio show one night. I called up Ed Sullivan, again in my youthful ignorance, just about like when I took that radio account down to the *Athens Banner-Herald*.... I call him up, got him on the phone, which you could never do today. I said, look, I got this book,... why don't you bring about twenty-five of these coaches from all over the country around and have them on the stage at one time. It would be a first. Nobody's ever done that.... He says, "I'll tell you what, send me a copy of your book and... maybe I can mention it next Sunday night." I made sure the publisher in New York sent him a copy of the book. I was sitting at home, watching the Ed Sullivan show [and]... I said, aw geez, he's never going to get around to it.... But with about five seconds to go, he says, I want to show you a great new book by a friend of mine. Of course, he didn't know me from Adam's off ox – and [he] held up the cover of the book. The next day it

really took off. The reason I mention that is because it gave me a grub stake to come to Miami.

Also, I was very irritated over something so small you can't believe it. The *[Atlanta] Journal* and *Constitution* were not benevolent employers, to put it bluntly. At one time, I put in a requisition for... a manual pencil sharpener.... [W]e only had one pencil sharpener in the entire newsroom [and] you had to walk about seventy-five yards to it. By the time a guy would walk out there and shoot the bull with everybody on the way there and back, you would lose ten minutes of valuable time, so I put in for a pencil sharpener which I was going to screw down to my desk.... The requisition came back with a big x... and a No on it. I went in there and said, is this a joke? He said, "no, that's not a joke. That's what I'm in here for, to prevent unnecessary extravagances." On top of being redundant, that was very insulting to me. I said, hey, you're talking about a \$1.75 pencil sharpener. No, no, he was adamant.... I said, when are you going to pay me for excerpting *Football's Greatest Coaches*? He said, "I'll either give you a voucher and you can go down to the cashier and get it or I'll put it on next week's paycheck." I said, how about a voucher, so he gives me a voucher and I go down and collect the \$250. Then I went back in the sports department and called the executive sports editor of the *Miami Herald* who I knew and said, can you use a man? He said, "what man?" I said, me. He said, "when can you be here?" I said, tomorrow, ... I'll be there. We didn't have to go through all this battery of psychiatric tests back then like you do know, else there wouldn't have been any newspapers back then because everybody was crazy that worked for them back then. Then I walked back in and told the managing editor I got the \$250 and by the way, I quit.... I refuse to commit my

career, whatever it may be, or my life, to a paper that won't supply me with a \$1.75 pencil sharpener and I took my stuff out of the desk and left. Coming to the *Miami Herald* was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me and it was sheer luck. The *Miami Herald* has treated me as well as my own family would have if they could have.

P: If you look back from the perspective of the year 2002, who would you select as the greatest college football coach?

E: The popular answer would be Bear Bryant because he won so many games, although Joe Paterno [football coach, Penn State University, 1966-present] has passed him now. But Bryant had much more charisma. Bryant had this amazing stage presence where, when he walked into a room, everything got quiet and he had this gruff stentorian voice and he was much more physically impressive with a great deal more presence than Joe Paterno has, although Paterno is a great man, I think. Those would probably be the popular choices. I'm not sure but what Eddie Robinson, the coach at Grambling for all those years, given the resources he had, wasn't the best coach that ever lived. The truth is, we'll probably never know. The best coach that ever lived could have spent his life at East Muscogee High School... for fifty years and nobody ever heard of him. It's just a concatenation of luck and resources and timing. Bryant was at the right school with all the resources and great recruiting resources....

P: As sports editor would you go out and cover sports?

E: Yes [and] I would write a column. I had very few other duties than writing a column..... I was writing a minimum of five columns a week for thirty-five years....

P: What makes a good sportswriter?

E: A lot of things. I think obviously the first thing that makes a good sportswriter is

just raw, natural ability. I certainly can't lay any claim to that because I think I had a lot less raw, natural ability than a lot of my peers. I tried to make up for it by working harder and working longer hours.... I'd [also] say attitude. You have to take for granted that a guy is willing to put in some murderous hours. Sometimes they're murderous, sometimes they're very easy. You've got to be ready to pull up stakes and take off and leave your family and everybody else and cancel every kind of social obligation you might have or even family obligations. I find that there are fewer and fewer who are willing to do that. I can't say that I blame them because flying is not what it used to be....

