SRU ORAL HISTORY

"SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY IN THE SIXTIES"

INTERVIEWEE: MR. ROBERT DISPIRITO SR.

INTERVIEWER: DR. JOSEPH RIGGS

29 APRIL 1991

R: Interviewing Bob DiSpirito. This is April 29, 1991. Kind of our beginning question, Bob, has to do with why Slippery Rock. How did you happen to come to these heights?

D: I was at Bucknell at the time. I was completing my second year at Bucknell. Prior to that, I was at the University of Bridgeport for several years. I was head baseball, head football, teaching 21 contact hours, and Director of Recreation for the the town of Wilton, and had four children. Sometimes I wonder why some of our colleagues think that they are overloaded today. But, nevertheless, I decided that it was just really too much, and I got the feeling of not really being appreciated. I was also the head baseball coach and we had been into the NCA playoffs for the first time in the history of the school. We went up and we got beat by Holy Cross and then we beat Boston College and then we got beat by the University of Vermont in 14 innings. So we had a good showing and everyone was very proud of the fact that we were there. About a week later, I was walking on campus and the president stopped me, and he said, how you

D: doing? How did baseball go? I said, well, fine. He said, I understand that you're going to go on to the playoffs. I said, well, we've already been there. He said, well, how did you do? You know, I mean, that was probably the final straw. There's a funny story that I can recall. In that area we used to have a sponsorship. Each week, each college would sponsor a news conference. Usually it starts off with Yale and then we go to Bridgeport and the Coast Guard Academy and then there were other schools in the area. So I got the big game. I got the news conference before the Yale-Connecticut game. That usually drew all the photographers and all the sports personalities. So I was talking to John Pont who was the head coach at Yale and Bob Engles, the head coach of the University of Connecticut, and in came our president and I proceeded to introduce our president to both of them. And he looked at them and he said, do you play each other? Well, I was kind of embarrassed, because this was the big week of the Yale-U.Conn game and I said, yes. He said, are you the head coach? I thought, oh my God. With those kinds of things I finally decided I didn't think they really cared in terms of what I was doing. So I wasn't very happy. Then that's when I decided to go. I had an opportunity to go to Bucknell University. But during that time at Bridgeport, I was also teaching and coaching. I was faculty. When I went to Bucknell, I was just football. I thought that's what I wanted. After two

D: years, almost two years, I found out that that was not what I wanted. For example, I had two meals with my family from the last of August until Thanksgiving. We were required to be with the training meals and all that kind of stuff. Anyway, I tired of that very quickly and I felt that I was having no family life. So when the Slippery Rock job opened up, somebody asked me if I would be interested in it, and I said, well, shoots, yes, but I don't really want to go to Arkansas. I thought it was in Arkansas. I was thinking of Little Rock. Up in the New England area, Slippery Rock didn't get the notoriety that you do get out in the west and other parts of the country. So anyway, I really didn't know where it was. So I interviewed for the job. The interesting thing was when I was interviewing for the job with Dr. Bill Meise and Pop Storer, who was the Athletic Director, in the middle of my conversation and my interview, Pop Storer proceeded to get up and said, I'm sorry I have to go downtown and do some shopping. Well, the thought occurred to me at that time, I wasn't doing too well on my interview. I guess Bill Meise saw the look on my face when he said that and walked out of the interview, and he said to me, Bob, don't worry. Actually, he really doesn't have any decision to make in this. I do. So he assured me of that and then we continued our interview.

D: Anyway, that was my beginning at Slippery Rock and I did get the job. We started, of course, to build the program from there. But that's how I got there.

R: And that year was?

D: 1967.

R: Then you're a real residenter?

D: Yes. I'm almost a native. Although the town doesn't quite accept me as a native yet, but they think I'm going to stay awhile.

R: They're thinking about it.

D: Yes. They're thinking about it.

R: What were the changes coming from Bucknell to here in terms of your schedule and pressures?

D: I have to start with Bridgeport and then compare Bucknell and then Slippery Rock because at Bridgeport it was a different type of student. They were weekend students. They were primarily from New York City and we didn't have our own field. We had to practice in a place called Seaside Park which was just across the road from the ocean. We used to run drills in the ocean and in the water when it got warmer and that sort of thing. So we had to walk a mile to our practice field which meant we had to carry all our equipment for a mile. We weren't on a scholarship program. Matter of fact, Coach Bruno, who later came on here to Slippery Rock, played for me there. His wife, Donna, went to school at

D: the same time. Then we went to Bucknell. It was a lot more sophisticated. The young men were a whole lot smarter. As a football coach, when you had them do things, you could do more difficult things. You could do a lot more things and they would retain it. One of the biggest problems in coaching of any sport is their ability to retain what you've been teaching them. Just like in a classroom, I guess, because that test comes every Saturday. I found a big difference, academically, from that aspect and they were a lot more sophisticated, wealthier, and that sort of thing. When we got back to Slippery Rock, they were down-to-earth, blue collar youngsters, who were used to working their way through school. Didn't have all the fancy cars and clothes as kids had at Bucknell. There was a spirit here at Slippery Rock that I think I picked up immediately, and it was a caring. I heard this. I hear the President talk about it all the time, but it's true. I built a following in football at Slippery Rock by entertaining an awful lot of people after games and so forth, and we developed our following. People cared. See, that was the extreme from Slippery Rock to Bridgeport. They didn't care at Bridgeport. That drove me out of there, because as hard as you would work, nobody seemed to care. Nobody really wanted to know. At Slippery Rock, everyone cared, and they're very curious about your program, so it made you feel good. This is where, I suppose, communication comes in. There are a lot of times

D: we don't take the time to give feedback. Well, at Slippery Rock we got feedback constantly.

R: Instantly.

D: Yes. Instantly. It was good. So it was that kind of atmosphere where the youngsters were basically here playing because they wanted to play. They weren't on scholarship. The little work-study they had to do, they had to work for it. So it was no different than any other student. So they weren't getting anything extra. Bucknell had full scholarship programs, so that was different. Bridgeport was also a work-study, but I guess, what I liked about Slippery Rock is that the kids played football because they wanted to play. It wasn't because they were getting any huge amounts of money. The big difference, too, was I was able to see them as a student as well as an athlete. Also, they saw me in a classroom. Then they saw me on a football field. There was a mutual respect there that was given, so I liked that. I had no more ambitions. Once I got the feel of it, I didn't ever want to move from here. I felt extremely comfortable, because the kids saw me as a coach on the field and they saw me as a teacher. And I saw them as students and as athletes. The recent coaches that they went to were just full-time coaches, and when I had my heart attack in 1980, they brought on a full-time coach. It didn't work out for him because he didn't teach. He didn't have

D: any contact with the faculty. He had no contact with the kids in probably the most important phase of their life. His demands on their time were unreasonable because he didn't know what the academic demands were. Where I did. I couldn't demand too much from them because, shoots, I had to get ready for my lectures. And all the coaches that I had, all my coaching staff, taught as well. I was teaching nine hours. I was getting three hours release time for the entire football program so you know what that would be like. The kids appreciated it because we saw each other on both sides. We just didn't talk about student athletes. We lived it.

R: The teaching faculty, how widespread was that kind of thing? This is the only institution that I was ever associated with where all the coaches were also classroom teachers. At least they were until a change must have taken place in 1980.

D: Yes, there was.

R: Before that, when I came here in 1971, I was amazed to find all the coaches in the classroom. Fully amazed because I didn't even know that existed.

D: Well, the whole system, the University system, has gone to full-time coaches. I think with the exception of Dr. George Mihalek as the head coach who's teaching, I think there's only one other in the conference. Everybody else is full-time coaches.

R: So there was a massive policy change? How in the world did that happen?

D: New presidents. New ideas, with the changeovers and all the presidents. We had a whole bunch of new presidents in our system. The thinking was big time. They wanted to go NCAA. They wanted to build a reputation through athletics.

R: What did that do to job security?

D: They don't have any.

R: So a coach can be here today and gone tomorrow?

D: Absolutely.

R: Like other institutions.

D: They don't even sign a contract. There is not even a contract for one year.

R: Somehow I didn't know that.

D: Yes. No contracts. It's a year-to-year thing. It's all word of mouth. Gentleman's agreement. Whatever it is. There's no extended contracts.

R: Then 1980 was the big transition year?

D: Yes. Just about that time. They brought a full-time coach in here to replace me. They kept him in until I replaced him seven years later for one year.

R: Now with the football coaching staff in the off-season, are they strictly recruiters and preparers?

D: Well, there are five coaches that are full-time, that do not teach. Coach Campagna teaches. Coach Mihalek teaches. That's it. Everybody else is a full-time coach.

R: Under eleven month, twelve month contracts?

D: Yes. He has about eleven coaches. That's another thing. The staffs have gotten big and very specialized. When I took over in 1987 again when Don Ault left, Dr. Aebersold asked me if I would take the season. I brought in some part-time people. That part-time person became full-time. Joe Kopnisky, who was the head football coach at Grove City College, was out of coaching, and I brought him back in and he has been here ever since. Pat Kuber who was with us for three years, and now he's left the coaching field. Right now they have two part-time people, high school coaches. Joe Walton, who's the head high school coach at Slippery Rock High School, is now offensive line coach here at SRU. I'm trying to think of one other one, but he is part-time and the rest of them are full-time coaches who don't doing any teaching.

R: Was it President Carter who hired you?

D: Yes. That was a fun thing. There were some interesting things that happened then. I first arrived here in March and I went

D: through spring ball and then the first faculty meeting in March, I believe. I went to a faculty meeting and they called for his resignation. No vote of confidence, if you remember. I don't know if you where here or not.

R: I know of it, yes.

