

Interview with Ken Bentley
Session 1 (2/11/2020)
Timed Log

[00:00:00.00]

Born in South Central (Los Angeles, California) [in 1951]. Attends Crenshaw High School and graduates in the first class. Serves as the first student body president and helps create the school's foundation, including serving on the committee which selected the mascot and school colors.

[00:01:20.21]

Tennis player and athlete for most of life. Father played in the Negro League Baseball. Mother played tennis in Texas.

[00:01:58.04]

Earns a tennis scholarship and plays tennis at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the University of California, Irvine. During freshman and sophomore year, he's the only African-American playing Division I collegiate tennis in the country.

[00:02:36.02]

Navigating an all-Black world in school and an all-White world in tennis as the only Black playing on the Southern California Junior Circuit. Relates experience to Arthur Ashe's upbringing in Virginia and St. Louis while playing tennis.

[00:03:25.09]

Graduates college [in 1973] and undecided about whether to pursue journalism or business. First job working at Xerox, then works for Spalding Sporting Goods as a tennis specialist. Goes to work for Anheuser-Busch and involvement in community events paves path for career at Nestle, where he spends the bulk of his 31 year career. Occupies a number of roles, with his role as head of workforce diversity being a passion.

[00:05:10.18]

Parents both move to Los Angeles in the 1940s in pursuit of opportunity and they eventually meet through mutual friends. Mother grows up in the segregated South and father grows up in Arkansas and decides to move to Los Angeles after serving in the United States military. Family includes eight children.

[00:06:39.27]

South Central is a predominantly African-American while he's growing up. Tight-knit community where his father picks up all the boys in the neighborhood on the weekend to feed

them, take them to the park, and teach them baseball. Father teaches baseball as a metaphor for life about working hard and pursuing success.

[00:08:31.06]

Father and other men in the community set examples of hard-work. Growing up in South Central is a blessing because the community members are all closely connected and take responsibility for each other.

[00:10:47.23]

Grows up on 65th Street and Budlong Street. Ladera Park is a gathering place, and the first place he plays tennis, and he eventually begins playing at Rancho Cienega [Recreation Center].

Rancho Cienega becomes hub of Black tennis in the western United States, particularly from the 1960s-1990s. Currently the Arthur Ashe Court and Venus and Serena Williams Tennis Academy are there. Competitive level of tennis.

[00:12:04.00]

First begins playing tennis at age 11 [year 1962] when friend John Harris moves to neighboring community View Park and begins playing. Participates in the Junior Program at Ladera Park where a lot of kids play, marking the first time playing with White kids. Quickly becomes good and develops a passion for sport, and this occurs at the same time that Ashe is making his mark. Often compared by others to Ashe while playing on the circuit despite differences in style.

[00:13:46.00]

Mother takes him to tournaments across southern California. First time meeting Arthur Ashe is at the Los Angeles Tennis Club during the Pacific Southwest Tennis Tournament after Ashe's won the 1968 United States Open Tennis Championships (US Open). Ashe invites his mother to come into the tournament with him after he sees her sitting in the car. She declines his invitation, but when Ashe finds Bentley, he shares his phone number and address and encourages him to reach out if he ever needs anything in tennis.

[00:16:21.16]

Tournament becomes an annual reunion for Ashe and Bentley. Next year, Ashe watches him in the tournament and sees him lose a close match to Bruce Brown. Ashe inquires about his grades and after learning he's an exceptional student, encourages him to maintain his grades and use tennis to get an education, as his future isn't in tennis.

[00:17:16.22]

Arthur's advice encourages him not to be single-minded and to consider for the first what he'd do if he didn't play tennis. Similar mentality shapes his ambitions in creating the Advocates Pro

Golf Association to provide the tools to be successful in the sport while demonstrating how to use the sport to pursue success elsewhere.

[00:19:18.12]

Attends Budlong Elementary and Audubon Junior High School. Completes freshman year at Dorsey High School before transferring to Crenshaw High School when it first opens in 1968.

[00:20:29.01]

Excited to start from the ground up and build something new. Crenshaw is the first school to open in South Central in many years, and it is the first named after a community rather than an individual. During the first ten weeks, the school lacks textbooks and is structured without bells to direct students when go to class.

[00:21:43.08]

Opportunities to develop leadership skills by participating in student council, writing constitution, and helping choose school colors. Inspiration drawn from University of California because want students to aspire for college, so that determines the selection of blue and gold for the school colors.

[00:24:13.10]

Demographics of Crenshaw High student body predominantly Black as well as numerous Black educators and administrators.

[00:26:05.11]

Initially, tennis isn't accepted by others in the community, so decides to play basketball to fit in. However, as he gets better, his tennis becomes more appreciated.

[00:27:47.05]

Mother talks openly about the Civil Rights Movement and conditions in the South. Attending Phillips Temple [Christian Methodist Episcopal Church], led by Bishop William Graves, who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King and is active in the Civil Rights Movement. Bentley creates an organization in high school to fund African-American tennis players.

[00:29:57.20]

Church as the center of Black life and regularly talks about issues and activism and highlights Black history and achievement.

[00:31:02.13]

Facing racial discrimination while playing tennis in Cheviot Hills, Los Angeles. Opponent shows up several hours late, however the tournament officials do not default the match. When the match is postponed until the following day, his mother directs him to show up an hour late as response. Tournament officials default match and threaten suspension until mother threatens to call the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People] for an investigation.