P: Would it be more difficult to write about sports or to write about something like politics?

E: Well, it evens out, I think. Sports is easier to write about because there's always something you can see and put your finger on and there's always a final score up there. In politics, it's so subjective. Half of it is guess-work. You don't know which are the crooks, which are the bad guys. You're pretty sure ninety percent of them are crooks, but you don't know for sure. In sports there's always a winner and a loser. On the other hand, a sports columnist almost always has to go somewhere. That's the killer part of it.... Not many days when you can just sit in the office and write off-the-wall like the political columnists or the general columnists do. That's the great advantage they have over the sports columnists, but I think what balances out the other way is that they have to scrounge for ideas. Being a sports columnist can be physically very wearing. It's not a healthy job....

P: You won the Red Smith Award which is generally considered the highest award for

sportswriters. What was your reaction to winning that award?

E: I was just stunned.... I was just absolutely blown away because I never thought, never even dared think about it or dream about it. Never....

P: In your book, *The Edwin Pope Collection*, James Michener [author] wrote a very laudatory introduction to that book. Michener earlier had written a book, Sports in America, in which he tried to explain the importance of sports in American life. How would you make that assessment?

E: It amazes me that there are so many people that take sports so seriously. But I really should not be amazed because sports, to most people, now more than ever, is pure escapism.... It is entertainment, it takes your mind off whatever – terrorism, bad marriage, bad job, not being able to pay the mortgage. You can just leave your work-a-day world and walk into another world. That is what sports is. It is understandable to me that there are so many people hooked on it. [It is] still hard for me to absorb the intensity with which some people approach sports as fans.

P: As you know, if it's Georgia versus Florida and your team loses, for some fans it is devastating.

E: Absolutely.

P: In some cases, they are not even graduates of the university. Why do they take it so seriously?

E: Well, that is like Sigmund Freud said that he spent thirty years searching for the answer to one question, what do women want? So, I would put your question in the same category as Freud's – what do sports fans want? I like sports fans, and I think they are a lot smarter than most writers give them credit for being, especially with all the

new ways to see sports.... It still baffles me and befuddles me... as to why are they that way. I guess that everybody needs something outside of his everyday life to attach himself to, or devote himself to, or to be fanatical about, whether it is your church, charity, philandering, stealing money, hating someone or whatever.

P: How has television changed sports? Now you have ESPN, ESPN2, the Golf Channel and you can see everything from pro football to curling twenty-four hours a day.

E: One way it has changed sports is that it has created a lot more millionaires because every time those TV shows come on, they have to pay fees to somebody. Those people that get those fees pay a lot of those fees to the players. In dealing with the players is entirely different from what it used to be....

P: How important are professional sports teams for Miami?

E: That is something that we are endlessly debating in this go-round about whether they are going to get a new... stadium for baseball, which they desperately need. My contention is that people who do not have any interest in baseball or going to the games should not have to pay a penny of their tax money. Of course, the baseball owners think that the public should pay for everything. I think that the teams themselves and, even in some cases, the players and certainly the owners should pay for all the stadiums. They have been getting a free ride forever.

P: Certainly, Wayne Huizenga [businessman; owner of the Miami Dolphins and the Florida Panthers hockey team] would have enough money to build a new stadium.

E: He would, but my question would be, if Wayne Huizenga is worth one and a half billion dollars, is it fair to ask him to spend a third of that to build a dome stadium, to

give up a third of his net worth just so a lot of people could enjoy it? That is the attitude of people who want a new stadium... They say, well, Huizenga has the money. He does have the money, but I don't see that he has an obligation....

P: Do you think when the city or state builds a professional sports stadium, that it is economically profitable for the community? Does it generate enough tourist dollars and tax revenue to overcome the costs of building it?