D: And I said, my God, this is the most unusual meeting I've ever been in in my life. I mean they're calling for the resignation of the president. That's when it was. It was just a very crazy time. As a matter of fact, for example, in order to try to help unify the football team, I had church services on Saturday morning, and I had arranged at the Newman Center for a Catholic and Protestant service where the Protestants would go one section and so forth, and I just felt that that was a good idea. I got a call from Dr. Carter to meet him at the Union, and when I walked in he had his brain trust with him at the time and sat down. Immediately, I knew I had a problem but I didn't know what it was. He asked me if it was true that I was having church services for my team. And I said, yes, it's not mandatory and I make it available to them. I thought it was a good idea. He said, I want you to know, in front of everyone here, that I'm agnostic and I don't believe in this sort of thing. I suppose there were two things I could have done. I could have just not said anything or I could have gotten mad. I got mad and I wasn't on the job very long. I looked at him and I said, Dr. Carter

D: are you telling me that I no longer can have these services? He said, no, I'm not going to tell you you can't. Then I said, before you answer anymore, I want you to know that I'm going to continue unless you tell me I can't. He said, no, I won't order you not to. I just want you to know that I don't really basically approve of it. I said, that's okay. I understand that. But, I said, I hope you understand my point of view, too. So that was one of the obstacles that I had to overcome. But that's one of the only times that I think that I ever had a problem here. I had support for everything that I did, and not just football. The thing that I tried to do all the time I was here was to serve on as many committees as I could, whether it was faculty council, department chairs. I didn't want anyone to be able to say that as the football coach I was just doing what I was supposed to do in football. I was completing my obligations as a faculty member, and I was not a one-dimensional faculty member. I wanted them to know that I was a multi-dimensional faculty member. And it paid off, because I developed a lot of respect from my colleagues because there wasn't anything that they did that I didn't do. So they looked at me as a faculty member. They didn't just look at me as the football coach. I think that helped a great deal.

R: I know that all the years I was here, the academic tracking with your athletes was a thing and it was a constant. We were always getting word from the coach, would you tell us how people are doing. That was very successful, I gather?

D: And they still do that.

R: Once in a while, someone would refuse, I'm sure.

D: Oh, yes.

R: But not often.

D: Not often.

R: Because when I was at a larger university, anytime a football coach approached a faculty member the fur flew, because that was encroachment on that academic territory. They didn't care about athletics and they translated it as pressure.

D: Well, you see that's where being a faculty member helped.

R: Yes, I think that's exactly what that's all about.

D: Sure, being a faculty member, there wasn't anything that they were doing that I wasn't willing to do. Matter of fact, I went to the University of Rhode Island for an interview. That's my alma mater and they called me in to see if I would be interested in the head coaching job. I was just coming up for full professor, so it was a decision I had to make. I went there for an interview and in the process of the interview, the president of the University of Rhode Island could not believe

D: that I was on faculty council. He couldn't believe that. He couldn't believe that I served on council. He said, when do you have time to coach? I said, well, we have plenty of time to coach. It's just like anything else. You budget your time and you try to develop quality time, not just spinning your wheels. He could not get over that. He said, it's the first time we've ever interviewed a coach like that. And the thing was that it worked because I had just won four championships out of five years. So you couldn't say it didn't work. It worked. He said, he didn't think that it would play at the university. I really wasn't interested in the job. I was more interested in developing some leverage to get my full professorship here. As a matter of fact, in the same year, I was also chosen for the Distinguished Service Award. The president had to write me a letter saying I was outstanding so, therefore, I was up for promotion and he couldn't say I wasn't outstanding because he just wrote me a letter. Everything fell in just right. I sat down with my youngsters and we talked about it and about the move and that sort of thing. The big thing, of course, was at the University of Rhode Island they were going to give a three year contract and I said I'm not interested in a three year contract. I have tenure. I'm up for full professorship. If I come here, I come here with my tenure and I want my coaches to teach, and I want to teach a class, too. Well, this was very

D: foreign to them. They said, no, you can't do that here. I said, okay, the only difference is we've proved it works at Slippery Rock. The University of Rhode Island hadn't had a winning season in about 18 years. It took them a long time to win after that, too. I think they've had two winning seasons in the last 22 years or something like that. They've had their problems, and I just think their philosophy is wrong. I think that our philosophy at the University was very sound because we got the faculty support. We were one of them. I don't mean we have to teach nine hours, but I thought that one class would be fine. I wanted faculty rank and I wanted faculty privileges and there are benefits that go along with them and they weren't willing to do that. I said I would not trade my tenure for a three year contract. The other guy was Bob Griffin, it was between the two of us. I could have had the job if I really wanted it. I had people who were in the right places, but each one of them said, you don't really want this job, Bob. You have a good job where it is. They kept saying, it's different. It's not the same. You're looking at it like it was when you were in school, and I want to let you know that the University of Rhode Island is no longer like it was when you were here. It was a very small school, so you would find it different. But, anyway, Bob went from a one year contract to a three year contract and that was like tenure to him. He's been there ever since. Bob's done a good job but he's struggled.

R: Back to the question about teaching faculty and tenure. How widespread is that kind of program? I've never seen it before. Do they have it in other school systems? Tenured coaches are really very, very rare, I gather.

D: Yes, I was tenured at the University of Bridgeport. I was tenured there.

R: And teaching there?

D: Yes. I was teaching 21 contact hours. We were teaching a big load there. At Bucknell, you had to be there for nine years before they even considered you for tenure. And of course, here. In our state system there's this big evolution that they have come into in terms of full-time coaches, I think it was around the 1980's, that the majority of the coaches don't even have a contract for a year. So I don't know what they have. I mean they are hired on word of mouth. It's strange. I would never take a job in the state system unless you give me at least a three year, four year contract. It's crazy. But they are taking it because it's a stepping stone, and this is one of the fallacies that I see this system is involved in. People see it as a stepping stone and they don't really care a whole lot about the system, I mean about the individual schools. They just want to do well and get on with it. And sometimes coaches who are very ambitious take some shortcuts. They play kids who are injured. They play kids who shouldn't be

D: playing. For one reason or another they discipline kids using preferential treatments, destroying morale on a team. All these kinds of things. I just think it is derogatory. It's a detriment, I think, to the entire system. One of these days, I think, they're going to get back to the fact that people like Coach Mihalek, for example, who's an associate professor, tenured, would probably be the thing to get back to, to stabilize the programs.

R: Does the NCAA have a position on that business of teaching faculty and tenure?

D: No, they do not.

R: They don't strike a position there? That's probably because it's such a minority thing.

D: Probably.

R: I mean it just doesn't exist for that many places.

D: In Division 2 and Division 3, you may find it. Not in Division 1.

R: Nowhere.

D: Well, I shouldn't say nowhere. Penn State. They're faculty.

R: Paterno's staff is faculty?

D: Yes. He's a full professor. His long time staff, I got to know a number of them, yes, they are all faculty. One of the few major colleges, maybe the only major college, that offered faculty.

R: Wonder whether Engle did that beforehand?

D: Yes. Absolutely.

R: Good man. Spectacular.

D: Oh, yes, he was. I knew him. When I was a freshman at the University of Rhode Island in 1949, the big cry was, nine for nine in '49, and that was Brown University's cry. Joe Paterno was the quarterback and Engle was the coach during that period of time. But anyway, that was their last year. They left. Engle left Brown University in 1949 to take over Penn State's program. But Joe was the quarterback and I remember I was a freshman and I remember him as the quarterback. That's one of the few schools. I don't know where it came from. I think maybe it was just western PA. I don't know. Maybe it was our Pennsylvania school system, because the state schools have always been that way till lately.

R: Sounds like a bad move.

D: I do. I don't care for it.

R: What about the championship years? When I came here you won 1973, 1974?

D: 1972, 1973 and 1974. And then again in 1976.

R: Was there a special reason why all that happened? Why you had that string?

D: Yes. I like to think of it in terms of stability. I had my staff. All the years, the 14 years I was head coach, I only had one turnover. We had that continuity and respect for one another. My job was to pull it all together. Their job was to coach. Although I coached the offensive line along with them, I treated them like colleagues. Never treated them any other way. They were faculty, colleagues. They were treated with respect at all times. We used to, contrary to what they do now, we used to have to do our recruiting between classes. We used to fight to try to get a three day class schedule so we could spend two days on the road. Yet when we went on the road, it was never to any great distance because we had to be back the next day to teach. We didn't mind that, because everybody in the country comes to western Pennsylvania to recruit, so why should we go anywhere else? We were probably in the most fertile recruiting areas in the country. We did stay within a 50 mile radius and did our recruiting. When you find people like Stan Kendziorski, who's the Director of International Studies, he was without a doubt my best recruiter. He worked so hard and diligently. Doug Clinger did a super job, and Paul Bruno and Ron Oberlin. All these guys. When the faculty went on vacation or at the Christmas holidays, we were on the road recruiting. Whenever we stopped teaching, we were on the road recruiting. So with that continuity, not

D: only in our recruiting but when on our staff, there was so little turnover. Everybody knew what their job was and what they had to do to get it done. I was very blessed with good people. They weren't people who were trying to use this as a stepping stone to get to somewhere else. Everybody, in a sense, was here to do the job and most of them stayed here during that time. With the good recruiting and the good rapport, I think, our coaches had and the kind of coaches they were and the stability that we offered, it's just like a kind of family. I think that when you raise a family and you provide stability for them, they usually turn out pretty good. That's what I think our football program did. It turned out pretty good. I remember those championship years, the athletic director would say, we won one. I'd come in and we'd be talking and he'd say, you're talking like you're going to win again. I said, yes, I think we can. We won two. And then he said, you're not thinking of a third? I said, oh, yes. Matter of fact, we're better than we were. We won a third. In that fourth year, we got a bunch of young spoiled kids. These kids were being carried by an awful lot of prior ball players and paid a price. So we were not successful. They didn't know what it really took to win. These other kids did. They were like the rich kids who were pampered and get all the goodies

D: that they wanted and all the respect and the trips and the championships, but they never truly had to work. They were just coming in to the program and we had to reeducate them, to be honest with you, and I think the best coaching year that we probably did was in that following year in 1976 when we took the team that didn't do anything.

