

Interview with Mack Robinson

Date: N/A

Interviewer: N/A

Camera Rolls: 5, 6, 7, 8

Sound Rolls: 2, 3, 4

Team: N/A

Interview gathered as part of *Black Champions*. Produced by Miles Educational Film Productions, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, William Miles Collection.

Interview with Mack Robinson, conducted by Miles Educational Film Productions, Inc. on N/A for *Black Champions*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, William Miles Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of *Black Champions*.

[camera roll 5]

[sound roll 2]

[Note: children playing and yard work going on throughout interview]

00:00:00:00 — 00:01:23:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling. OK.

Interviewer:

Mr. Robinson, I wonder if we could begin by talking about your early life here in Pasadena. You grew up here and became an athlete here. I wonder if you'd tell us about your schooldays and your family life.

Mack Robinson:

Well, I came to Pasadena, California, in 1920 with my mother and four, three other brothers, and one sister, making a total family of five. And we grew up on Pepper Street. And it was, in those days—what you might say, it was a normal childhood. We, we were discriminated against at that time, but it was so prevalent until we had become accustomed to it and it didn't really make, make that much difference [truck drives by] within our life. [pause]

[sync tone]

[cut]

00:01:24:00 — 00:02:31:00

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

What do you think about that? I mean, do you wanna do that section again, or—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—do you want—OK.

Mack Robinson:

Are you, are you want me to look dir—

Camera Crew Member #1:

At him.

Mack Robinson:

—directly at you, or, or between—

Camera Crew Member #1:

At Clayton.

Camera Crew Member #2:

No, right at Clayton.

Mack Robinson:

OK. All right.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Do you really have it?

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes.

Camera Crew Member #2:

OK, we got it.

Interviewer:

Why don't we go back and do just, just the—

Mack Robinson:

Just the very—

Interviewer:

—question you answered—

Mack Robinson:

—beginning?

Interviewer:

—yeah, right.

Mack Robinson:

All right. You ask the question, then.

Interviewer:

OK. Would you tell us about your early life growing up here in Pasadena, and where you grew up, and something about your family?

Mack Robinson:

I came to Pasadena, California, in nineteen and twenty with my mother and three brothers and one sister, which, that's a total of five in our family. My mother had left her husband and we came here. I grew up in the elementary school system of Pasadena, and I attended the

junior high school system in Pasadena. John Muir High School, and I went to Pasadena City College. Later on, in my college days, I went to University of Oregon.

00:02:32:00 — 00:03:28:00

Interviewer:

You were telling me earlier that in those days you, kids were not allowed to use, negro youngsters were not allowed to use the swimming pool.

Mack Robinson:

Oh, yes. We, we were segregated in that regards. We weren't allowed to swim at Brookside Park only but once to year, and at that time the churches of southern California used to have the, what they called the union picnic, and the churches would gather at Brookside Park and [coughs] we would have the full use of the swimming pool that day. And that was the only time we were able to swim, and that was once to the year. During the interim times, and, and part of my life I spent helping to bring about the, the swimming policies of Pasadena, and other things that were happening to minorities.

00:03:29:00 — 00:04:53:00

Interviewer:

When do you remember first being personally very interested in athletics? You later go on to be a, a fine runner. When, when did that start?

Mack Robinson:

Oh, that started in elementary school. We used to have little games on the playgrounds of classes. We'd have running games and tag, like a tag team, or something of this nature. And, and the teachers most the time would, would get me to start, start it off. And we'd play like chasing the fox, and I'd have to break out of the ring, and then the whole class would start running after me, and then I'd learn how to swivel hip and sidestep, and dart in between. And the next person that, that caught me and tagged me, we went back and formed the ring all over again, and, and he wou-, he or she would break out of the ring, and we'd start the chase all over again. And as time went on, I found out then that I was fairly fast and just, just developed from, as a normal kid. There was nothing exceptional about it. It's just the way I grew up. And I think there was, there were a lot of youngsters my age, probably was faster than I was, but you know, when you find where your niche is, that's where you, you t-, try to stay. And that's what I did.

00:04:54:00 — 00:05:21:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember when you first ran competitively in, in track?