E: Time and again, it has been shown by expert economists that it does not have a commensurate economic benefit to the city. Baseball doesn't bring anybody into town. It is just a huge non-taxable white elephant sitting there that very often brings down the quality of life around the stadium. You don't see any baseball or football stadiums in upscale neighborhoods. It doesn't really create very many jobs, except minimum wage people who sell beer and popcorn.... No, I don't think it even comes close to equaling the public output. As you can see, I am not supportive of the public paying all the freight for a pro franchise.... There is no question that pro sports adds to the quality of life. It is an adornment to the lifestyle of the people who live in towns, but it also takes its toll on other things. It is taking a huge toll on college and high school sports and other amateur sports.... Everybody talks about [how] the entertainment dollar only goes so far, that is no doubt true. But there is also the question about the entertainment hour, how many hours people have to spend. Where are they going to choose to spend them? Are they going to go out and do something that benefits everybody like the optimist league or high school football game or a little neighborhood basketball game, or are they going to pay fifty-eight dollars for a seat at the hockey game?

P: I noticed in the paper today that the Dolphins have just raised their ticket prices.

E: For the fourth straight year.

P: It now costs something like forty-three dollars for a good seat. If you have two boys, and you want to go to a Dolphins game, with parking and hot dogs, it has to be a minimum of \$150. Who can afford to do that?

E: Well, I ask myself that question all the time. I see these people going in there that I know are not rich. They do without or borrow the money. It has gotten way out-of-hand. Baseball is particularly a game of fools, both players and owners....

P: Why is baseball not nearly as popular as it used to be?

E: My personal opinion is that life has gotten so much faster, every movie you see wants to be so much louder than the last one, the cars to go faster, the explosions... noisier, the fatalities... more numerous, life has gotten to be so much faster that, especially young people, demand everything at a fever pitch and baseball is not played at a fever pitch. Baseball is played at... [an] even slower pace than it used to [be] because they have ever more commercials. The World Series game has forty-five minutes [of commercials].... You can just about count on them lasting three-and-a-half hours. That just doesn't tie in with the pace of American life....

P: I know some rabid baseball fans who resent the fact that a shortstop who hits .230 gets five million a year. They see this as an extraordinarily high price to pay for average baseball players. Also the players' attitude seems to have gotten worse, they are arrogant and won't sign autographs, and this has turned fans off. Do you think that is a fair assessment?

E: I don't blame the players for taking the money. That is why I say that it is a game of fools. The players ruined it by insisting on so much money, but the owners didn't

really have to submit to their demands, but they did. So, it is a question of who are the biggest fools? The owners or the players....

P: Should Pete Rose [professional baseball player] be in the Hall of Fame?

E: I don't think so. I think he bet on baseball. I think the evidence is incontrovertible that he bet on baseball or otherwise he would have gone to court, which he never has. He has never been tested in court. It is generally thought that Bart Giamatti {former commissioner of Major League Baseball} knows and has evidence that he bet on baseball. I don't think that there should be a place in the Hall of Fame for anybody who ever bet on baseball. If you bet on baseball, it follows that there is a chance that you might have bet on your own games. The way that Pete bet, I wouldn't think it unusual because Pete is sort of, not so much a scoundrel or saint as he is amoral, he doesn't see the difference. No question that he loves baseball and was a wonderful asset to baseball....

P: I presume that college football is still your favorite sport. How have the athletes changed in the years that you have been reporting college sports in general, but college football in particular?

E: They have changed negatively. There are reasons. The demands by the media have increased almost exponentially. You used to go out to a University of Miami practice or press conference and there might be four people there. You go out there now, there are thirty-four people. If a guy is a good football player it is a heavy burden on him, dealing with the media. Although this has always been the case in some way, it has been more marked in recent years. If a kid has athletic ability, he has a free pass in life, just about from the time that he is six or eight years old on. He can get away with

anything.

P: Both in and out of school?

E: Oh, yes, absolutely. This always [been the case] to some degree, but not like it [is] now. If some fourteen year-old kid gets in trouble, and the high school coach knows that he is going to be a great football player, he will intervene and a lot of times [it is] with the sufferance of the teachers. Let's say that they are much less humble than they once were. A lot of them are pretty arrogant, but they are still much better to talk to than any of the pro athletes, except for hockey players, race-car drivers, and horse racing people.

P: Those people are easier to talk to?

E: The three pro sports I mentioned are the easiest. Horse racing – trainers, owners, and jockeys. Hockey players mostly, but coaches too. Automobile racing, those guys would let you ride on their fenders if it wouldn't slow them down. They are terrific, but I notice that the hockey players, as the salaries go up, the hockey players tolerance for media demands is going down....