R: Was that a bowl year?

D: In 1972, we were in the Knute Rockne Bowl. We were in Atlantic City. In 1973, we did not go to a bowl game. We won a state championship again but we were not chosen to go. That angered me because that was probably the best team that I ever had. Then we went again.

R: Ithaca?

D: Yes, but it was at Cornell Stadium. You and Ted went to the game. I remember seeing you there. Yes, we played at Cornell Stadium, if you remember. We played Ithaca. You're right. The The following year was the year the kids didn't really know what it took to pay the price to be as successful as these other boys. They had a bad year. So the next year we came back and won our division. But because we had won it the year before last, then Shippensburg, since they had never been in to the playoffs, they were given the right to go in. It was a strange way of choosing but that's the way they did it.

R: Were there some rivalries within the university structure of 14 teams of the western division? Are there some rivalries that have been more important to you or have grown stronger or some less strong?

D: Yes. Clarion and Edinboro were just dog fights. Just dog fights. During the good years, the years that we won the state championships in 1972, 1973 and 1974, the schedule was not a rotating schedule, and we, I must admit at this time, that we had the break in the schedule. We always had Clarion the last game, and it was always for the western division championship. We beat them three straight years for the state championship. Matter of fact, we had beaten them for seven straight years. But we were driving them crazy and they were coming close, but yet we were beating them. So they were coming into the game never convinced that they could ever beat us. It took them eight years to decide that they could beat us. But, yes, that one always created a great rivalry and Al Jacks, who I respect enormously, was a former Slippery Rock coach. He went over to Clarion and probably has, percentage-wise, the best record in the history of the state colleges. Bill McDonald, who's the head coach at Edinboro, who today is a very close friend, where we go to each child's wedding and all that, we hated each other. I mean, we wouldn't hardly talk to one another. There wasn't anyone that I could really talk about in my coaching career that I

D: really didn't care for except for Bill McDonald. He was such a competitor and I was a competitor and they would always beat us and yet when we would beat them, we would just beat them. When they beat us, they murdered us. Yet, Clarion, who would then handle Edinboro easily, we beat them handily. Yes, those two schools were it, without a doubt. Boy, when we played Edinboro and we played Clarion it was a knock and sock ballgame. Records didn't mean a thing. We developed great friendships and respect for, as I said Bill McDonald, and Al Jacks. Yes, you're right. The other schools like Lock Haven, since they've never had that great many teams that were successful, there was never a real great rivalry. Shippensburg was really basically too far away, and that never became a reality in terms of a rivalry. But Edinboro and Clarion were so close and yet we were always fighting for the championships in those years. Those three teams. The other people were just bystanders. That's were the rivalry was and it still is today.

R: Were you meeting the recruiters on the road all the time, too?

D: Oh, yes. It was a question of who would get to what school first. We were always fighting each other for the same type of student athelete. Basically, we were all financially in about the same boat. Not like today, where Indiana, for example, is so far ahead of everybody, financially, that we can't even compete against them. But other than that, there's a real parity in the league, financially. So we were always fighting for the same kids.

R: What about the alumni as scouts or supporters?

D: Alumni have not played a whole strong part in this whole activity. I wish I could say differently. We've had some individuals, a few individuals, that have supported the programs through the years. From the 1963 teams, where they had great pride, where they won. The 1962 teams where they won. They won championships and there was great pride in that. I look back like just this past weekend when we had the spring game, and we bring the alumni back now for a flag football game prior to the green and white game with the varsity. We had 22, I guess, return. That's not a very good turnout for alumni. We have some real great supporters. Dennis Tilko, for example, who runs the meat packing place. He always provides food for us free and he's always there with his billfold to help us. He's been a great asset to our program. He started four years and he was a great athlete here. John Ross, who's a captain for USAir, has been very, very helpful with us in financial support as well as moral support. So has Dan Parr who owns a construction company. A lot of local kids. We don't do a whole lot with our alumni. I wish we did more. It's not a criticism of Sally Lennox. It's just an observation, to be honest with you. It's not very support oriented and yet the athletes usually are the ones who come back and support, to a great extent, the University.

R: Is there a prototype institution in this system that does that really well?

D: I think Indiana does.

R: Does it have something to do with size maybe?

D: Probably. Also, the direction in which the alumni directors go over the period of years. I don't mean to lay this on Sally Lennox, because she certainly hasn't been the only alumni director. I think there've been some attempts. I think Dr. Reinhard made a real effort to bring alumni in, but they've been struggling. I know that Dr. Aebersold goes all over Florida or whatever and he has to go and try to drum up support. They get some. But we're a state school and they say they don't support state schools because the money should be coming out of the state taxes and if we're going to give money we should give to the private institutions. That's a fallacy because I come from the University of Rhode Island and that's a state school and they have fantastic fund-raising efforts. A lot of participation. You look at the makeup of this school and we're basically teachers, so the salaries have never been great. We don't have a whole lot of doctors and lawyers and engineers as a lot of the big schools do, and they are the people who have the big money to give. So

D: I think that has something to do with it too. I wish we had more alumni support. I don't think it's anywhere near where it should be.

R: I saw Dennis Tilko when you had your heart attack. He was beside himself.

D: Is that right?

R: Yes. You'd have thought he had the heart attack.

D: Is that right?

R: It was really unbelievable. I saw him and he was just as low as could be.

D: If only we had more kids like him who have been very successful in their businesses.

R: Who was the guard along side of him?

D: Tom Yacksik?

R: Yes, that's right.

D: Tom has been very good to us, too, financially. Tom Yacksick has diabetes. He's diabetic and he's lost a tremendous amount of weight. I mean he looks like a running back now rather than that big guard that you would envision. He owns a family bar in one of the outskirts of Pittsburgh. He's very successful. He's doing well.

R: I like Tom a lot. I see Denny every now and then. He slimmed down after he graduated.

D: Denny is learning how to relax and plays some golf now, but

D: he's built the thing from nothing, his financial base. He's sold cars and all that kind of thing. Saved his money and then bought into a partnership with the meat packing and then he slowly bought everybody out. Good heart, but he works 18 or 19 hours a day.

R: But you wouldn't have thought that, that he was going to be an entrepreneur.

D: Well, that's right, but yet when Dennis first arrived here they didn't claim that he was going to doing anything academically. They never thought that he would even get into college. Denny proved them all wrong because when he finished he had better than a three point average. So he was just not motivated at some point in his life, and as you know, people mature at different levels. Sometimes some kids who are not very successful or show a whole lot of ability at a certain age may blossom years later. One of the biggest things for us as coaches at a school like this is that we've got to try to get athletes who haven't quite achieved the peak of their ability, because if they did the other other schools would grab them. We have to try and find those kids and get them here. Take Myron Brown. How would you recruit a Myron Brown? Myron Brown and basketball. Well, he was voted the number one basketball player in Division 2, and right now he's ready to sign a multi-million dollar contract in the NBA.

D: Now how did we get him? People weren't quite convinced that he was good enough to play in the Divsion 1 level, and as a result they stayed away from him. Bobby Barlett was smart enough to see it and lucky enough and fortunate enough to get the kid here, and he's built the program for us.

R: How do you make a decision that you have a comer? That that person hasn't peaked and he's left over from the Division 1 schools. Is it intuition?

D: No. Some of its funny, but it's true when you say it. I want to meet the parents first. I want to see how big they are. That's one of the things I want to see. If I go in and I see a father who's six feet five and a mother who's probably six foot and that boy is six three, I know that guy's going to be about six seven, about 240 by the time he matures. It's funny but it's true. All the recruiting years, we always had to get into the house and the first thing we're doing is sizing up the parents. To answer your question, we look at their abilities. A lot of times, the youngsters show ability but are not getting good coaching. So they are not exploited. They don't know what to do, but you can see that. When you're evaluating a boy on a film, you're looking at his speed. He either has speed or he doesn't. He either has agility or he doesn't. Or he's aggressive or he isn't aggressive. Usually.

D: It's hard to make someone aggressive who isn't aggressive. You look at those three and if you can find those three qualities, then you evaluate their coaching. If those youngsters show those three abilities and you know that they have had lousy coaching, you've got a comer. That kid is going to come.

R: So you're also making some kind of a measurement of the high school they came out of.

D: Absolutely. And their competition. Who are they competing against. It's just like the pros right now. They very seldom try to go after a player from a small college. It's because, well, the competition, of course, is never as competitive as Ohio State or Notre Dame. But I'll tell you a real quick story. I was recruiting and scouting for the Denver Broncos for five years after I got through coaching, and I used to scout the Steelers for them. So I used to follow the Steelers in the preseason games. And we're at Washington, D. C. stadium and the punter that we had at Slippery Rock was number one in Division 2. A punter. He could punt them off the wall. The Steelers picked him up. He's punting that night. I'm sitting next to this guy from the Dallas Cowboys, and we're talking and he said, yes, I went up to see your kid. A matter of fact it was a very miserable day and it was cold and rainy. We're going through this whole thing, and I said, what do think?