Mack Robinson:

Sure. That was in a junior high school. A ran a hundred-twenty yard low hurdles in a race, and that was my first competitive race, and I tied the, the city record. And by the time the junior high school season was over, I had broken that record, and that was in 1932. And that record stood until nineteen and fifty-six.

00:05:22:00 — 00:06:00:00

Interviewer:

Did you get—during this period, were you coached at all, or, I mean, were you pretty much running on your own effort?

Mack Robinson:

Well, in junior high school, you're not really coached. You're placed out there, and a coach tell you, do this, and you do the other, and you try, you do this event, and you do the other. Junior high school is kind of like a feel, f-, feeling out situation, and you kind of get involved that way, and you see where you're strong parts, points are, your weakness, and you go to your strong points, and you continue down that avenue.

00:06:01:00 — 00:10:10:00

Interviewer:

Can you remember when you first received some formal coaching? When somebody really sort of s-, took you aside and said, Robinson, you can run, and we wanna teach you how to do some things that'll help you run better.

Mack Robinson:

Well, my high school coach was the one that did a lotta good and did a, gave me a lot of help. But I think that in reality, I just developed. I, I think that my involvement was more of a natural standpoint rather than a s-, say, like you, some people may see in the movies where you go through all these accolades [sic] of exercises and things of this nature, and so to speak, dad is on the side, and he's gonna do this, and he sees to, that you eat Wheaties or whatever, and all of those things. Well, I didn't have that part of the training. The coaching was, came from practice out on the field, the coaches naturally teach you how to start and all of those things, and help you to improve, and you have to go with it. And the funniest thing about it was, when I went to high school, I was ineligible, or the doctors declared me ineligible, because I had a heart murmur, and they refused to let me run track in my first year in high school. And so rather than doing anything as far as the heart murmur is concerned, I felt as though they had actually broken my heart and I quit school. I just, totally just walked

out of school and refused to go. So I went to work on odd jobs in the labor field, and, and worked with my mother washing windows, waxing floors, and things of that nature in which s-, that was the type of work she was doing. So I helped bring in money to the family. And 1934 I went back to, to s-, school and the doctors again declared me ineligible, saying that they would not be responsible for me to run track, and again I was ineligible. And I went around and round with him about why's and wherefore's, and they saw that I was determined. I w-, wanted to run. And they said, well, if you can get your mother to release the school of any responsibility of anything ever happening to you on a track, he says, we'll let, you can compete. So I told my mother that I wanted to run track, and if I died running track, that's the way I wanted to go, and I says, I want you to sign the papers. And she said, well, OK, if that's what you want, that's what you can have. So she signed 'em, and I ran, I started running track. And I won every hundred yard dash race that I was in, in 1934, and I became the state champion, undefeated state champion. That year I set a school and league record in the long jump, and that was in nineteen and thirty-four, and that record wasn't broken until nineteen and sixty-six. So, I started out basically a dead man, and here, individuals who are, were sound and never had a problem or ob-, objective from a doctor's standpoint, most of them gone. I'm the only living sprinter from the 1936 Olympic games that participated in the, in the games. All of them are gone. [truck drives by] Ralph Metcalfe, Jesse Owens, Foy Draper, and Frank Wykoff.

00:10:11:00 — 00:11:40:00

Interviewer:

When did you point, when did you begin pointing toward the Olympics in 1936? When did you have a sense that that would be a, a worthwhile and achievable goal?

Mack Robinson:

Well, I don't think that I ever set my sight on any particular event or thing. I was a competitor, and when the games started to develop I beg-, I got involved, and it was the process of elimination. And I just continued to go on, on up the ladder. What most people don't know, and the sportswriters of today don't know, is that I set the first Olympic record in the tryouts. I broke Eddie Tolan's 1932 Olympic record in the two hundred meters, over in Los Angeles. And even Jesse Owens—as great as he, as he was—to that date, he, he hadn't broken the Olympic record. I broke it, and then I met Jesse Owens for the first time in the finals in New York, and Jesse beat me, one foot, and he broke the record that I established in Los Angeles. So therefore, it n-, really never got a chance to—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Mack Robinson:

—get into the record book that I was—

Interviewer:

OK. We'll come back to—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Cut.

Interviewer:

—that point. Very good.

[sync tone]

Interviewer:

Marvelous.