P: Are college athletes today less intelligent, less articulate? More articulate? How do you assess them?

E: The athletes today are much more media-savvy. They give you better answers, in part because the journalists ask better questions, and a lot more of them, they give you better answers than they would have ten years ago, twenty years ago, forty years ago, [because] nobody even asked them any questions. People didn't go to the dressing rooms after the games, you wouldn't have thought of it. Personally I think the biggest waste of time and space on a sports page is all these innocuous quotes from athletes,

few of whom ever say anything worth repeating.

P: The athletes often say, “somebody has really got to step up for this game,” “we’ve got to focus.”

E: “We didn’t execute.” Yes. “We just got to regroup.” We print all that garbage.

P: Are there more cliches in sports than in other areas of society?

E: Cliches are cliches because they are so true. But now you hear them like the one, “we control our destiny.” You can’t control your destiny, destiny is destiny. Or fate, “we control our fate.” You cannot control fate. Fate is fate, it is preordained.... We compound the felony, they are bad about cliches, but I don’t blame them as much as us for printing them.

P: One thing that disturbs a lot of academics at universities is this rather lax attitude toward athletes’ irresponsible behavior. Without getting into specifics, there were wide receivers at Florida State University and the University of Florida who were caught stealing. Not only were they not kicked out of school, they remained on the football team. They were suspended for one or two games. What is your reaction is to that?

E: Well, I look at that in the context of society as a whole. Now, when I grew up in Athens, Georgia, about the worse trouble that you could get into was knocking out a streetlight with a rock. You couldn’t be drunk, because you couldn’t buy anything to drink. You couldn’t be drugged, because there were no drugs. There were much fewer opportunities to be a bad guy. As a result, we didn’t have much misbehavior. I don’t know how we would have reacted if we would have had the opportunity for misbehavior that they have today.

I think that there is a great division of how the coaches handled this. For example,

I think Spurrier [Steve Spurrier, former football coach at the University of Florida; currently head coach of the Washington Redskins], even though I don't care much for him personally, he is too arrogant and thin-skinned for my taste, is a pretty good disciplinarian. And just the opposite, I love Bowden{ Bobby Bowden, football coach at Florida State University] as a person, but I think Bowden is a bit too light on the players. If you ask him about it, his answer is, well, that is the way kids are these days. Well, that is not the right way to confront this. Butch Davis at the University of Miami was a chronic liar. Football coaches in college and pros are the world's biggest liars, except for politicians. It would be a dead heat if you had a lying race between head football coaches and politicians. Maybe... they have to lie. All I know is that they would climb a tree to tell a lie. Butch Davis is the worse of the whole field of worst. Yet, he was a wonderful disciplinarian, a very decent and honorable man in every other respect....

P: That reminds me. I want to go back to the Miami football team, 1986, when they wore fatigues, had gotten in fights and had been accused of other indiscretions. They cultivated this bad-boy image.

E: Actually, the severity of their malfeasance was overrated. Most of the things that they did wrong were not terrible, but their attitude was so arrogant and they taunted and showboated and hot-dogged and I thought it had reached its apex, of course, at the Fiesta Bowl, the 1987 Fiesta Bowl. That is an insult to all of football, to me, the way that they acted there.... [T]hey were cursing the Penn State fans from the door of their locker room before the game. Jimmy Johnson let them get by with it. Actually I think Jimmy Johnson encouraged them to do it. I thought it was shameful and I wrote columns to that effect. I wrote that Jimmy Johnson should apologize or be fired. His

answer to that was to go in and offer to resign to President Tad Foote [President, University of Miami]. As it happened, the athletic director, Sam Jankovich talked him out of it at the last minute.... The whole scenario of the Fiesta Bowl was a blight on college football and just shameful. It was everything that college football should not be. I know that there are a lot of abuses in college football, anybody would be terribly naive to think that there are not, but it also does a lot of good, the way that it unifies alumni, I think that it is very healthy.

P: You think that there is a lot cheating going on in college sports, particularly recruiting? I noticed that sanctions have been recently handed down against Alabama and Kentucky for violating NCAA rules.