D: He said, he'll never make it. Boy, I got mad. I looked at him, I said, what are you talking about? He's got number one statistics in Division 2. I mean, I've seen the kid punt all these years. He said, yes, but he has never played before 60,000 people. You wait till the noise gets to this kid. What we're going to find out is, is this kid unusual and can he take the pressure? Because in the four years in a small college, you get maybe 1,000 or 2,000 people at a game. Noise is never a factor. So I said, I don't know if I can agree with you on that. Anyway, as the game progressed, lo and behold, the punts started to go off the side of his foot and then the final coup de grace was when he was in the end zone. The place is going wild. It's just before half-time and our kid is standing in the end zone trying to punt out of the end zone and the ball comes back to him. It was like his hands were made of stone. Hit his hand. Just dropped. They fell on the ball. Washington scores. The guy turns to me and said, I don't want to tell you I told you so, but you see what I mean. And he was right. So it's unusual for our kids to even get up into that league. Myron Brown surprises me that he is doing so well. I'm very happy for him.

R: All the stuff that is happening to him now. Because you read about him everyday.

D: Yes.

R: Scouting for the Broncos. How did that come about? How do you

R: get a job like that?

D: In my class, I show statistics on how you get a job. And the number one factor is who you know. That's what the statistics show throughout the country. How do you get a job? Who you know is ranked number one. The receiver coach, Nick Nicolau, was the first guy I hired at the University of Bridgeport. He had just gotten his doctorate and I hired him at the University of Bridgeport. He was the receiver coach. I was out of coaching, so he evidently told them and they called me. They wanted to know if I would do some scouting and then do some signing during the draft, which I did for several years for them. It was a fun thing to do. I had never been up in those beautiful press boxes and the great meals they give you. You have a telephone and you have a set in front of you, and anytime you want a replay you just pick up the phone and say give me a replay, and they'd send the replay back to you. It was just exciting. It kind of grew old after a while. Then the demands got to be greater. For example, on signing, they'd want me to go into say Penn State and stay for like three days. Well, I couldn't do that when I was teaching. I couldn't take three days off. They'd want me to go up to Philadelphia to time a kid . I couldn't just leave my classes and go. So I finally told them. I said, for everyone's benefit, I think I better not do this anymore.

D: It was getting too demanding. Before, I'd just go in the night before. I used to make phone calls. I'd have my kids that I was going to try to sign, say out of Penn State or West Virginia or some place like that, and I would be in touch with them for over a period of three weeks. I would call them and talk to them. At that time you couldn't be in touch with for any extent of time. You could take them out to eat that night. That was about the only thing you could do. That was my first year. So everybody would hide the athletes. They'd go in and take the kid and they'd hide, so some other team couldn't call them and try to talk them out of it. The NFL eliminated that. You could go to the kid's apartment. So, therefore, you'd go out and buy the beer and buy the sandwiches and buy all the nibs, and you would take it to the kid's apartment and you'd sit down and watch the draft on TV. So you did baby-sitting. That's basically what it was. So you had to stay there until approximately three o'clock in the morning which was when the draft was over. So you had to stay up all that time and make your final call in to headquarters to find out if, say Joe Riggs, was drafted. They'd say no, Joe Riggs has not been drafted. He's on my list. So, therefore, I pick up the phone immediately, and I'd already prearranged that I'm going to call you as soon as the thing is over. I'd say, now I want to meet with you and your

D: agent at nine o'clock in the morning. That sort of thing. Then you would make your arrangements. They would come in. I would give the pitch in terms of this is how much money I can give you and a signing bonus. Everyone that goes in the NFL every year, except the extended contracts, sign a standard contract. Then they have the addendum sheet where all the incentives are. That's how you would get in. I never signed anybody. Every time I got to that point all their agents would say, we're not satisfied with that. I'd say, well, fine, I'm not authorized to give you any more than what they told me. So I'd pick up the phone. Call the headquarters in Denver. They'd say, well okay, let me talk to him and then they would take it from there. I would leave. That was the next day, so I used to take a personal day and it was never a problem. Then they wanted me to spend three days so I decided not to do that.

R: Pretty glamorous on the front end.

D: Yes. It was fun. Oh, I'm glad I did it. It was really fun. They would send you coaching shirts, the hats and all kind of different things. Going to Three Rivers Stadium and not have to to through the hassle of some guy spilling beer over you and cussing and all that kind of stuff. You were in a very professional environment. It was fun. It really was. I liked getting to the stadium early because it wasn't crowded and afterward, by the time we got all the statistics which we had to mail out immediately, by the time

D: all the statistics would be mimeographed off, everyone was gone, pretty much. Then you would never have any trouble getting in and out of the stadium. It was never a problem. Then you developed camaraderie with the guys you'd meet over the years. You kind of looked forward to seeing them again.

R: Our school was never accused of any unethical behavior or anything of that sort.

D: No.

R: By anybody. That was pretty true of this entire college system around here, I gather, and of the private schools that you played.

D: Yes. We're not involved in the big money. That's always the problem. It's always money. What can Notre Dame offer financially that Ohio State can't, or Michigan State can't, or Penn State can't? They're all regulated by NCAA rules, so they all give the same amount of money. Now what makes the difference? Years ago when I was at Bucknell, it was what kind of an alumnus can I attach you to who will take care of all your clothes, take care of all your vacation money, your summer money. And you would find an alumnus to do that. Then the NCAA really started cracking down on this business.

R: But it was common practice then? It was what everybody gets.

D: It was common practice. For example, you would house a kid in a motel. When he walked in the room and opened up the clothes closet, it was full of clothes. They were all his. Nobody ever said anything. They were his. He would have a car to drive around in. He was told to walk into a clothing store. Somebody wanted to meet him. An alumnus wanted to meet him. When he went in, they would meet him and they would say, oh by the way, here's the suit you ordered. So it was who could do what and give what. They developed a breed of youngsters who expected this.

R: The perks?

D: Exactly. It made it difficult for coaching because you started out on a very negative note. You were cheating. You were breaking the rules and regulations. Then all of a sudden I bring you into my program and I say you have to abide by rules and regulations and here they've watched me break the rules and regulations. It's just like, I guess, when we're trying to bring our youngsters up and saying we should always be honest and never cheat, but yet we're at a dinner table and we'll talk about how we beat the government on our income tax. Okay? What are we teaching? We talk about Uncle Jim who's the alcoholic in the family. He's always drunk. He can't hold a job but when he's around, I want you to respect Uncle Jim. Double standards. It doesn't work.

R: Yet coaches rarely, even when they knew there were serious violations, they never blew the whistle on each other very much.

D: You're right.

R: That was an unwritten rule.

D: Yes. That's right.

R: That was part of the brotherhood. The code of the hills.

D: That's about right. Unfortunate. It sounds very negative but you're right. Once in a while, coaches would complain about one another or break the bad news to get them in trouble. It didn't happen very often.

R: I remember Paterno unloading on Switzer and Jackie Sherrill once upon a time.

D: Yes.

R: I'm sure the A. and M. faculty all unloaded on Sherrill when he got that two and a half million dollars. Truly unbelievable.

D: Right. Unbelievable. I think he was the first publicized million dollar football contract, but nobody said anything about Johnny Majors. They said, okay, Johnny. We're going to give you an $80,000 salary. However, you're going to have ten percent ownership in this building. You're going to have ten percent ownership in this shopping mall. Incidentally, you have a million dollar insurance policy all paid up. I mean, all these perks. Before you knew it they were making all kinds of money. They talked about, for example, Ishmael, the rocket from Notre Dame

D: going to Toronto. Anywhere from 18 million to 28 million dollars? How can anybody be worth that much? He's only a punt return, kick off return. That's specialist. That's it. I mean he's not even a quarterback. I don't think he's a franchise. Then they also said they gave him ten percent ownership in the team.

R: He denied that.

D: I know. But, you know. I believed it.

R: I did, too.

D: I did because I know that they have done these kinds of things with coaches.

R: I remember when Cliff Wittig went to Knoxville. When they wanted him to come down there. When they met him at the airport, they had a brand new orange Oldsmobile. They said, now, Cliff, you take the job, this is one of things that goes with it. Of course, Cliff did go with Knoxville.

D: Right. This is small time stuff, but I got a call when I first got here. I got a call from the Jacksonville Quarterback Club. I had no idea what the Jacksonville Quarterback Club was all about. They said, we would like to have you come down as the Slippery Rock coach to speak at our dinner. We have a weekly luncheon. So I said, when? It fit in the schedule and I said, what will that entail? They said, to start off with, we'll fly you and your wife down, first class, and we'll give you a home at the Ponte Verde Country Club, which was one of

D: the most exclusive country clubs in that area. We'll give you a car and we'll put you up for about three days and you can do what ever you want during that period of days. You have all the rights to eat in the dining room at Ponte Verde Country Club, and anytime you want to have a meal in your cottage you just call. They took care of everything. I didn't want any money. I just said as long as I can take my wife that's enough for me. That was a great holiday for us. So we're at the cocktail hour prior to the luncheon and this guy comes over and he wants to meet me and so forth and he said, I betcha they paid a lot of money to get you here? I said they didn't pay me any money. He said, what? I said, no, they just took care of everything. He reached in his pocket and gave me a hundred dollar bill. He said, don't you dare leave this room without this hundred dollars. You should have had more. He was really upset. I said, they have taken care of my wife and me for three days. I mean I had to speak for fifteen minutes and I got three days' holiday, first class at one of the nicest places. That's just touching the tip of the iceberg. These major coaches, they get so much.

R: It's impressive.

D: Yes. Matter of fact, when we were at the Knute Rockne Bowl in Atlantic City where we stayed at the hotel, the hotel manager

D: came up with compliments. He had some refreshments and fruit for the family and everything else. He said, I want you to know that we would like to have your team in our hotel at any time. And why don't you come back in the spring, you and your wife, and spend four or five days here as our guests? We'd like to show you all the things that we can do for your team. Those are the kinds of perks that you get. We didn't take advantage of it, incidentally, because I was teaching and I couldn't do it. Those are the small perks. Guys like Johnny Majors and those people just make so much money and it's all undercover. Lou Holtz and Joe Paterno.

R: Talking about administrative support, in the years that you coached, did it matter who was president or who was athletic director? The chain of command, did that matter?

