

Interview with Joe Reeder  
SESSION 1 (6/2/2020)  
Timed Log

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Reeder, born in Tacoma, Washington (Fort Lewis) in November of 1947, has lived all over the world as the son of a West Pointer. He attended five different high schools, three in Germany, one in New Jersey, and one in the Washington DC area. He too graduated from the United States Military Academy, West Point, in 1966, and got to know to know Arthur Ashe when he came to West Point as a second lieutenant. He worked with the tennis team and at the computer center at West Point. Reeder served as the 14th Deputy Secretary of the Army and Chairman of the Panama Canal Commission from 1993-1997, in the Clinton Administration.

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As an infant he moved first from Fort Lewis to Nara, Japan, where his father was stationed. His maternal grandfather, Glenn Parker, was Chief Justice of the Wyoming Supreme Court and a Colonel during World War II, responsible for recruitment of all U.S.-based aliens.

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His father urged him to attend Princeton, but Reeder chose West Point, where, during the 60's, while cadets followed the news, the campus was somewhat isolated from much of the political upheavals that hit other universities. Reeder found West Point inspiring, but tough and very regimented.

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There was little political activism at West Point. Reeder remembers a news headline, "Women of Radcliffe March on West Point," reporting on a war protest, where some cadets actually met their future wives. West Point was far less diverse then than it is now, with a dozen or so African-American cadets out of a class of 750. The Vietnam War was studied at West Point, and freely discussed, but not highly debated. Overall, he recalled the cadets shared their allegiance to the President's position to go to war.

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While West Point is tuition free, it comes with a five year commitment in uniform. While very few were, cadets could be conscientious objectors if that was legitimately established. Ashe arrived at West Point in late 1967, already a widely know tennis star, and served for two seasons as assistant tennis coach, where Reeder got to know him.

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Reeder reported that the West Point tennis team was strong, and ranked one year as second in the East. He recalled each player on the starting team getting to hit with Ashe at least twice for about 90 minutes during a season. Reeder describes the Ashe coaching style as quite different from any other he'd experienced. Ashe for the first fifteen minutes or so silently observe the entire range of different shots. He then picked the two or three things he thought most important to improve. Two points Reeder still remembers are (a) starting to me as the opponent is hitting the ball, and (b) to improve any particular shot, closing your eyes for 5 seconds and visualize the shot as a maestro would execute it.

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Reeder described Ashe as being eloquent, quickly witted, extremely well spoken, and having a very droll sense of humor. Ashe once asked the team what they thought about Stokely Carmichael. Reeder remembers most of them not thinking very highly of Carmichael, who was known for saying "get your guns." Ashe listened, smiled and shared some of Carmichael's background before that unfortunate statement, teaching the team the critical importance of context.

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Reeder much later learned Carmichael visited then Lt. Arthur Ashe at West Point, who resided in the Culum Hall, the bachelor's quarters. Early one Sunday morning Carmichael arrived at Ashe's door with a couple of friends, trying to recruit him in hot rhetoric. Carmichael asked Ashe to tell his roommate, who had opened the door, "to take a walk." Ashe responded words to the effect that "Whitey is my best friend, and will stay to hear whatever you have to say."

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After Ashe won the U.S. Open, many came to visit him at West Point. Having played as an amateur, Ashe couldn't receive a cash prize, but he joked that he did get two marriage proposals, and someone sent \$2000 worth of stock shares in the mail. Reeder also recalls Ashe being invited to play in South Africa, but the invitation withdrawn. At practice the next day, someone asked Ashe how he felt about the disinvite, whereupon Ashe laughed, saying "I thought I was doing them a favor. While Ashe's style was very different from Stokely Carmichael, he strongly supported civil rights by example.

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Reeder remembers Ashe coming to the dining hall for lunch after he winning the US Open, and speaking to the entire Corps of Cadets, telling them in eloquent and humble words that he was most proud when they announced the score between each point, referring to him as "Lieutenant Ashe," as he was a UCLA ROTC second lieutenant.

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Ashe was a big deal after winning the US Open. Ashe brought a lot of attention to the courts. Reeder describes Ashe as a gentleman on the courts. Other members of the team included Bill Malkemes, Steve Strom, Phil Pfeiffer, Jackie Stevenson, Dick Fate, Ray Federici, Bill Gardepe, Dickie Bowers, Barry Conway, Billy Campbell, Geoff Prosch, and Joe Hardin. (The West Point brothers who helped recruit Reeder to West Point, both in the West Point Sports Hall of Fame, are Richard and Walter Oehrlein.)

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Reeder recalls visiting Ashe's apartment, sparsely decorated, with nothing except the U.S. Open trophy on his fireplace mantle. Reeder and Ashe remained friends for a few years following West Point before they lost contact including a get together while Reeder attended the University of Texas School Law in Austin, when Ashe was in town for a tournament.

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More recently Reeder and his wife Kate sat with the Ashe family celebrating the 50th anniversary of his U.S. Open win at Ashe Stadium, attended also by LTG Darryl Williams, West Point's Superintendent.