E: You know, I really don't. I know that a lot has gone on, but I think that just the fear factor...

P: The death penalty? [Referring to stringent sanctions handed down to the NCAA for recruiting violations.]

E: Right. It stops a lot of this. I don't doubt but what hundreds, maybe thousands, of coaches, including some of whom I am absolutely positive of, kept stacks of \$10s, \$20s, \$50s, and \$100s in their desk drawer. And if a guy needed a new suit, he would go by the coach's office and he would dip in there and hand him the money. The money was furnished to him by affluent alumni. I don't think that happens near as much any more. I think that the University of Miami now has four compliance officers. They didn't use to have any. Now they have four people who do nothing but to see that they are in compliance [with] this tangle of NCAA regulations. I am sure there is a lot of hanky-panky going on, but it is not like as open and as wild as it was, like when Max

McGee (the old Green Bay Packer wide receiver that caught seven passes in Super Bowl I) told me, when he went to Tulane, he had any kind of car that he wanted any time that he wanted it. When SMU [Southern Methodist University] got the death penalty, one of the higher officials told the athletic director he had do something about these abuses. The athletic director's response was, I don't have time or the resources to do that,... we have a payroll to meet....

P: What about financial stipends for college athletes?

E: It is not financially feasible. If you had to pay, first of all, you couldn't just confine it to football players, you would have to pay every athlete.... Say [there were] 500, you paid them all, nothing less than \$200 a month would even make a difference these days, do the math, it would not work. Besides, they are already getting paid. At the University of Miami, you are getting a \$35,000 tuition free. So they are getting paid, basically for four years, \$140,000.

P: When we examine college sports, it is an expensive proposition. Should coaches and players accept money from Nike for wearing their shoes and athletic equipment? I know that they get million-dollar contracts.

E: I see a lot of flaws in the coaches accepting the money. It compromises the university and makes it even more commercial. But the colleges themselves aid and abet this by using this as part of the coach's compensation. When you get into the pros, it is just business to me. I don't really see anything wrong with it in the pro sports. The only thing that I see wrong with pro sports is it enables thieves like Nike to charge kids from the ghetto \$160 for a pair of Jordans [shoes].

P: Are you disturbed by players turning pro early after one or two years of college?

E: Absolutely, I think it is terrible. Now we are seeing that they do not redshirt nearly as many players, because they know that they are only going to have them for a short length of time. That is not all that disturbs me.... I think that the pro leagues should compensate the colleges for every player they use. I am not just talking about the guy turning pro early. I think that if, let's say, Dan Morgan, who went from the University of Miami linebacker to the Carolina Panthers. In effect, the University of Miami is a factory that produced Dan Morgan for the larger company, the Carolina Panthers. I think that the Panthers should have to pay a fee.... The pros get such a free ride from the colleges....

P: What about coaches' salaries?

E: Oh, that is a sore point with me.... I think that it is just absolutely ridiculous to pay a college coach \$2 million like Spurrier was getting, or \$1 million like Bowden. Two million is getting to be the going rate for top coaches like Bob Stoops [head coach, University of Oklahoma]. As soon as Bob Stoops hit \$2 million, Butch Davis hit the ceiling and started thinking that he was a \$2 million coach. That was part of the reason that he left the University of Miami to go to Cleveland. I think that is a terrible abuse. Doesn't bother me about the pro coaches, I mean it's gross, crass....

P: I wonder also if there needs to be more NCAA control about grades. I know that some schools have very low admission rates, some schools have higher admission rates. Should there be some sort of national standard?

E: ... I certainly think it should be standardized and higher. I don't think you should take a complete academic washout, accept him as a regular student. I think this should be done on an NCAA level and I really don't understand why it hasn't been done that

way.... We could sit here and agree that there should be a national standard, [but] I can see an immediate holdup where the president of the University of Florida would say, it's wrong for you to try to hold us to the standards of Princeton or Yale or Harvard or MIT or Tulane. Our function is as a public university, we shouldn't be that elitist as to demand these high admissions standards such as the Ivy League schools and others....

P: How about graduation rates for college athletes? You rarely hear that from sports announcers.