[cut]

[camera roll 6]

[sound roll 3]

00:11:41:00 — 00:12:39:00

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, we're rolling.

[sync tone]

[production discussion]

Interviewer:

Mr. Robinson, I wonder if you'd tell us again the story about your breaking Ed Tolan's 1932 record in the two hundred meter dash.

Mack Robinson:

Well, in the tryouts here I com-, was competing in the two hundred meters, and at that time I broke Eddie Tolan's Olympic record, there in the Coliseum. And this was first time it had

been broken, so I was the world record holder in the two hundred meters for about two or three weeks, whenever it was, and up until I met Jesse Owens in the finals, tryouts in Randall Island in New York. There he beat me by one foot, [leaf blower in distance] and he broke the record that Eddie Tolan, I mean, that I had established in Los Angeles.

00:12:40:00 — 00:12:42:00

Interviewer:

Was that the first time you'd run against Owens?

Mack Robinson:

Yes.

00:12:43:00 — 00:13:41:00

Interviewer:

Tell us, tell us a little bit about the kind of competitive atmosphere that existed sprinters in the country. Who di-, who did you know among the sprinters for, beside the sprinters here perhaps in southern California? Were there reputations? Were people pretty well-established at that time? Did you have people you were pointing to run against?

Mack Robinson:

I never pointed myself towards any, any sprinter that there was.

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

All I thi-, all I was concerned about was being there. And they had to be ready for me, because I was ready for them. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 1]

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

And throughout my crack, track career, I was never out of condition. I was never injured, and I felt as though that in my c-, in my competitive year, that the only way to succeed is to be ready and to stay in shape. And I stayed in shape.

00:13:42:00 — 00:14:22:00

Interviewer:

Now, when you, when you broke Tolan's record, that qualified you for the—was that the qualifying meet for you to go to the Olympics, or did you have to do—

Mack Robinson:

No. No, that qualified me to go to the finals. You had three regional events. One was in New York, one was in Chicago, and one was on the west coast, and in those areas the first three individuals was qualified to go to New York to, to compete in the finals, there in New York. And in, in the finals in New York, that's where you qualified to become a member of the team.

00:14:23:00 — 00:15:29:00

Interviewer:

How did you feel about going to the Olympics? Did it have any special meaning for you?

Mack Robinson:

Well, yes and no. It was something that I really hadn't dreamed about, or hadn't put too much emphasis or thought behind it. My involvement was trying to do the best that I possibly could through the process of elimination, and I figured that I could beat the next guy, and that's where it, it went. And when I made the team, I just knew that I was a winner; that I was going to do good in, in Berlin. I was never boastful about it. I never, say, became big-headed or anything of this nature. And I didn't change my attitude towards my friends or the, anyone else. I was still myself.

00:15:30:00 — 00:17:16:00

Interviewer:

What can you tell us about your memories of that 1936 Olympics? Of—were there, are there any special preparation—of course, you had to go from here to New York, I guess, to leave. How did you—were your friends or family, were they excited about it? I mean, what was the atmosphere?

Mack Robinson:

Well, it's hard to say how the family actually was feeling because they were here in Pasadena and I was in New York, but I'm quite sure everyone was excited. Now, my brother that was older than I, all I know, he was [laughs] like popcorn coming out of a machine, 'cause he was a, he was really a pusher. And he liked to bet a little bit of money, and I think he made a little bit of money on, on what I was going to do. And I suppose he lost some money, because I didn't win, I didn't win the finals, because I'm sure that he would've bet the farm on it. But

overall, I think that everyone was as, as enthusiastic as you or anyone else would be as, as a member of the family, of your family would, was making a c-, successful venture. So we ha-, we were just normal individuals, and we'd say, well, that was great, and this, and that, and the other; was no big hip, hip, hooray, and not like in the—most people think about in the movies or some kind of a program where the hero comes home and everything is laid out in, in that manner. That didn't happen.

00:17:17:00 — 00:22:44:00

Interviewer:

You qualified for two events—

Mack Robinson:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—at the Olympics, the one hundred meter and the two hundred meter dashes. Tell us about your progress in those events once you got over there. What, what were the races, and the qualifying heats, and thing—all of that like for you?