D: Well, let me put it this way. In my tenure of 14 years as head coach, I went through seven university presidents. Usually, it's quite the opposite. Usually, one president of a university goes through seven football coaches. I remember making this comment at my testimonial dinner right after my heart attack when I had to give up football, that I had been through seven presidents. So that says something about the place. To answer your question about the individual who made the difference. Of course, Carter hired me. The reason why I know I got hired here is because I was coming out of Bucknell. He was a Bucknellian. I was told

D: from the people at Bucknell that I would be a strong candidate as a result. Out of how many people applied for the job, I'm sure one of the things that certainly didn't hurt me was the fact that I was coming from Bucknell and President Carter was a Bucknellian. That was my start. The individual who did so much for this school is Big Al, they call him. Al Watrel. He was here at, I think, the time at which there was the biggest period of growth here at the University, in terms of, not just the physical. He brought in the faculty. He developed the liberal arts program.

R: So it got bigger as the teacher education school shrunk a little. Of course, when I came here physical education had fifteen hundred. It was a huge, huge program.

D: Right. He was here, I would have to say, to be honest with you, he was here during the biggest growth both internal as well as the physical growth.

R: His presence had a lot to do with it.

D: Yes. He built the program. I was very close to him but yet I wasn't. I wasn't as close as some people thought I was. He was an absolute football nut. Such enthusiasm for football. He would come down to the office and you'd look up and he would

D: say, initially he would say this and I thought he was kidding, you want to trade jobs? He said it so often that after a while I knew he did. He would have preferred to have been the football coach rather than the president. He was not suited for the presidency, I think, in terms of the pressures. He used to come down on a Sunday night. This is not an exaggeration. He would have all the newspapers from the state of New Jersey and they were all underlined. Red, green and yellow. He coded all the athlete prospects in terms of the best athletes, from what leagues and so forth. He would give that to me every Sunday. I mean that must have taken him hours to do.

R: That's an amazing story.

D: Hours to do. He would bring them in. I'd walk into my office and he's sitting at my desk and he's already opened all my mail. I'd walk in and I'd say, anything interesting, coach? I used to call him coach. He'd say, no, nothing too much. I'd say, you want me to go up to your office and open some of your mail? He'd just laugh and that was the end of that. We really liked him. He was never offensive. His enthusiasm was genuine. He was the one who would always say to me, what do you need? He allowed the program to grow considerably. The one thing I never, never forgot was that I would never take advantage of him. I never, never did. I could have. I think that man could have

D: been fired years earlier if I had taken advantage of him. I could have broken every law, because his enthusiasm for athletics was unprecedented. It was a genuine one. Anyway, he was good for me and I think I was good for him. I kept him under control and he gave me the things that I needed. That's why we won. And we had a good staff who then was able not only to go out and recruit the kids, but he gave us the means to recruit. We set the standards for the league. One of the nicest things anybody had to say about me, I guess, when I ended my career was that there wasn't anyone who had furthered the progress of the league any more than I had in terms of developing programming. We had more aid than anyone else. We were better organized than anybody else. When I was at Bucknell, we had developed a computerized program of scouting which I took here. All the time I was here and to this day we are the only team that had a computerized scouting analysis which basically would just extract a philosophy of an offense or a defense. People knew that after a while and so, therefore, when they played us they would try to stay away from the things that they were successful with, because they knew we knew what it was and we forced them in to doing something they really didn't want to do. Psychologically, it was a psychological head game as well as a physical game. We stayed ahead of them, the entire league. That computerized

D: program was so far advanced. We were getting a complete anaylsis of breakdowns for every down distance situation, passing, running and all that kind of business. One time I was going to Oklahoma. My wife is from Oklahoma.We were going to be out there for two weeks and I said to myself, what am I going to do for two weeks in Oklahoma? So I wrote to the University and I said this is the program we have at Bucknell. I would like to come in and see what kind of program you have. I got a call a few days later. We don't have that kind of program. Would you stop in? I said, yes, I'd be glad to. I didn't want to sit around for two weeks in my mother-in-law's house. I didn't know what I was going to do. So, anyway, I spent three days at the University of Oklahoma. I set up their computer program. I brought in my computer program, not mine, Bucknell's computerized program which we got from the University of Maryland, incidentally. We brought that in and I showed the head coach at the time how it was done. He was fascinated by it. But he said, you know, I'd rather have pictures rather than all that word analysis. He said, can you do that? I said, I don't know. We've never expanded or tried to explore that yet. So we called their computer programmers over and they said, oh, yes, we can do that. So what they did was, we fed the same information. The only difference is, the computer would make the X and the three

D: O's and then list every play that they ran at every home and they would list every pass that they ran in every zone. And all of a sudden you just opened this thing up and it says, picture. And you could see from a wing right formation on a right hash mark the O is run to the right, and from this formation and this position in the field they always did this. So when we were doing analysis on our teams, this would all go in the computer. And we would have a game plan that on first down and five we were going to go this direction because this is what they did if they were in this formation. It was absolutely fantastic, and they knew it and we were so dominant. You asked me earlier what were some of the things that made us strong. Along with all the things I mentioned the computer program was probably the thing that helped us out the most. Because it told us what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and then we out-psyched them because they knew we knew. So they would change, and by changing they were doing things that they weren't doing very well and that weakened them. They used to think that they could beat us when they came in, and you don't beat anybody if you think you can beat them, you only beat them when you know you can beat them. With that kind of confidence. The kids knew it. We'd show them the computer program. We'd show them what they were doing and what we were going to do. Then we'd match it up in

D: our pregame films and every time they get it in this formation, we'd say, okay, the defensive coordinator, that was the linebackers, we'd say, well now what are you going to call? Well, we're going to call this and see what they do and they would go right to where we were going. All of sudden we developed this confidence and they were having fun out there because they had an advantage that they didn't have. Interesting.

R: Very interesting.

D: But the computer program that we brought in was extremely important. But, anyway, the support that we got was great. Of course Dr. Aebersold came in as a freshmen coach for me, his first year. Then he was freshman baseball coach and we've had a friendship that started from the very first time. We've been close friends for 24 years because of this. As you might be aware, he got involved inofficiating. I mean big games. He had the Bear Bryant's last game and all that kind of stuff. He'd get through a local game and the guys would say, well, why don't you hang around we're going to go out and have a sandwich and a drink and he'd say, no, I've got to run. I have to go back. I've got to make the party after the game. They'd say, what are you talking about? He'd say, we always have a party after the ball games at home. And this is where our wives where fantastic. We would feed over a hundred people. I mean feed them and our wives are the

D: ones who did that. I would take a week and somebody else would take a week and another coach would take a week. Our own money. It wasn't coming out of any football budget, but we felt it was very necessary. Before you knew it the president said, I want to throw one. Then the admissions director said, I'll throw the next week, and then the team physician said, I'll throw one. After a while, we didn't have to throw any. It was always somebody doing it for us, but it was bringing everyone together. We went five years without losing a game at home, so we had some pretty good parties. That helped. Dr. Aebersold, of course, supports the program. He's done a lot for George [Mihalek]. They got a whole new office complex. They got a new weight programs. He has 11 coaches. Sometimes Bob might be criticized to the point where he's not giving them enough money, but then again, what's enough? To say that Bob Aebersold, if somebody asked me, is he supporting the program? I'd say, yes. Yes, without a doubt he's supporting the program.

R: Was it hard for you when President Watrel was forced out of office?

D: Yes, a whole change of philosophy. There was a change. Matter of fact, at the same time there was also a change at the dean's position and that made it very difficult for us. I think Dr. Haverstick became the dean while Bill Meise was away on sabbatical

D: or finishing up his doctorate, I'm not sure. She was very conscious about the lack of money for women. So all of a sudden she started taking all the money away and sharing it with the women. Well, you don't do that immediately because all of a sudden all of these kids that were promised money and guaranteed money out of the football team, I had to go to a football meeting and say, we were only kidding. You don't have it anymore.

R: Was that when Title IX was taking place?

D: Before that.

R: Before Title IX?

D: Before that. So we had some bumps there. You know sometimes when you're successful, sometimes people get a little embarrassed by your success, and they begin to apologize for the success. Like Al Watrel used to be badgered, but he didn't care about it. They'd say, hey, you gonna win another championship? He'd say, you're darn right. We're going to win a national championship. He never cared, because he felt that he was doing enough for the academic aspect of the University. The one thing I think people fail to realize is that it's very difficult for a student here at Slippery Rock or at any other school to identify just with a program. Unless it happens to be some outstanding program. But otherwise, they need to have something to identify with. It's hard to

D: identify with a math class versus a football team or a basketball team. To make kids feel good about the school gives them a good feeling in general, and they take pride in being a Slippery Rock University student. And what is wrong with doing that with athletics as long as it's academically accountable? If your program is academically accountable, then I think that you can allow your programs to be successful where the kids will identify with it and feel this pride, and as a result all the spirit of the campus improves tremendously. I have seen this campus go from one extreme to the other. I have seen kids having no pride at all, and athletics plays a very important role.

R: And it's kind of an attack on any form of racism as well, I suspect.

D: That's true.

R: Yes, I've felt that. That the black athletes, the black dancers, the black actors, all of those kids who are out there and become a part of that whole morale thrust. It softens other kinds of things.

D: That's a very good point. I agree with that. Everybody just feels good about the school. You know, Notre Dame's been doing that for years. Ohio State's been doing that for years. Penn State's been doing it. What's wrong with saying I'm proud and I

D: feel proud about the institution because football is successful at Penn State. That's not to say we're watering down the academic aspects at all. That's why Al Watrel never felt intimidated, because he knew he was doing a lot for the academics. People were saying, you're doing everything for the athletics and not enough for others.

R: He certainly was accused of that. That press box thing and all that business.