E: Well, you see, those figures are released pretty often. The ones that have high graduation rates rush into print with them. Miami has increased its graduation rates tremendously in the last ten or twelve years.... I must say, in all honesty, that I think, and it's quite patently obvious to me, that the teams that don't have very high graduation rates don't put a very high premium on character or academic ability when they're recruiting. I don't think, with all due respect for Bobby Bowden, I don't think he's going out looking for many Rhodes scholars or anything approximating it. All he's interested in is whether they run a 4.3 or 4.9. There are other coaches,... Larry Coker [Davis's replacement as head coach of the University of Miami football team] would be one of them, ... who believe the two go hand in hand: a good student is a better football player and that you have far fewer problems with a guy who has shown through high school that he is an honorable person who does his best academically....

P: Let's talk about the University of Miami football, you've covered them for a long time. When you look back, there have been some rather extraordinary coaches at that campus. Almost every one( Jimmy Johnson, Dennis Erickson, Butch Davis, etc.) went on to a successful pro career. Who was the best coach?

E: That's a great question. Oddly enough, I've never been asked that question and I'd be hard-pressed to give you an answer. I probably would have to say Howard Schnellenberger... [who] came in and built it up from almost nothing to a national championship. I'm convinced had he stayed, he would have won... just as many national championships as other coaches there wound up winning....

P: I know you mentioned how you feel personally about Spurrier, but how would you evaluate his career as a head coach at Florida?

E: Spurrier's career at Florida? Fabulous.... It's hard for me to imagine anybody doing any better job at any college over the same period of time, except maybe Tom Osborne at Nebraska, and Osborne had advantages involving academics that Spurrier didn't have and they have a system at Nebraska, a very sinister system there, ... where they use walk-ons as scholarships. Say there's a player in West Big Nose, Nebraska, that they just don't have a scholarship for. The local 4-F club or something like that will pay his way. It's a very organized network. He effectively has a scholarship, so they have an unlimited number of what amounts to scholarships, which gives them a huge advantage. Osborne was also a fine coach. Other than that, I don't see how anybody could have been a better coach for the period of time than Spurrier...

P: How influential was Spurrier's style of play on the SEC [Southeastern Conference]?

E: ...Often imitated, but never replicated. I think people tried to do what Spurrier did, but they can't do it, because they just don't have the knack for it and the mental quickness that Spurrier has for it. The things that Spurrier has been doing at college, I'm not all that convinced that he's going to be that successful in the NFL. Those guys

have seen all of that stuff. That's not going to cut any ice up there. Besides, I think Spurrier's thin skin and super-sensitivity to criticism and his aversion to doing outside things, part of the reason, I think, he didn't like dealing with the alumni, going to alumni functions. Didn't like recruiting, can't blame him for that. I don't think he'll stay very long. I don't think he'll last five years in the NFL....

P: What's the greatest or most exciting sporting event you've ever attended?

E: No question, the 1980 Olympics at Lake Placid; the U.S. victory over the Russian ice-hockey team. I don't know much about hockey now, but I knew even less then.... There was a transportation strike... so a lot of the guys just left.... Only about half the media were still around for this wonderful, wonderful event. I went and sat beside a fellow [from Boston]... and he explained to me what was happening during the whole thing and then I went as crazy as everybody when the U.S. got the winning goal. I remember I got so excited, I apparently threw a very expensive pair of prescription glasses into the air.... It was just the most riotous, ecstatic event. Nothing else could even come close.

P: Because it was so unexpected?

E: Unexpected and patriotic. They were not given... any chance whatever.... The second-most exciting would be Jack Nicklaus winning the Masters when he was forty-six years old in 1986....

P: What's wrong with boxing?

E: It's just wall-to-wall sleaze, always has been. It's no worse now than it's ever been. They keep saying that it won't last, it will sleaze itself out of business....

P: Is it the promoters?

E: Yes, mostly, but the managers. Managers are just as crooked as anybody else. The fighters are the victims.... Any sport in which the object is to maim or kill the other person couldn't possibly have very many redeeming virtues....

P: How have sports reporters changed since you started in the business?

E: The main way they've changed is you hardly ever used to see a sports reporter who wasn't a drunk. Now you hardly ever see one who will even take a drink.