Mack Robinson:

When it got down to the, the hundred meter relay team, which I qualified for, I was eliminated by the coaches. I wasn't even allowed to participate in the trial heats or runoff races between us. What they did was change the relay team all the, around.

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

They removed three of us from the relay team: Sammy Stoller, Marty Glickman, and myself. We were taken off the relay team, and the team was made up of Ralph Metcalfe, Jesse Owens, Foy Draper, and Frank Wykoff. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 1]

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

Now, in one, in the trial heat and the runoff, it's to find out who is gonna be the fourth man. Frank Wykoff, Ralph Metcalfe, and Jesse Owens was already automatically selected by the coaches. They had to have, have a fourth man. So Marty Glickman, Sammy Stoller, and Foy Draper, they were in a runoff to see who was gonna be the fourth man in that race. They told

me, forget it. They wouldn't even let me race against the four. Marty Glickman won that race, Sammy Stoller was second, and Foy Draper was third. He was three-tenths of a second slower than the winner. The coaches put him on, put Foy Draper, on the relay team. We argued that in a meeting, and the, and they told me point-blank, if I hadn't ha' made it in the two hundred meters, they never would have even put me on the boat to go over. And, course I sounded off. If you know Jack, well, I'm older than he, and so I, I was quite vocal and I expressed myself. And so Ralph, no, Jesse said that he would back off and not run in the relay if certain things were, were to change. [plane flies over] There was also a discussion as to who was gonna run, in what order. And the coaches decided that Jesse would lead off, Ralph Metcalfe would run second, Foy Draper third, and Frank Wykoff ran fourth. Now what that actually set up was, the two blacks ran first and the two f-, whites finished, and that's where basically, you see, you get the glory from. Normally in a track meet, the fastest man either runs first or last, the second man runs first or last. The slowest man runs second, and the next man, he runs third. Therefore, you're sandwiched in between your slowest and your fastest to pick up any slack or whatever you may develop. And the coaches had decided among themselves, is, that's the way it was going to be. ***And there was a lot of i-, inside fighting there and a lot of hard feelings. But the coaches decided that's the way it was going to be.*** And that was the same way with Eleanor Holmes. The judges, the officials didn't like, American officials, didn't like the fact that Eleanor Holmes was given first class treatment by the captain of the boat. She was on top deck, and she had a little cocktail, wine, and whatever she'd normally drink, and she was still the fastest swimmer that we had, as far as that is—in the world, at that time. But somebody got mad about something and they just pulled her off the team, period. We tried to sign a petition to have her reinstated, the athletes, but the officials said, no. Now, since the games, there's been a lotta controversy and a lotta talk about the association between our officials and the, the German government in which, was in charge of the games. And they were unhappy with the amount of blacks that was on the team— ***[Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 1]***

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Mack Robinson:

—and whatever. [pause] Cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

We're out.

Mack Robinson:

Cut.

[cut]

00:22:45:00 — 00:22:48:00

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

We're going to camera roll number seven. Number seven.

[cut]

[camera roll 7]

00:22:49:00 — 00:24:47:00

[slate]

Interviewer:

You losing?

[sync tone]

[production discussion]

Interviewer:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Go ahead.

Interviewer:

Mr. Robinson, you ran in the 1936 Olympics, in the finals for the two hundred meter dash. I wonder if you'd describe that for us.

Mack Robinson:

Well, it's rather hard to describe, I think, because it's kind of like a flash. You've got less than thirty seconds to run two hundred meters, you know, you don't—there's not a great deal of thinking that you can do. You just listen for the gun, and when it goes off, you're off, and you're doing your darnedest out there, and before you know, it's almost al-, it's al-, the race is over. But it's, it's, it's a good feeling to be—

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

—there. *You know, we had sixty-four individuals that was in the two hundred meters in the very beginning, and they had to be eliminated down to eight. So when you look at, you're inside of the eight out of sixty-four, that's not bad; and you go on down, and you're number two out of the eight and, which covers the whole world, to me, it's great. I have no qualms about finishing second. I've enjoyed placing second. My silver medal has a lot of meaning in, to me, and I believe it has as much meaning in it as the gold. [Note Interview gathered as part of Black Champions; Episode 1]*

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

But I think that the gold, to me, was taken away, and the fact that I wasn't really given an opportunity to win the gold, because I was not coached [phone rings] by the coaches. [phone rings]

Interviewer:

Let's cut—

Camera Crew Member #3:

Cut. Gee.

