

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

GEAR-UP ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TYRONNE HARRIS

December 9, 2003

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor and the Gear Up students  
at Great Mills High School Media Center

Transcribed by DWH Office Services on January 22, 2004

Logged by Bob Lewis on December 12, 2009

Original format is one cassette tape

47 minutes, 3 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

0:00 Introduction of interview. Mr. Harris did not feel that he was as gifted academically as others. His athleticism was to be his ticket to success – but in retrospect, athletics should never be an excuse for not getting good grades. He had played basketball and scored very high. Coach Magnani was an important influence on him – Magnani insisted on his being a team player. Harris was all ready recognized as All Conference and All American. From the start Magnani said that Harris would not make the team unless he could demonstrate team effort. At that time Harris thought that he (by himself) was the team – he was the star the two years before.

Track 02

4:31 Great Mills High School won the Conference Championship in 1974 – then again more than 25 years later in 2003.

4:51 He had to challenge the Coach and skipped a class. He got caught and Magnani said he wouldn't dress out for the game.

5:55 Harris knew that he was the star and that the girls only came to see him play. Harris asked the coach to let him sit out at an away game. But no, he had to sit behind the bench at that very next home game and he was to tell everyone who walked by why. He told the first people to walk by that he was sick. Magnani then said that if he lied again, he was done for the season.

7:11 Discipline is extremely important. If not for Magnani, he would have missed out

on a college athletics scholarship. Magnani insisted on a B grade point average from his players. Harris was a C student before – but made the effort and got Bs.

#### Track 03

8:22 Coming to an after school program for extra academic support – like Gear Up – is extremely important. The adult mentors do this for them, not because they get paid or to get accolades, but because they care about them.

9:00 County parks hired a Gear Up student for summer work in 2003. He had a good experience working with senior citizens.

10:35 Harris graduated in 1972.

#### Track 04

12:13 Harris attended GMHS during the first years of desegregation. He had attended the segregated Carver School for elementary school grades 1-8. Athletes were shelter from discrimination. Teams got along and worked together.

13:21 He watched a students get stabbed. His insides were cut out. The attacker was never prosecuted and today his nickname is “Guts.” The story is sketchy, there was an argument and then next things “this guy’s insides were laying on the cafeteria table.” “...took like a hundred, ninety some stitches.”

14:33 He went to the softball arena. He was the first African American in that league in 1980. Still today there are areas in St. Mary’s County where blacks are not welcome.

#### Track 05

15:58 Slow pitch league here in St. Mary’s began in 1965. Harris was All-American in baseball at college. When he came home in 1976 he could not play in the county league. Kenny Dement was instrumental in getting Harris on a team in 1980. Other blacks played in the league that year. Jackie Rice was the first African American woman to play in the local league. She played for the Raleys – the only team that would welcome blacks.

18:30 Jackie Robinson was the first player to integrate the pros. There were similar treatments for Harris. Couldn’t go in the same bars after the games, name calling, couldn’t use the front door to many businesses, couldn’t drink from the same water fountain – in 1980 St. Mary’s County.

#### Track 06

19:40 Years ago, those who wanted to play in the softball leagues were asked to come

and try out. What team managers wanted to know was skin color. That was more important than ability. Kenny Brandt was the first and only African American to play in the Rocking Chair League – which lasted until 1971. Bryandt was one of the first record holders at St. Mary’s College – played basketball in 1970.

#### Track 07

23:18 Experience maturation in college then you fall in love and life changes greatly. Harris coached with Tubby Smith at Great Mills High School. It takes a strong female to make a male successful. Harris had a local girlfriend during his college years and he wanted to come back.

25:06 Back then pro players were paid \$15,000 a year. He feels good about his days from GMHS to today. The experiences help to shape who he is today. He enjoys the opportunities his job and volunteerism give him to give back to youth today. Magnani always said “You can’t win if you quit.” That was an important lesson.

#### Track 08

27:30 After pro league, Harris worked in nuclear security, which was a lot better than Food Lion. Today he is Facilities Manager for Chancellor’s Run Regional Park, the county skate park, and the new park facility in the old Carver Elementary School. He oversees activities for senior citizens, after school programs, and team sports.

29:45 Students should visualize their future. Pick your role models carefully. There are summer employment opportunities for GMHS students. Harris looks for people-oriented summer workers. People who can have a professional manner and approach – and can relate well to senior citizens.

#### Track 09

31:54 The county recreation and parks program offers students scholarships to low income families to cover registration fees for their programs. Years ago, blacks made up most of the players in the county’s leagues. He is disappointed that minorities no longer participate in these programs as much. Today blacks make up about 30% of league basketball players. He thinks that there are lots of black youths who are occupying themselves with bad influences – maybe getting into trouble. Don’t watch TV, “it will destroy you.”

33:50 Most rappers are smart and excelled in school. They are entrepreneurs. Young women need to respect themselves more.

#### Track 10

35:41 Harris provides the students with good stories and opportunities to learn. Harris’

father was an important influence. And Magnani turned him around and made him a team player. That made him realize that the world did not turn around just him. His basketball averages at GMHS: 14 points freshman, 31 points sophomore, 22 points junior, and 19 points senior. In his senior year the team averaged 48 points because they played excellent defense. His highest scoring game was in his sophomore year – 61 points. Youths need to dictate their road to follow. They must convince the coach that they will be an asset to the team. The 1974 championship team had every player as an asset. No one player stood out.

#### Track 11

- 40:53 He never had any serious injuries until after college. He regrets not being a team player in his first two years at GMHS. The results could have been greater. He was in Sports Illustrated magazine when he was a sophomore. You have to remember that those people to were with at high school will be the people you have to deal with later in life. If you were a jerk in high school, they will remember that.
- 43:13 Advises students that it is important to be a positive person and to have positive experiences. Seek all the knowledge that you can – you don't realize how much it will affect you later in life. They should bond together and work together – and not set themselves up for defeat. A couple Gear Up students were cut from the basketball team. Harris says that's not necessarily a bad thing. It gives them time for self evaluation and to improve and try out again next year. You only get one or two opportunities to prove yourself each year.
- 45:57 The best basketball player in Harris' years at GMHS never made the team. He got all Fs and spent four years in the ninth grade. He did not graduate.
- 46:36 No pizza was ordered because only three students showed up on time.