

Interviewee: Brooke Cooper
Interviewer: Ana Escudero, Timothy Forde, Sophia Martin
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Abstract: Brooke Cooper was born in Woonsocket, RI in 1992 and attended Woonsocket public schools. She attended Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire pursuing a Bachelor's of Science degree in Sport and Recreation Management. She then attended Providence College and obtained her MBA. Upon completing her MBA, she interned for the Pawtucket Red Sox, who then hired Brooke when she graduated. She began her career within the Red Sox organization, and is now the Senior Vice President/Assistant General Manager for the Worcester Red Sox [Woo Sox], a Triple-A Affiliate of the Boston Red Sox.

TF: All right! So, we are completing a city-wide oral history of the lives of Worcester women, aiming to collect stories about a broad range of experiences. Based on the goals of the 1850 National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, we are focusing on the areas of women's education, health, work, and politics/community involvement. We want to focus today on your experiences with Woo Sox and your profession and your involvement in the city of Worcester and the greater area. And thank you for your help with this important project. So, first question, what is your full name, including both maiden name and married name, if applicable?

BC: My maiden name is Brooke Irene Coderre. And my married name is Brooke Irene Cooper.

TF: And how do you spell your maiden name?

BC: C O D E R R E.

TF: Thank you. And when were you born?

BC: I was born [] 1992.

TF: Have you ever married?

BC: Yes. My husband's name is Ellis Cooper, E L L I S. We met in college, actually. And we've been married for about three and a half years.

TF: Awesome. And do you have children?

BC: Yes, we have one little guy Braxton Cooper. And he will be two on April 3.

TF: I like the name. What cultures/ethnicities do you identify with?

BC: I'm French Canadian. So, I'm white. I was raised Roman Catholic and I don't necessarily identify that way anymore. Although I do celebrate the Catholic religion. And I'd say national

holidays. So Juneteenth, the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving. And then also Christmas and Easter.

TF: So, tell me about your parents.

BC: Yes. My mom, Donna Coderre. She is an elementary school principal. She actually started a family first. And then after having four kids, she went to college and got a degree in education, became a teacher, and then went and got a master's and became a principal. I know having one little guy, I can't even imagine how she went back to school and having four. But she did it and she makes a big difference in the community. My dad is, you know, my guy. He's kind of like my moral compass. And he was a firefighter. He's now retired. He had his own drywall business. For the majority of his life, he always worked two jobs. And in addition to that, he was my coach for every sport that I played. And again, now being an adult, I wonder how he did it. But he did. So, with my parents, very involved in the community, and very active in our lives with sports and PTO [Parent Teacher Organization], and all of those things, so great people. And I'm very close with both of them.

TF: Where have you lived during your life? And did you grow up in Worcester? And in what neighborhood obviously.

BC: I grew up in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. And that's where I live today. Still, my husband and I bought a house in Woonsocket. I'm really proud of where I come from. I always waive the Woonsocket flag really high, metaphorically, internally. Everyone anytime something comes up with Woonsocket or northern Rhode Island, they make sure to include me in the conversation. I went to college at Franklin Pierce University located in a small little town, Rindge, New Hampshire that you've probably never heard of, but it was a beautiful campus. And I lived there for four years. Well, I attended college and then moved back to Woonsocket. So, I have not lived many places in my life.

TF: Assumption is actually in the same athletic conference.

BC: Oh, I know.

TF: What was the neighborhood like generally?

BC: I grew up in an urban neighborhood and the houses are really close together. But my parents did a great job, I think, of picking a house with a big yard that took some time to finish up. But we had a basketball court in the back and clubhouse and large grass areas. We had kind of our little private oasis, even though we were in the city.

TF: If you were not born in Worcester, when did you arrive? Year or age? And how did you come to live in Worcester?

BC: Yep. I don't live in Worcester, but I came here. And the reason I work here is entirely because of the Woo Sox, formerly the Paw Sox [Pawtucket Red Sox. I worked for the Pawtucket Red Sox, since 2015. And then, obviously, we made the transition to Worcester. Our inaugural season was 2021. I would say that was the year that I started spending a lot of time here and obviously at the ballpark, and then make the commute to Worcester almost

every day.

TF: Just looking at these next few questions, I don't think most of them are going to apply. But I'm still going to ask the questions, just to let you know. Where do you live in the city now? Have you lived in multiple areas?