Interviewer:

—and start again.

[cut]

00:24:48:00 — 00:26:45:00

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—your situation with the coaches. I think that's a very important, very good story. OK?

Mack Robinson:

OK.

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Interviewer:

Go ahead. Well, in the 1936 Olympics two hundred meter dash [truck drives], you, I think, feel that you weren't given every opportunity to win the gold that race.

Mack Robinson:

Well, I wasn't given an opportunity to have a shot at the gold because I was not coached by the coaches, nor was I asked any questions of needs, or how I felt, or do I need a rub-down, anything. I was out there on my own. I did need a pair of spikes. I didn't have an opportunity to talk on the radio with Bill Henry, who was broadcasting back to California. And I would, at that time, I certainly would have asked friends in Pasadena to send me a pair of spikes, or send me enough money to be able to buy a pair of shoes. You see, I left California with a hundred and fifty dollars in my pocket. My train ticket cost ninety-nine dollars—round trip, from Pasadena to California at that time—and I had less than fifty dollars when I landed in New York. And when I made the Olympic team, I believe I had less than thirty dollars. So, being the first time actually away from home, not knowing what tomorrow was going to bring, I was trying to hold on to a dollar or two in order to meet any personal needs that I might have at the time. But I certainly was thinking that I would be looked after with spikes and things of this nature. So that's what happened to me.

00:26:46:00 — 00:27:55:00

Interviewer:

I wonder if you'd describe to us the portion of the race where you felt you were particularly disadvantaged by running without spikes because of the quality of the track. You, you said at one point earlier that you had, you had stepped into a soft spot.

Mack Robinson:

I would, I would have, not have gone that deep into the ground because [stutters] of the short spike, and therefore it made a lotta difference. And I just would like to have had an opportunity, to have been given, to have been given that pair of spikes. I did get a pair of spikes after the games. And I went to, on a tour, and I went up to Norway, and I was given a pair of spikes by the Norwegian track club. There I was [plane flies by]—

Interviewer:

I'll—maybe—

Camera Crew Member #3:

Cut.

Interviewer:

—we should stop.

Mack Robinson:

Dillon, don't—

[sync tone]

Mack Robinson:

—take—

[cut]

00:27:56:00 — 00:28:28:00

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Just tell us the story about you getting the spikes from the Norwegian track club, OK? I'll, I'll just lead you in.

Mack Robinson:

All right.

Interviewer:

[pause] OK, then. [pause] Mr. Robinson, after the 1936 Olympics, you toured in Europe. You went to run in Norway. What, what—

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Interviewer:

—what happened there?

Mack Robinson:

The Norwegian club gave me a pair of spikes, and at that time [car drives by]—

Interviewer:

Who's this guy—I could have—

[sync tone]

[cut]

00:28:29:00 — 00:30:57:00

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Go ahead with the question.

Interviewer:

After the 1936 Olympics, you ran in some other places in Europe. Tell us—

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Interviewer:

—the story about running in Norway.

Mack Robinson:

In Norway, we went there, and I was on a relay team of, with Cornelius Johnson, Johnny Woodruff, Al Fitch, and myself. And we ran in a thousand yard race. The Norwegian club gave me a pair of spikes. I ran the three hundred yards, instead of the two hundred meters in that race, and we set a world record for a thousand yards. Now, Cornelius Johnson, a normal high-jumper, he ran a fantastic hundred meters, Al Fitch ran a fantastic two hundred meters. I ran an exceptionally fast three hundred, and Johnny Woodruff—we all, I think, just overshadowed ourselves in our events. So we set a world record for a thousand yards. And then after we left Norway, I came back to Paris, and in the two hundred meters there, I ran 20.8 in the two hundred meters. The Olympic record was set by Jesse Owens in, in Berlin, at 20.7. So we ran one-tenth of a second apart as far as time goes. But in that race, I didn't have

competition, and I was approximately twenty yards ahead of the field, so I was, I basically just breezed in to the finish. And I was surprised when I got the photo that there was no strain on my face whatsoever. And I think competition might have made some difference. It may not. But the spikes did, I know, because I was up on my toes and I was able to drive. And I fel-, feel as though that had I had some kind of help during the games itself, it might have been somewhat different.