Standards are much higher these days.... They're much, much more knowledgeable about sports because of TV, they start watching TV when they're five or six years old and they know everything there is to know about a sport by the time they're twenty years old, when we had to see it all first-hand....

P: When you are writing, you are trying to get an audience that is essentially wedded to television or listening to the radio. How do you get people to read your column and read the newspaper?

E: ... I think the thing I try to do mostly is address and deliver an opinion on what the people have found most interesting on television. I want to be writing about what they're going to be talking about when the column comes out the next morning.... You used to be able,... a long time ago, [to] go to an event and more or less tell them what happened. Now, you have to tell them why it happened, more why it happened than what happened....

P: What do you think of *USA TODAY*?

E: ... I think *USA TODAY* has had a salubrious influence on sports journalism if for no other reason than the emphasis is put on tight, bright writing and the proper use of graphics, not this helter-skelter all-encompassing hunger for gigantic space-eating

photos....

P: Have you ever had any problems from either Knight-Ridder (publisher) or an editor about anything you've written?

E: I had two problems, which is not very many for forty-five years, I think. One time I wrote something rather cutting about Hialeah Racetrack when it was starting to go down way back in the [19]60s, late 60s. I referred to it as a rich folks country club and I got a note from John S. Knight that said I was being arrogant. He took issue with what I said because he was one of the rich folks whose country club it was. Naturally he took issue. He was a great man, there's no question about that.

P: At that time, he was publisher, right?

E: He was publisher, I think that was before we were Knight-Ridder.... I wrote him back that if he just wanted a sports editor who would be a mirror for his own opinion that he was going to have to find somebody else. I wasn't going to do it. I never heard a word back from him. That's the kind of guy he was.

P: You mentioned that in the beginning of your career that you could never have had a female sports editor. Now there are an increased number of female sportswriters. Are there many female sports editors?

E: Yes. They're all over the place. Philadelphia has had several of them. The *New York Times* has had at least one. It's not at all unusual to have a female....

P: What about African-Americans and minorities in the profession?

E: We don't have near as many of them as we should have. Obviously the ones who do come in and are very good rise to the top very quickly. Most of the newspapers I know, certainly Knight-Ridder and Gannett, are very diversity-conscious and are always

looking for minorities. African-Americans, Hispanics, although Hispanics aren't a minority in Miami.... For some reason, [it is] hard to find gifted Hispanic newspaper writers...

P: We need to talk a little bit about the Dolphins. Give me your assessment of Don Shula. Do you see him as the greatest pro coach?

E: All things considered, I think Shula was the greatest pro coach. Even though he didn't win a Super Bowl his last twenty-two or three years, they were always right there. In thirty-three pro seasons, he had two losing seasons. That is truly incredible.... On sheer persistence and you have to give some weight to longevity as a coach. Not only that, but to maintain the quality of teams, despite the fact that they almost never got a premium draft choice, because they always did so well.... I think he was the best because he was so consistent....

P: How would you rate Dan Marino among NFL quarterbacks?

E: I wouldn't rate him as the best quarterback who ever played. I think there have been several other quarterbacks. Joe Montana [former San Francisco 49ers quarterback], Johnny Unitas [former Baltimore Colts quarterback]. Without any question at all, Dan Marino is the greatest pure passer who ever picked up a football. No question about that....

P: When you look back on your career, are you satisfied with your accomplishments?

E: No, no.

P: In what sense? What would you rather have done?

E: I think I could have been more ingenious or innovative. I will have to say that innovativeness and departure from the general line of thought is more encouraged now

than it was thirty, forty years ago.... It's hard to pick out one thing. I... probably should have been more interested in basketball and maybe a little more interested in baseball.... A problem that I had was, that I was... never as much a fan of sports as I was of writing. If I quit tomorrow, I would never go to any other sports event, except maybe a tennis match or a horse race or a college football game, if I could get in the press box. I'm not a big sports fan. A lot of times I would have to crank myself up in the morning to get interested about the subject I was writing about. I never had to crank myself up about the writing, because I loved to write and I still do. I would have been better. All these guys you hear on sports talk radio and most of the outstanding sportswriters are real sports [fans]. That's their life. That's not my life. I never wanted it to be. I would have been a better professional if it had been my life, but I wouldn't have been as happy as a person....

END OF INTERVIEW