BC: Yep. I don't live in Worcester.

TF: Do other family members live in the same area? I guess referring to Woonsocket?

BC: I have pretty much my entire family living in northern Rhode Island. I have three older brothers and an older sister. And my parents all live in the northern Rhode Island area within 15 or 20 minutes of each other. So that's really convenient. And my husband's family lives in Springfield, Massachusetts. Worcester, is actually kind of the midpoint between my family and my husband's family which is nice.

TF: Another very good question. Do other family members live in the same area? Yes. If you don't currently live in Worcester, what is your Worcester connection?

BC: Yes, my Worcester connection very much is the Woo Sox. Although I was always familiar with Worcester growing up—although in Rhode Island, there's kind of that mindset of you don't cross the border—because Rhode Island is so small, you get to anywhere within an hour. And crossing over into Massachusetts always seemed like such a hike, even though now I'm coming to know it's really only 30 to 35 minutes and there's a lot going on in Worcester. So largely because of the Woo Sox. Although now that I'm here, and I'm getting to know the city more, I do like to come here more socially as well.

TF: What challenges do you think the city still faces? And what would you change about the city?

BC: I would love if there were more parking around the ballpark, which I think everyone would enjoy. That's one of the top questions that we get. Although I think the city has done a great job of identifying those parking spots. But in general, I've been so impressed with Worcester. And I hear from people who have lived here for a long time that it has been a struggling city, but it's really on the up and it's rising. And I think that we see that every single day. The people that we interact with in the community are so excited and proud about Worcester and it's really exciting to be a part of. I mean, I am sure Worcester still has a way to go in areas of improvement. You see construction taking place around the ballpark and throughout the city. But I really think that Worcester is on the right path.

TF: I would agree. What changes have you seen in Worcester over time?

BC: It's so fun to think that when I was really introduced to Worcester, because we were moving here, that the land we are sitting on right now while we're doing this interview was an old parking lot. And I remember coming up here so many times and looking at the ballpark site, which again, was just a large, empty parking lot. And trying to envision, okay, how is a minor league ballpark going to fit here? It is just so crazy. And we love looking at the photos of then

and now and seeing the change. And so, I think that the ballpark is a prime example of the changes that I've seen personally. But you really see it every single day, around the ballpark and right across the street in Madison Street with the parking garage, and other real estate development. I think that it's taking place right before our eyes.

TF: What distinct characteristics make Worcester the place that it is?

BC: Worcester is so unique from what I've heard, and from what I've seen, because Worcester is so proud of Worcester, even though it might not be considered one of the major cities in the country. But I think sometimes people forget, it's the second largest city in New England. And Worcester really supports Worcester. And what we've heard is that the most important word in the city is Worcester. The second most important word is local, and businesses and people really want to support locally. And I think that's something that is so unique to Worcester. It's like the old phrase: me and my brother against my cousin; me and my brother, my cousin against the world. And I feel like Worcester very much has a mindset of, okay, it's us against the world. And Worcester will defend Worcester. And it's okay to poke fun at it a little bit, but there's still so much pride there. And it's nice that we've been able to, I think, help give Worcester a bit of an identity. Well, it already has had so much identity, and we're able to contribute to that.

TF: And last question for me. What do you think women's experiences in Worcester have been generally?

BC: I am still very new to Worcester so I don't think that I can speak long term to women's experiences. I also don't like to really generalize and say that all women's experiences are the same. But what I can say is that I have been so inspired by the women I've met here in Worcester, because there are so many women in leadership positions. And what I have found generally, from the women in those leadership positions, is that they are such advocates, not just for themselves, but for other women and their organizations. You see so many women that are busy, not only in leadership, in their business, but throughout the community. And it's not enough just for those women to know that they're successful, but how can they bring along others and push others forward? And I don't know if that speaks to women's experiences in Worcester as a whole, but that's something that I've certainly found firsthand speaking with many of the women here in Worcester.

SM: Where did you attend school? What were the names of the schools?