00:30:58:00 — 00:32:48:00

Interviewer:

In the aftermath of the '36 Olympics, of course, a number of changes were in the offing in athletics in America. I think many people don't know that up until that time, even though we did have a single team at the Olympics, that sports in America was still a largely segregated matter, and that they were, conditions for negro athletes at that time were not at all the same as they are now. What was the feeling among athletes about what could be done? What did you—did you sense that among the, the athletes themselves there was a drive toward changing the conditions under which athletics were conducted? Most especially the professional areas of athletics.

Mack Robinson:

When we returned from our trip to the games, we didn't have enough time to actually be, c-, come together as a body to maybe try to form or, an organization, or actually discuss the policies that went on during the games. We, we all went our separate ways, and lot of us were really happy to, to get back home, because we—like myself. I left the last part of June, and here it was almost September, getting back home. And it was a long time, and that was a good feeling to be back home. But to a degree, a disappointing return because of the input that was given by the city itself. [plane flies over]

Interviewer:

So, we gotta stop.

[cut]

00:32:49:00 — 00:32:52:00

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #2:

We're going to camera roll eight. Camera roll eight.

[sync tone]

[cut]

[camera roll 8]

00:32:53:00 — 00:34:43:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, go ahead.

Interviewer:

By the 1940s, there would be a great move forward in terms of what professional athletics mean in this country. Jack Robinson would make a move that has enormous meaning, I think, to all of us here, and to many people in the country. Do you have any feelings about what generated that particular activity, where we always hear, well, Branch Rickey made the decision to do this, but obviously some other decisions had to be made.

Mack Robinson:

Well, I don't know too much about the final decision—

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

—as to Jack's involvement in baseball was concerned. He had established himself as a [sic] outstanding athlete by being the first individual to score—

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

—four letters at UCLA. It's never been done before, and that was in baseball, basketball, football, and track. And then he went into the service, and he was a second lieutenant. And when he came out, he started playing ball with the Kansas City Monarchs and the black professional teams. And I suppose some of the scouts was out—

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

—watching those teams also. And according to what they say, Rickey was interested in bringing about some changes, and through his scouting reports and everything they—

[missing frames]

Mack Robinson:

—they finally selected Jack in 1946. And that year he played for the Montreal Royals. And they won their league that year, and Jack was signed in 1947 to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

00:34:44:00 — 00:37:12:00

Interviewer:

What was the atmosphere here in California like during that period as far—you know, I mean, I, I think it may have been somewhat different than it was in the east, but what did people generally feel about a whole history of black people being kept out of sports competition? How did you feel about the fact that many people just didn't get an opportunity to—

Mack Robinson:

Well, during those days, you know, there wasn't very much movement towards integration as far as sports and other, other activities was concerned, and I was not involved in, basically, a political movement at that time. So we just came along and basically c-, had to accept what the standard had been laid before us. The major change that came about was in 1947 after Jack was signed into baseball. We came outta the kitchen, we came outta the upstairs maid, downstairs maid, the chauffeur, butler, and gardener. And when you look around the country and you see what positions we now are able to hold, I think that you'll have to contribute it, that to the success of Jack in baseball. Our intelligence now can be used and not wasted. And cooperations and every aspect of the world is looking for the best talent that they can get. You had no professional players in any professional sport of today. Now—at that time, I should say—now we are dominating the professional sports. And we have quarterbacks that can be quarterbacks if you owners are willing to give us that chance. And, we're gonna, we're gonna get you. And I want my, my fellow brothers to stay in there and pitch. Don't give up. Because if you give up and say you can't, then you won't. A quitter never wins, and a winner never quits.

00:37:13:00 — 00:39:38:00

Interviewer:

You have recently been involved with the Jackie Robinson sculpture project at UCLA. I wonder if you'd tell us a little about the genesis of that project, and, and how it proceeded.