D: That was nonsense. They use it all the time. Now it's condemned again.

R: Was all that just a lot of focus that just ought not to have taken place?

D: Of course. It was absolutely ridiculous. Al Watrel was the best thing that's happened to this school in a long time. He was here at a time when we had tremendous growth and I don't think he impeded it one iota. I think someday he's going to be given the respect that is due to him in terms of what he accomplished here at the University. It wasn't too many years ago, I get a phone call and it was Dr. Watrel. He was in town. His father-in-law was living in Butler and they were visiting. We talked. We hadn't talked in years. He said, I'd like to see you. I said, Al that's great. Why don't you come over to the house for lunch. We'll sit down and have a chat. I said, why

D: don't you bring Carol, his wife. Well, he said, she's never been on the campus. I said, you don't have to go on the campus. Come on out to the house. So he said, I don't know. But anyway, they both showed up. Well, we had the warmest reunion. He's a big lovable kind of guy, at least from my perspective. I mean I got to know him in many ways that possibly you and a lot of other people didn't get to know him. So we talked for maybe three hours. Just talked ourselves, about catching up on everything. He was going to upstate New York to a presidents' conference of some sort. I said, Al, why don't you come back on the way back, and I want you to stop again. I said, let me have some friends here. Who would you like to have? He said, that would be great. So he named some people that he wanted to see again. So I arranged this party, and when he came back he met everyone at the door. It was the warmest, touching scene that I've seen since I've been here. The warmth and the feeling, it was still there. They were hugging each other. It's funny. We socialized for a period of time. I don't know what made me do it. We were sitting around in the living room. There were about 20 some odd people there. I said, you know, I hate to interrupt you but with Dr. Watrel here it brings back so many memories. I said, let me tell you my fondest memory. I went through and told my fondest

D: memory about Al Watrel. Well, that went right around the room. Everyone did the same thing. All the way around the room we talked about it. He was in tears. He was absolutely in tears. I felt so good about that meeting. There was so much warmth. So much love. So much respect for one another and just good feelings about one another. It was a great, great time for us. He left. Didn't say a whole lot. He just couldn't say a whole lot. The next day we got the biggest bouquet of roses with this note that he and Carol were able to write. Because they left this campus, if you remember, in a very negative, negative atmosphere.

R: Yes, I know.

D: They didn't think anyone cared for them anymore. Well, they found out that that's not true. He still had a hell of a lot of friends here.

R: I knew there were a lot of detractors and I knew we were getting a lot of very, very bad publicity about the athletic program and the press box and all that stuff and the food services. I was in some meetings with him at that time when we were doing the leadership conference at Bloomsburg, and one of the things that impressed me was that he was not an abrasive personality.

D: That's right.

R: Of course I was not around him a great deal, but I never saw him angry.

D: No. That's him. You're right.

R: I think his gentleness, is that fair to say?

D: Absolutely. You absolutely captured it.

R: To see a man in a heavyweight confrontational situation that he didn't want to be in and didn't really have the gut response that others might have had, that is, to become terribly angry, he didn't do that.

D: He was a big gentle bear. I don't think he ever should have been a president.

R: Did you ever see another temperament.

D: Never. And I was with him for many years. No. I never saw him get angry. Matter of fact, whenever you got into some confrontation with him, he would back off. He'd always tend to back off.

R: I've heard real horror stories about him as a personality. Bob Carter, another matter entirely.

D: That situation, I mean that's another thing, but as far as I'm concerned it was all misrepresented. There were facts that were given to the Secretary of Education who later apologized for the whole affair because he was fed that information. And he made a decision, a very rash decision, a very quick decision which he should never have made. This is something that is on record that Dr. Pittenger, who was the Secretary of Education at the time, has admitted. He was fed the wrong information by certain parties

D: at this University that wanted to get rid of Al Watrel and just nailed him. Really nailed him. It should never have happened. If he had been more forceful, if he had been somebody like Herb Reinhard, they would never have pushed him around like that. Herb Reinhard would have stood his ground and taken care of anything and everything that came his way. He was that kind of person. Al wasn't. Al didn't like to confront people. He didn't like those kinds of situations.

R: How about the Michigan Stadium stuff?

D: That was fun.

R: That was good? Great stuff.

D: Yes, that was. It was the best thing that ever happened. That has to be in the top 10 of whatever happened here at the University. To be able to appear before 60,000 people and to be treated by the University of Michigan administration as a big league team. They didn't think of us as a joke. They didn't give that impression at all. They made sure I had all the best equipment, whatever I needed. Everything was given to me just as Bo Shinblack would have gotten on his Saturday. They had the news conference at the end of the game. They must have had 15 or more reporters there. They had the news conference the night before and that was packed with news media. We had 10,000 musicians on the field at half-time at one time. It was really spectacular. But that was

D: part of many things that we did that only could have happened to Slippery Rock. We traveled to Seattle. We traveled to New Orleans. We traveled to Texas. We traveled to Michigan. We traveled up east. We did some great, great ball games, some great traveling for a small college where normally you don't get to do those kinds of things. Then throw in the state championships and the bowl games. It was a very rewarding kind of experience for me personally and certainly for the University. We weren't just the general run of the mill kind of program. We did some great things. We went down to New Orleans, the first great trip we took and we were down there for four days. We walked around. We did all the things that a tourist would do. Took the boat rides and played the game.

R: Was that Nicholls State?

D: Yes. That's exactly right. It was Nicholls State. That's the first time. They were so gracious to us until the game started and it was the war between the north and the south! The flags came out. The officials. I remember Carol Watrel coming up to me after the game and saying how furious she was because she had walked in near the locker room and there was so much cussing going on. Anyway, their President sent us a letter of apology for the manner in which their football team had conducted themselves. They were the greatest people in the world until

D: the game started, and all of a sudden the war between the north and the south broke out all over again. It was crazy. I said to myself, I never want to play in the south again. This is crazy. This is a football game, you know. This is not a revival of the Civil War. It's crazy. But yet it was a great trip. Seattle took us out for four days. Went through the Boeing plant. Took all kinds of publicity pictures with our kids. They took all the seats out of a 747 and lined us up in offensive and defensive settings to show how wide it was. Had the kids stand in the jet wells and things like that. I did four shows when I was there. I did two T.V. and two radio shows. They had our kids at dinners all over the place. I guess in a very short period of time we experienced some of the things that small colleges never have, simply because we were Slippery Rock. I did show after show after show out of New York, Rockefeller Center. For two straight years I did a radio show every Friday night. They called me and I had to be available for them and I would talk for about 10 minutes. His brother-in-law is a member of our faculty. His name is Dave Shaw. His wife's brother has been producing the Good Morning America show on Channel Four. He's been doing that for quite a long time. Prior to that he was doing all kinds of shows out of NBC prior to joining ABC. Because of our connection he would come down to practice. If we played in Connecticut, he would show up. He was a great fan of ours, and I was doing all kinds of radio shows with him.

R: By telephone?

D: Yes.

R: Yes, exactly.

D: For two years I did a show out of Rockefeller Center. No other school has ever been able to demand that kind of publicity. If Coach Mihalik ever gets successful again in terms of wins, all of a sudden it comes out of the woodwork. All these people will be over. At the Michigan game we had the Detroit Free Press. They spent three days with us and he wrote an article every day from Slippery Rock, on how we were preparing for Shippensburg. And there was another reporter at Shippensburg doing the same thing for them. It was just like the big time. The guy was at our practices, at our coaching sessions and all kinds of stuff and he's taking all kinds of notes.

R: Like having George Plimpton there.

D: The interesting thing was the first article. You know what the first article was about? It was about the 99 cent breakfast in downtown Slippery Rock. He couldn't get over that. He says, I had two strips of bacon, two eggs, toast and coffee for 99 cents. That was the lead story out of Slippery Rock.

R: Do you have a scrap book of all that?

D: Oh. yes. I have a great scrapbook. I have all kinds of scrapbooks. I have a lot of pictures. I was a collector. I was a collector while my wife kept books. I have stacks of books and all those kinds of things. It's a great history.

R: Can we talk about some of the players you've had in terms of walk-ons, rags to riches, people who did the unexpected, went far beyond themselves?

D: I think that's what keeps us in the business the period of time that we stay in it. These are the kinds of rewards that money can't buy. These are the kinds of rewards that I know friends of mine who have made all kinds of money, wish that they could have had that same kind of experience. Because I guess just making money is not the same as making over someone's life and the effects that you have on kids. Probably the greatest rewards, when I look back at the number of youngsters that I've had, are the ones who haven't necessarily been the ones that have been successful on the field. I have had a young man, for example, Donny Leverich who was a starting tackle for me and came down with leukemia and was really on his deathbed in Pittsburgh. We couldn't even go in to see him. I remember calling the President in, Dr. Reinhard, his first year. I asked him to come down to my office. I wanted him to talk to one of my

D: boys who was dying. He came down. He spoke to Donny over the phone because that's all we could do because we couldn't get in to see him. I mean it was just one of those very sad times. I don't know what it was, but I think God gave him another life, and all of a sudden he turned around. He beat it. Of course, he got out of the hospital. We talked to him. He was very, very weak at the time. He went home. Never heard from him again till he walked in the office again in August. He had put his weight back on. He had been lifting. He said, Coach, I'm ready to play football again. I just couldn't believe it. I could not believe it. This transformation was unbelievable before my eyes. I said, of course, Donny. No problem. He said, I want you to know today that I'm still on chemo and I have to take these pills. And whenever you see me at practice, if you see me going off by myself, don't bother coming, just let me go by myself. I'm probably getting sick. I might have to chuck up or something. But he said, don't worry about me, I'll be all right. If I don't show up to practice, you'll know why. I said, Donny, don't worry about it. You run your own schedule. It turned out in the game he would play up to the point he could. I would always start him. He would play as long as he could play. He would take himself in the game, out of the game. I never told him when to go in or out of the game. That