BC: Do you want me to start college or like elementary elementary school? Nursery? Yeah. Oh my gosh, I think I went to the YWCA in Woonsocket for preschool. And actually, but even before that, my mom did kind of like a homeschool, home daycare sort of deal and then I went to the YWCA and then I went to Bernon Heights Elementary School, located on Logee Street in Woonsocket. After that, I went to Woonsocket Middle School, Woonsocket High School. And then I was really fortunate. I received an athletic scholarship to go to Franklin Pierce

University in Rindge, New Hampshire, as I mentioned, and after that, I went to Providence College and got my MBA.

SM: Did you attend graduate school direct from college? What were the names of your programs?

BC: I got a Bachelor of Science in Sport and Rec management from 2010 to 2014, and then a Master's of Business Administration from Providence College 2014 to 2016, and I concentrated in marketing.

SM: What were your challenges in education?

BC: I think early on one of the challenges that I faced going to a large, inner city high school was that athletics were such a big part of my life, but we didn't always receive funding because of other issues going on in this city. And so, early on, I faced the dilemma of do I go to a private school, or do I stay in public school, but as I mentioned, I have such a proud sense for my city that I never wanted to go to a private school. And it was kind of that being torn between a rock and a hard place. And fortunately, everything worked out. I decided to stay at Woonsocket public schools, and we had so many great leaders, including our athletic director, George Nasuti, who really fought to keep sports in the schools. And we had some really great successful teams throughout my years in high school. And that ultimately led to me being able to get an athletic scholarship and further pursue my education in college. So that, I guess, one of my earliest challenges that I faced in education. And then I think, as maybe you can relate, as a college student, not knowing what I wanted to do in life, and what direction to take and, you know, am I wasting my time? How am I going to relate this to the real world and those sorts of things. And again, I'm just fortunate that things kind of worked out. I think just the uncertainty of knowing which way to go, but fortunately school, not that it was easy for me, but it always came pretty naturally. And maybe that's because my mom is a teacher, and she always taught me good study habits. But going through education wasn't or going through school wasn't necessarily super difficult. But I will say, I didn't realize how important getting an education was until I really entered the professional world.

SM: Upon finishing your formal education, what did you see as your options?

BC: My dream when I graduated from Franklin Pierce University in 2014, was to open my own community center in Woonsocket. But I knew that I had no idea where to start, or what to do, and that I really had to better myself in order to ever do that. I decided that I would get a master's in business and that would help me. So I went to Providence College, got my MBA, while I was simultaneously working at YMCA doing before and after school programs. I felt like that was a logical next step. Although in my MBA program, because I was fresh out of undergrad, I didn't have business experience. And my job at the YMCA, didn't count as business experience. So, I needed to get an internship and there's no way I could do both. I actually left my job at the YMCA and I pursued an internship with the Pawtucket Red Sox that counted towards my MBA. And then honestly, from there, it was very natural because I just kind of grew throughout the organization. And I know that it doesn't always happen that

organically.

SM: What support networks and mentoring have been important to you?

BC: For support networks, I think number one is my family. My mom and dad always worked so hard so that I could go to school and do what I wanted to do and not be forced into a career. And in addition to that, my husband is the most supportive individual that anyone could ask for. We work such long hours here in baseball and in sports and he is always my number one fan pushing, pushing me, supporting if I work long hours, pushing me to advocate for myself. So, when it comes to a support network, I think that family is just so so important. For mentors, one thing that I've always felt that I lacked a little bit was I've always really wanted a female mentor. I think that I have an aunt who's very successful in business, not in sports necessarily, but in business. And I turned to her for a lot of professional advice. But I haven't been able to work side by side with, I think, a more veteran female in my career, which I really crave. But that being said, we have some great individuals in the organization. I would say my first full-time boss was Rob Crain, who's no longer with the organization, but he really helped me out early in my years with the team. And then I also work really closely with our team president, Charles Steinberg, who some days I don't even realize how much I've learned from him until I go and have a conversation with someone else and start preaching some of his philosophies. So, I think just internally here at the Woo Sox, I've had a lot of good mentors.

SM: What was your first job?

BC: My first job ever was at an ice cream shop in Woonsocket, Rhode Island when I was like 14, back when you could work when you're 14. So that was my first job ever. You know, I worked, I think, a variety of jobs. I worked as a waitress, I worked at the YMCA running a basketball program, also doing before and after school programs. And then I interned with the Paw Sox. And then from there, I guess my professional career, and my full-time career has been entirely with the Paw Sox now the Woo Sox.