Mack Robinson:

Well, as the brother of a man who had contributed so much to the world, to the United States, I had watched the situation go by in which I did not feel that Jack had ever been given proper recognition. When Roberto Clemente, Hank Aaron, and other outstanding athletes have had

statues made of them and placed in various points o-, of the country, in their s-, sites in which the individuals felt it was proper, nothing had been done for Jack. And I, this idea has been in, on mind since about nineteen and seventy. In '72, four months before Jack died, I was talking with him in New York, and I said to him, what do you think of me having a statue built of you? Well, after so many years had gone by and nobody had actually come up with that idea or had done anything about a statue, life-size, I thought it was time that he be recognized. And I set about setting up a cooperation, non-profit, in order to build a statue for him. A statue now is at the UCLA Jackie Robinson Baseball Stadium, and I am very pleased and proud [plane flies over] through the help of my wife, to develop the program in which the statue was built. [laughs] Bam! [laughs]

[cut]

00:39:39:00 — 00:41:47:00

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—pick up from your conversation with your brother in New York, OK?

Mack Robinson:

All right.

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Interviewer:

OK? In 1972 you said, four months before your brother Jack Robinson died, that you had a conversation with him in New York. Would you tell us about that?

Mack Robinson:

Well, I had been thinking about the statue of him for a long time, because no one else had ventured to do it. And so I ask him what he thought about having a statue built of him, and he told me, well, sounds good; if you think you can do it, why, go ahead. Well, four months later, with him dying, there was a setback, because at that time I was sure that someone would come up with this idea. And it lingered on and lingered on, and then here's eleven years later, nothing happened. And I said, well, no one seemed to be interested, so if it's gonna be done, I, I, I'm gonna try to do it. And I started out, and I started soliciting funds from friends across the country, and people whom I thought would be willing to make a contribution to help build a statue, which I estimated a cost of a hundred thousand dollars. And the statue is up, but financially, I'm in the hole. But—the statue has been paid for, but

there's an awful lot of other extra monies that is needed, and I'm still working on that phase of it. But it's a beautiful life-size statue of Jack. It's an on-deck position, and I think it's a beautiful statue. And if any time anyone is out in Los Angeles or southern California, go over to UCLA and ask where the statue is and get the directions as to how to get there.

00:41:48:00 — 00:43:16:00

Interviewer:

Mr. Robinson, let's talk about what happened in the period after 1947. What has happened to athletics, in your view? What about the modern athlete? Have people inherited, you think, the tradition—certainly that you helped to establish—the tradition of excellence, of hard work, of perseverance? What do you think about today's sports stars?

Mack Robinson:

Well, we have some fantastic sports stars of today. The thing that I see that is different, we're too interested in how much money we're going to make, and we don't put enough back into the sports in itself [sic]. Helping the young people, the children on the streets. Those children are your idols, and they're looking up to you. You're gonna have to stay away from the drug scene, and talk to young people and show them a better way to go. You know, when you, your idol becomes involved in a serious problem, it affects you in various ways. And you would say, oh no, he wouldn't do that, she wouldn't do that, or whatever. You're really disappointed. Or you might say, well, he—

[rollout on camera roll]

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

00:43:17:00 — 00:45:18:00

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, rolling.

Camera Crew Member #2:

You gonna ask a question?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #2:

I'm gonna wait till you're finished.

Interviewer:

OK. Mr. Robinson, I wonder if you'd talk about your feelings i-, in regard to the responsibility that the champion, that the person who becomes a champion, has, and particularly in regard to relationship between tw-, champions and young people.

[picture returns]

[sync tone]

Mack Robinson:

I, I think a champion should turn his rewards back to the young people, and give them a pat on the back. If you see a youngster doing something that you feel would help him to improve, take a time—may only take a minute or two—and show him a point that would change his approach or attitudes around about the game that he's involved in. I see a lot of youngsters myself that are out. When I go to a track meet, I look for specific things. I look for arm motion, leg motions, and all of those things. And if I get an opportunity to see to that, see that individual, I speak to them in a helpful manner, but I don't try to change a coach's decision with that athlete. But some little points of keeping his arms straight forward, arm motions, and leg motion, and realizing when to move up on a, on your competitor, or what position you want to be in at particular times. Little things that a youngster who's competing is not fully aware of what he's doing. He's so bent on achieving until he does not realize how much he is—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Mack Robinson:

—losing by just a few little points.

Camera Crew Member #2:

I think we got it.

Interviewer:

I think we got it. We got it.

[sync tone]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:45:19:00

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