D: was his thing to do. Well, a football season, in a so-called normal season you have players with all kinds of hurts and all kinds of injuries. They have one excuse or another to be out of practice. Not that year. All of a sudden they noticed it. Kids were coming to practice all the time. They weren't missing for the little things. I began to realize why they were no longer a typical team who had the hurts and would stay out of practices for a day or two just to rest up or something. What was happening was that they saw what this kid was going through. They saw this kid trying to practice. Taking the chemo. Going through a deathbed scene. He was vomiting here but he was always working hard. All of a sudden the whole team captured this whole spirit of Donny Leverich. That's the team when we came back in 1976. Matter of fact, I was chosen coach of the year because we weren't expected to be anything that year. I attribute it to Donny Leverich. Believe me, I don't even hesitate. It wasn't me, it was Donny Leverich. That kid played the whole season at his own pace. Practiced at his own pace. And our injury report just dwindled to practically nothing. It's like the morning report in the army. Nobody wanted to be on the morning report. Because what they were going through was very minimal compared to what Donny was going through. It was a

D: great tribute to what the kids saw that Donny was going through. So Donny went through the season and he was given every accolade that you could think of. The courageous awards and all that sort of thing. Then we got a call in August. Donny was dying. He died. We had to open up our season with Lehigh, and I'll never forget going down to Lehigh. The team went down to Lehigh, and that night the coaches and I went out to his wake. The night before the game. We damned near beat Lehigh that day and we shouldn't have even been on the field. But nobody complained. The only complaint was don't take me out of the game. It says a whole lot about human nature and the psychological effects on things. Sometimes we think that maybe all we need is money to win. Sometimes we just need equipment to win. Sometimes we just need skills to win. No. Those things are important but you've got to have the guts of it and that's something else that's so very hard to find. You say, who are you most proud of? Donny Leverich comes to mind just like that. I've had some very successful kids. Ricky Porter who played in the pros. A sweet kid. Great kid. He's now coaching on our staff. I don't think anyone contributed as much to this program as Donny Leverich did with his strength and his inspiration. That's what this game is all about. That's what kept me in the game. Those kinds of guys. Then we had some of

D: these guys who came into the program who were bums. I mean bums. I mean lousy attitudes. They used to call me the godfather. I set the rules and they knew that. When they crossed me there was no doubt as to what was going to happen. They knew. There was no backing off because you were first team or so forth. Every now and then, I guess maybe God gave me a gift, but every now and then, I would see some good in some kids when nobody else did. I remember one particular kid. The staff said, no way. He's through. I said, okay, I appreciate your input, but I'm going to go against you. I really think we ought to do this. That kid turned around and nobody could believe that he turned around. It wasn't probably anything that I did other than the fact that I I gave him the support that he needed to have at that time. And he turned around and today he is a very successful businessman, but he is going through a very difficult phase of his life. Somebody recognized it. Those are the true success stories of what my programs are all about. It's not the wins and the losses. It's how the program was made up. It's the guts of the program. There are many, many stories like that. I'm proud of Dennis Tilko, for example. When he got out of school they said, oh, the kid's a dummy. He'll never make anything of himself. Well, he can buy and sell lots of them right now.

R: He was good in speech class.

D: He liked to talk, right?

R: Oh, yes.

D: He sold cars. That's where he got his money initially. But he saved it and then he took the money and invested it. The youngster was no dummy. Sometimes kids mature at a different rate. The biggest motivator in my personal life was a Spanish teacher who told me that if I promised him that I didn't go to college, he would pass me. I said, okay, I'm not going to college. He passed me. Then I went to college. Then when I came back, I came back in my senior year, I was senior class president. I was president of my fraternity. I was over a three point average and I spoke at the dinner and he was sitting there. That was one of the proudest moments I have ever had in my life. That happens. People motivate at different times in their lives. At that time I was just thinking of athletics. That was all that was important to me.

R: So after a loss, you have a team that's on the move and the morale is high, the expectations are high and then you lose one. That kind of puts the stopper on things. How do bring your folks back?

D: I can probably explain that. The interim president that we had here, Dr. Larry Park. He and I became very close friends. Very close friends. Of all the presidents, really, he was probably the closest friend I had. He was just new. I

D: didn't even know him and I never met him so I didn't even know what he looked like. That's how new he was. We opened up our opening game against Millersville with a T.V. game. We got beat handily. We walked in the dressing room. I had to make a quick decision. How I was going to handle it. When I looked up, there was some strange looking guy that Inever met and I never saw him before, and I said to myself, I betcha that's Larry Park. Didn't know. Wasn't for sure. I said to myself and I don't mean in this the wrong way, I'm going to put a show on. I'm going to try and do something really good here because I was angry. I was ready to chew them out. Instead, I went the opposite way. I went to delivery of encouragement, of hope. Whatever. I went totally different. Didn't yell. Spoke very quietly. You could hear a pin drop. Evidently whatever I said, and I don't even remember what I said, it was from the heart, extemporaneous, as I think sometimes some of your best stuff comes out. I got the nicest letter from Dr. Larry Park, and I was right. That's who it was. He was very impressed in terms of the way I handled it and he wanted to meet me. From that time on, we were great buddies.

R: Where you there for his first speech to the faculty? No, you weren't there then. You missed that because you would have known him had you been there.

D: I didn't know who he was. I was at practice. I didn't get to see him.

R: You should have heard that opening address to the faculty when he came in as interim president. The thing he said is, one of the things I want to tell you folks is, I don't want to hear any Al Watrel stories. He said, I've heard the Al Watrel stories and I don't need any more of them. We have a job to do here, let's get on with it. Terrific speech. I wish I had a copy of that speech. So beautifully done. It was let's heal up our differences.

D: I was very impressed with that man. The last night he was on this campus, he was at my house for dinner. He said, Bob, I don't really want to leave. I said, I don't want you to leave either. But, he said, I made a commitment. It took me years later to truly understand that, because I thought, you can change your mind. In 1987, Dr. Aebersold called me and said, Bob, the football coach just resigned. They have problems down there. The athletic director has told me all the problems and I think you're the only one who can turn it around. Do you think you can physically handle this? I said, well, I want to talk to my wife about this. I've never thought of going back. We talked about it. In the meantime, I wrote up a Christmas list of all things that I felt the program needed. And I said to Dr. Aebersold, I will meet with you only if the Vice-president of Academic Affairs is there, the Athletic

D: Director is there, the Admissions Director is there, the deans are there. That's the only way I will meet with you. I want you all to hear the same story at the same time. I don't want anybody to translate the stories. I want them all to hear this story the same way. They sat down and I explained the list of things that I wanted. And if they were willing to abide by my wishes and they would do for the program what I asked them to do, then I would give it an attempt. They all agreed.

R: Good strategy.

D: Interesting.

R: Yes. You didn't have to do it twice.

D: I didn't have to do it twice. Someone tried to change it once, and it was no because everybody else heard the same story. There was no translation. I wasn't being unfair or unreasonable in any way. I just felt that these were the needs. I told them as simply as this, I don't need to do this. Matter of fact, I'm taking my life in my hands. I'm not being dramatic about this. I don't know if I can handle this or not. I can do the physical. I've been running and walking. But I don't know if I can handle the emotional aspects of this game. What they don't understand is that when you start football, it's three practices a day. You go from 7:30 in the morning to 10:30 at night. Well, I wasn't used

D: to doing that anymore. I told them I wanted a tent out there so I could be under it from time to time. I couldn't stand out there in that heat all that time. From then on it's been a tradition, because now it's where the kids who get injured are able to go under. That's where they keep the warm-up. That's something they never did before. New football office. That was part of my deal. The number of coaches he has, that was part of my deal. A number of other things. I had never been in a card game where I held all the cards before. I guess I was reasonable. They accepted that. With that I was able to come back. Do it. Almost didn't make it a couple of times. Matter of fact, we were in a game in central Connecticut. My first grade friend, Edward B. Hunt, Jr., who was my friend for the rest of my life, his son had played for me. He had just died of cancer. I had been in to see him, Gary, before he died. Talked to him for about a half an hour which is the longest he had ever talked to anyone. Then he died in the meantime. And we're coming back to central Connecticut, and I want that game ball, and I invite his parents. Eddie Hunt was my lifetime friend, his wife and his family, and I want to present that ball to them. Now a ball for non-athletes or someone like that, it doesn't sound like very much, but it's symbolic more than anything else. We won the game by one point.

R: I was at that game. 19-18 or 18-17 or 20-19? They were driving at the end?

D: I was exhausted. They tried for two points at the end and didn't make it. I went over and between trying to talk to the Hunts with the ball and my exhaustion from the game, I turned to Dr. Aebersold and I said, Bob, you have to do it, man, I can't do it. He took the ball and he presented it to the family and did this whole thing for me. Right then I said, I don't know if I can hack this. My heart was beating. I felt that I was taking a chance and I felt I should be rewarded for it. I don't mean personally rewarded for it, but I think the program ought to be rewarded for it. So that's what I felt about having the cards, and that's another episode that we got through here. Interesting. Football can be so symbolic at times. Win one for the gipper. People don't understand that unless you played football or played in a sport or been in a fraternity or some kind of group. It doesn't have to be athletics. It can be anything.

R: Let's talk about the demands on an athlete in terms of homework for the sports program, learning plays, all of the things a person has to be able to do today. I don't know how much it has changed to be able to play football in a very complex sport.

D: It's getting more difficult to play year by year because the game is developing.

R: Yes, but you've got to have some brain power to pull this off.