SM: What other jobs have you had and what do you do now?

BC: So now I'm the Senior Vice President and Assistant General Manager for the Worcester Red Sox and there's a lot that goes into it. People ask what day to day is like, and I always say every day is different. I directly oversee productions and ballpark entertainment and that includes what you see on the video board, as well as social media and the television broadcast. I oversee merchandise, so the team store and all of our branding, community relations. And then marketing has really been kind of my specialty and that includes advertising, but also outreach and the different promotions that we do. I have a hand in some of our HR [human resources] efforts, including recruiting and hiring and training. So pretty broad, but I think that's one of the really beautiful things about minor league baseball is that you're not put into a box and you get

to explore a lot of different areas. We all wear many different hats, and it's been a really great opportunity to grow professionally.

SM: What has this work meant to you?

BC: The work has been very fulfilling. Because as I mentioned, I always thought that I would work in the nonprofit world. And although I don't necessarily work in the nonprofit world, we do have the Woo Sox Foundation, but even outside of the foundation, the club does so much in the community that we're able to connect with different organizations, different people. We can provide opportunities for fans that create lasting core memories of throwing out a first pitch or just having a great experience with your family and those sorts of things. And it's really meaningful to feel like your work matters.

SM: What were/are your primary responsibilities in terms of housework and child care?

BC: So, as I mentioned, my husband and I have a one year old, almost two year old. Also, as I mentioned, my husband is so supportive and my job is much more demanding than his and he really tackles a lot of the housework, although I definitely contribute. But definitely during the season, he tackles a lot of it in terms of cooking dinner, he's also just a better cook than I am. And our son goes to daycare five days a week, which he absolutely loves, because he is a social butterfly, like my husband is. So, I would say when we're home, we both split the housework and childcare. Both spend a ton of time with our little guy. But during the weekend, during the season, my husband takes care of a lot of things at home for me, and I'm very grateful for that.

SM: How do you feel about the choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets?

BC: I don't have any regrets in my life. And I think that part of that is because I don't really believe in having regrets. Although, that's not to say that one day I won't have any, I just really try to focus on what you can control and what you can do to be productive and constructive. So, again, I'm just really fortunate with my husband and our little guy and our little family that I feel really grateful. And I think that if I had done things differently, you never know the butterfly effect and if I would necessarily have the life that I have with them.

AE: So now moving on to the politics and community involvement area, do you consider yourself active politically?

BC: I don't consider myself active politically. I am not a huge fan of politics. I think that a lot of the things that I believe in might be considered political views. But, oftentimes, I think that I try

to separate it from politics and I just think it's basic human rights that I believe in and things like that. I really try—especially with how polarizing politics can be—I try really hard to step away from them.

AE: Have you been involved in volunteer or community work?

BC: I have, largely through the club—we do a lot in the community. We have volunteer opportunities with the United Way and we go to St. John's Food Pantry, which is always so much fun. So really, through the club, I have a lot of opportunities to engage with the community.

AE: So, what made you join this organization?

BC: I think the Woo Sox allow us to be so involved in the community, but we do, I think, have some core pillars that we focus on: recreation, education, social justice, and diamond sports. So, so, you know, through those that really kind of focus on our efforts.

AE: What did the work consist of?

BC: And sorry, actually, the fourth pillar isn't recreation, I should say the fourth pillar is actually conquering cancer. Sorry, so what was your question?

AE: What did the community work consist of?

BC: The community work. We actually just recently had the Woo Sox Caravan, which will lead a lot of our social justice efforts. So that just recently came in the centerpiece and one of the ones that I feel really strongly about is our recreation and diamond sports pillar. We have partnered with the Trudeau family from Paxton who lost their son, Tyler Trudell, last year, and Tyler loved baseball. And his parents really want other kids who might not be able to afford equipment or instruction fees to be able to have the opportunity to play baseball, so they've actually been raising funds to do that. Our foundation is partnering with the Trudell family to create this program, Tyler's Teammates, that covers the cost of registration, and equipment, and things like that, for boys' and girls' stuff. Playing baseball and softball are their choice. I think that the work really changes based on what the initiative is, but it's really finding something that hits close to home, both in your heart and geographically—Paxton is a neighbor of ours—and seeing how there can be an impact there.

AE: What role has religion played in your life?