[00:32:49.14]

Sister marches to get Black studies taught at [Los Angeles] Southwest [College]. At UC Santa Barbara, Bentley participates in protests by writing the demands. Begins Black Employees Association at Xerox and Nestle. Invites Rosa Parks to speak at Nestle, and she expresses gratitude to live long enough for Black people to appreciate what she did.

[00:35:15.19]

Starts Advocates Professional Golf Association to diversify a sport that's been largely White and included in the Professional Golf Association (PGA) a requirement of Whiteness for membership until 1964.

[00:37:02.12]

First observation of overt racism in the corporate setting at Anheuser-Busch. Organizes a protest when racist manager retires and the employees are called to chip in for his gift.

[00:39:00.13]

Mentors include Ashe, Bishop Graves, and Bill Gray. Bishop Graves encourages him to make the most money he can to do the best good he can.

[00:40:53.00]

Defining success by living life backwards and thinking about what he wants people to say when he's gone.

[00:43:16.11]

Oldest sister passes away and her impact was so vast that 2,000 people attend her funeral. Learns that making a lot of money is not necessary to make a difference.

[00:44:53.18]

Father playing in the Negro Baseball Leagues for Arkansas Travelers [c. 1930s]. Father talks about playing against and watching Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige even before they gain popular attention.

[00:46:23.23]

Father dreams for him to play in Major League Baseball, and is heartbroken when he chooses tennis. Attends baseball games every Sunday with father, and aspires to play baseball until he discovers tennis.

[00:47:29.20]

Attends UC Santa Barbara from 1969-1971 and UC Irvine from 1971-1973. Is the number one recruit to Santa Barbara, but still begins on Junior Varsity and works his way up. New experience for him and teammates because he's the only Black player, and his first time living with White people.

[00:48:57.07]

University anti-Vietnam War protests and burning Bank of America. Armed national guardsmen occupying campus and students can't go to class in groups of more than three. Martial law declared on campus and curfew set at 5:00 pm. Often can't get to tennis courts because they're outside of the campus, so decides to transfer.

[00:50:39.25]

Experience of the draft lottery and deferments.

[00:53:43.05]

Transfers to UC Irvine. Loses contact with Ashe in college and reconnects when begins working at Nestle and a mutual friend puts them in contact as Ashe is beginning Safe Passage Foundation.

[00:55:15.21]

Relationship with Ashe develops through youth book fairs, hosted by Jeanne Moutossamy-Ashe and several other women, as both he and Ashe attend to discuss their respective books with students. They talk about Safe Passage Foundation and he secures \$100,000 seed-money from Nestle for the organization. Nestle continues to donate \$100,000 annually for several years. Safe Passage later becomes the Arthur Ashe Learning Center.

[00:56:28.19]

Talking with Ashe about what he wants his legacy to be. Mission of Safe Passage to provide safe passage for youth from childhood to adulthood.

[00:57:26.29]

Invites Ashe to speak at the National 4-H Conference, youth agricultural organization. Ashe receives a standing ovation from group of 5,000 young children who never saw him play, but know what he's done outside of tennis as a humanitarian.

[\[00:59:20.03\]](#)

Ashe writes *Days of Grace* and lets him read a chapter in which he talks about Safe Passage and what he aspires to do with youth. Ashe also talks about what he wants his daughter, Camera, to remember about him, and decides to write a letter to her as the final chapter of the book.

[\[01:01:35.26\]](#)

Serves on Board of Safe Passage. Asked by Jeanne to be on the board of the Arthur Ashe Learning Center, and serves as president for several years.

[\[01:02:05.20\]](#)

Mission of Arthur Ashe Learning Center. Collaborates with Reading as Fundamental to establish Arthur Ashe reading rooms at schools around New York and Harlem.

[\[01:03:07.04\]](#)

Through the Learning Center, Jeanne creates the Inspirational Tour as a mobile interactive learning exhibit that allows people to see and feel Ashe's legacy.

[\[01:04:31.20\]](#)

Searching for a permanent home for exhibit and Arthur Ashe Learning Center and landing on UCLA.

[\[01:05:47.14\]](#)

Origins of the Advocates Pro Golf Tour [c. 2009] to create a tour where Black golfers could develop their game and potentially increase the number of Black golfers on the PGA tour. Focus shifts from developing pro golfers to introducing youth to the game and preparing them to make the safe passage from childhood to adulthood.

[\[01:08:04.27\]](#)

Advocates Foundation [c. 2010] brings inner-city youth to golf courses, provides a clinic, talks to them about health and wellness as well as careers. On-going lessons provided for youth who show golf promise. Focus is to get children to get out of their neighborhood and show them something different.

[\[01:09:11.12\]](#)

Advocates clinic in Miami. Impact of foundation demonstrated when a young person rides a bus for two hours to get to the clinic with the desire to find anything that will make her life better.

[01:11:42.00]

Thinking backwards and how he wants to be remembered as a good father and grandfather. Also, as someone who achieved and brought others along and created opportunities for others to realize their dreams by seeing something different.

[01:14:15.08]

Remembering Ashe as a true mentor. Being another Arthur Ashe not through tennis, but by reaching back and helping someone realize their dreams.