BC: As I mentioned before, I was raised Roman Catholic; my husband was raised Methodist. And I think that, together, there's been a lot of values that we continue to practice, although

others that we might not practice anymore. I very much consider myself more of a spiritual person than a religious person. I believe in a higher power, whether that's God or someone else? I don't know. But I do believe in a higher power. And I feel like that helps guide me on a day-to-day basis and being honest and having integrity. I pray every day. And, again, I think that speaks more to my being spiritual and less religious. But yes, I think there's a higher power and, in general, I think that helps guide me.

AE: Moving on to the health area, how have health issues impacted your life or those in your family?

BC: We have been so fortunate in many ways. I lost my grandmother when I was 11 to cancer, and at 11 years old, that was absolutely devastating because she was only in her early 60s. And just about a month ago, we lost my father-in-law which also was devastating. So other than that, I would say both my family and my husband's family are generally very healthy and we're really fortunate for that. I'm happy to say that, for the most part, health issues don't plague us on a day to day basis.

AE: What are your experiences in access, accessing quality, affordable health care?

BC: I think when my mom speaks about before I was born, it was a little bit more difficult for her and my older siblings when it came to having affordable health care. But as the youngest of five, I never experienced that. Fortunately, with my mom being a teacher and my dad being a firefighter, we always had health insurance, which really helped us and then the same thing, I think, when I joined the Woo Sox. I often, especially since having my son and going through the constant doctor's visits and then going to the hospital to deliver him, I think to myself, "I don't know how in the world we would ever be able to afford having a child without health insurance." So that's something that I've been very grateful for and has really, I think, in my adult life become much more on my radar as a key important issue. As a whole the Woo Sox are such a great organization because they do provide parental leave, which not all organizations do. And that was something that as an organization, they felt was very important because how can we claim to be a place that is so much dedicated to families and providing a really great family experience, but then not provide those core values to our employees. So that's something that's become very important to us.

AE: So now some closing up questions. How do you get through tough times and what kinds of thoughts keep you going?

BC: I think number one is my support system. My husband is so supportive, he's also my best friend and just always knows exactly what to say or what to do. So, he's great. But I really try to focus on the things that I can control and if I can be productive. I don't think that it helps to dwell in the past or dwell on the problems as much as to think okay, what steps can we take

forward? And that doesn't mean that when some things happen that are out of your control, it just stinks. And then in addition to that, one of the things that I've learned is that, so often, we spend a lot of time stressing over things that in the long term just really don't matter. And so I try to take a step back, when I'm having those thoughts to just say, "Okay, in a week from now, and a month from now, and a year from now, is this even going to matter? Am I even going to remember why I was stressed out about this?" And if the answer is no, then take a breath and kind of move on.

AE: How do you define success in your life has this definition changed over time?

BC: Even before I had a family, I always knew that I never wanted a family life to come at the expense of a professional career. And so, while I think that there can't be balance every single day, or sometimes every single week even, or every single month, I know for us, as we're gearing up for the season is so crazy, and my career life very much kind of outweighs my home life, just because I'm so busy. But I very much look at success holistically. And how is my work life balance going and am I getting enough time with my son, and with my husband, and with my parents and family, because those are the things that really matter, and that you can't get back. And so, that's very much how much I define success. I also think that doing something you love, or doing something that you feel matters is extremely important, because as much as you try to have balance, we spend so much of our lives working. I mean, you work five days, in most cases, at least five days a week, you spend as much time with your co-worker as often as you spend with your family. And so, making sure that you are happy with what you do and who you surround yourself with, I think is a large measure of success as well. I don't necessarily define success in the way of titles or how much money you're making. I think that all of those are complementary to the life that you want to live.

AE: So the last question we have is based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations.

BC: Some of the advice that I was given was to chase the dream and don't chase the money. I don't think that's specific just to women, I think that in general. That's something that I was told. And as I think about transitioning into the next phase in my career, out of the very, very early years in my career, I definitely see where that's beneficial. But as specific to women, I think some of the advice that I would give would be not to be afraid to walk away from an opportunity if you're not valued or if you're not being treated the way that you should be. Yes, at times it's important to fight for that, but at the end of the day, sometimes the best thing that you can do is walk away and find a place that's better suited for you that surrounds you with your people because there are places that will value you.