D: No, you can't be dumb and play football. When I came back,

D: there was another thing I did. This is something I had done earlier but I had to renew it. We had Parents' Day, and we always had parents come in and we would give them a breakdown of the offensive game plan and show them what we were doing. I did that as kind of a lark because I had this one parent when I first got here. He was yelling at me. We were up at Thompson Field which is a very small field. It was like he was in your back pocket. He was on my back constantly, constantly, constantly, all year long. Mr. Ambrose, I'll never forget the man's name. So I decided to have the parents in and give the game plan. But the reason I did it was when I got through the game plan I turned to Mr. Ambrose, and I said, Mr. Ambrose, you've been yelling at me all year long. Now you've seen the offense and defensive game plan. Is there anything you want to change now? That way you can be off my back for the game. He just laughed and we've been great friends from that time on. I didn't know if the guy was going to poke me or what, but I felt that I had to give him that lesson. It was funny.

R: But he took it well?

D: We're good friends. From that time on he said, I will not be on your back and he wasn't.

R: Faculty support has been very good, I gather? With some exceptions?

D: Yes. The faculty support has been a combination of our taking them into social circles after games and involving them in quarterback club meetings and things like that. I think the image that I had to present along with my staff in that we served, as I told you earlier, we served on committees. I didn't sit back and say, I'm not going to serve on any committees. I was on faculty council. I was on a number of all-university committees. Nobody could accuse me of being anything other than a full fledged faculty member. I was doing not only as much as they were doing, but in fact, if they would open their eyes, I was doing a whole lot more than they were doing. I don't know if it's true, but I think I gained the respect of a number of people here because of that. I never thought I was anything special. I was just a member of the faculty doing his job as I was given the job. I think a lot of people respected that. As a result, people like Ted Walwik would write notes to me, letters to me, glowing letters. He was so appreciative.

R: He was so proud to be president of the Quarterback Club.

D: You're right. He's been a Quarterback Club president for a number of years, different years. I don't think it just happens. This is why the people who came in as full-time coaches never had contact with the faculty, and they could never develop that rapport.

R: One of things that impressed me for those 20 years was the coaches were all kind of low profile and always gentlemen. The coaching staff I had seen at Memphis State, that wasn't true. Those guys were out there badgering people, if they thought there was a faculty member who could change a grade with pressure. I saw a lot of strange practices go on and they never did become a winning football team. Their basketball team did pretty well. But I was always impressed with the coaching staff here.

D: They were professionals. They were all professionals. They were professional educators I should say. I think I had better say that. They weren't just football coaches. We were teachers first and we were coaches second. Just as we told our kids. I don't know how that would sound to some people, but it's true. Our kids were students first and athletes second because they were not on scholarships, and the only way we could motivate them was the desire to play the game and play for us. We didn't have the money to give them. We had work-study money. It wasn't any outright money. They had to work for it. They had to put hours in. Some jobs were easy but you still had to be there. I don't know. I agree with you. I was very blessed with some very fine people who probably weren't

D: the most knowledgeable coaches in the world, but they were handlers of human beings and they were educators and that translated here a lot easier. Here's a story. There was a line coach that I had met. He was at the University of Maryland. I watched a practice session there one time in spring ball. We were making a spring tour of different college campuses to learn. I saw this kid go against an offensive lineman in what they call the one-on-one drills or the Oklahoma drills, where they block and the back runs through. Well, this defensive player kept beating the offensive lineman that he put in front and the offensive line coach, a friend of mine, who was so enraged kept putting this same kid, defensively, because he wanted one of his offensive lineman to beat him. Nobody could beat him. What that translated to was this kid probably took on about ten different kids. He was exhausted and they finally carried the kid off the practice field. It was brutal. I don't know how logical it was. I wouldn't dare think of doing that but it was brutal. Later on that night, we went out to eat. I asked the coach about this kid. Is he okay? They carried him away. The ambulance came in and everything else. He said, I don't know. I don't care. He's just a number. I said to myself, if this is big time football, I don't want any part of it. I was still at Bucknell at that time. I said, I don't want any part of this kind of thing. To make a long story short,

D: this guy's career bounced all around. He went to Duke and he was in the pros. He ended up as the head coach at California State, here, in our conference. He was the offensive line coach for the Steelers. Matter of fact, he's still with the Browns right now. Good coach but very brutal. Couldn't win. California State was getting killed. They couldn't win. He asked me at a conference in Pittsburgh, would you come up to my room? I've really got to talk to you. We sat in that room for hours. He wanted to know what the secret was to win in this conference. He had been in so many big time colleges and there were so many short cuts and total disregard for the kids that he was a misfit. In a small college, you don't have everybody doing things for you. You do it yourself. The only way you are going to motivate a kid to play and you can't do it through money because you don't have it, you have to motivate them so they really want to play for the sake of playing. This was foreign to him. He had only dealt with full scholarship kids. He got fired. He had a miserable record here in four years at California State and got fired. He couldn't hack it. Now he's successful in the pros again. It says something about our whole system. I always used to tell the kids this. If you hear me swearing

D: on the field then you can swear. Not until then. Nobody ever cussed on my field. Never. I said, if you fight, just walk off the field. Save me the trouble. In a game as well as practice. Those are my rules. I'm the head coach and those are my rules and if you can live by them, fine, and if you can't then you are perfectly free to leave. And it's funny, the kids are always trying to find out how much they can push you and how far they can push you, so they know the parameters in which they have to operate I used to try and set them as quickly as possible. I had very few discipline problems on my team simply because, I think, that we went to a policy of a freshman, a sophomore, a junior and a senior and our captains as our discipline committee. I wanted all their actions judged by their peers. I had known through years that the peers were tougher on them than I could be. You can't fool your peers. You can fool the coach. I'm not around. I don't know what's happening in the dorms and all that kind of stuff. The kids know. You can't fool your own teammates. The most effective thing I ever did was to bring in this disciplinary group, and I had the right to change any opinion that they may have arrived at, but I never once changed it. As a matter of fact, they were tougher than I would have been. Our kids responded to their own kids. Interesting. Again, playing the psychological game that motivated. And George [Mihalek] has continued it that way. I think its a very good method. Let the kids handle themselves.

Tape 3

Robert Dispirito Interview

R.D. I am helping to coordinate homecoming and I've established the homecoming theme this year which is the parade of champions, bringing back all the championship teams, which includes tennis and soccer but it includes 7 football teams. We have been wanting to do that for a long time so we have that going and I'm trying to put a pep rally out here and we're going to have a laser show to try to revive homecoming. I've reserved a hundred rooms down at Days Inn, Butler, and a couple of big rooms for a dance, and have a post game tailgating down there bring a truck right in and put the tailgate down and have all the food, kind of neat. Just trying to revive homecoming, it's kind of dead to be honest I think some get involved in the work and don't care to do the work. It just doesn't work. They don't work at it. At least I don't think so.

J.R. Needs a new approach.

R.D. Yeah. That's right Joe. It needs a new approach and a we've got to, I think, maybe the word isn't right, stop recycling our alumni and try to go after new alumni. We always get the same people back that's usually 50's, 40's, 30's

I realize this, so I've also started another program which is a mentor program and what I did was, I requested information from all alumni, through the Rock magazine, to see if they care to either adopt a student as their mentor or to have them come into their place of business, accept them as a practicum or intern student, and we received a hundred and thirty replies from a large variety of places and all we are doing now is trying to plug kids into those, so that's another exciting program which is getting the more recent alumni involved. Actually the parade of champions started out with my trying to develop and renovate the McGill rose structure above the stadium. I envision putting a 90 foot deck out front opening it up so people can come out onto a deck with tables and that kind of thing, which could be used by any other department in the university for any kind of seminars or whatever. So I'm doing a fund raising from the 1970 teams and the 1960 football teams and I'm asking them to give basically five hundred dollars for two years of the renovation of McGill Rose. But you know that is what people can see. But what my intent is, is to get an awful lot of guys from the 60's, 70's and the 80's to get involved in giving.

L.B. Get back connected.

R.D. Get them back. Giving them something that they can hang their hat on. All those kind of things, that's what I do over there. Plus try to get the president club membership

which is basically ten thousand dollars, a thousand dollars for a ten year program, and we are looking for people who have or work for a company that has matching funds. Like the other day, a boy I got played for me in the 1970's and he's good equitable. So for five hundred dollars from equitable, we are getting a thousand a year for a ten year pledge, but then in terms of a tax break, it really only costs from about $436 a year because it get's that tax break. So when you try to present it that way, it's really not too bad. And they are getting it to the salary range where they can afford to give four or five hundred dollars, but nationally, athletes are the worst givers.

J.R I had no idea.

R.D. You wouldn't think. I am looking at it from a small college prespective. A lot of these kids couldn't have gotten through school unless they, number one, weren't receiving the money that we were giving them, work study money, and a lot of them wouldn't have gotten through unless the coaches stayed right on them. I mean you talk about guidance, you're talking about advisement. There is no better advisement than an athlete gets. They have study halls. As soon as the grades are at a certain level they are placed in study halls, faculty tutor them so a lot of the young men and women would not get through school unless they have this close monitoring and yet they don't give. So I'm trying to give them something to hang their hat on. Give them a reason.

L.B. Remind them what they got.

R.D. Yes. Well that's what I do when I go and talk to them. This young boy by the name of Sam Debona that I'm meeting with today comes from very humble beginnings. He got through school. He's done well. I think he's a CO of Penny Saver. I don't know if you've ever heard of the newspaper Penny Saver. Anyway, it advertises a lot of the businesses. I could find out what he is, I don't know whether he is the CO or what.

J.R.
If you get a copy, there would be a mast head, I suppose.

R.D. I don't know. I'm going to see him today, I'll find out. I've done a background check on him but it doesn't give me that kind of information.

J.R. A lot of people got into that business early and then sold their franchise I mean sold those papers. A lot of investors who really knew what was going on in terms of marketing started those little news papers and then sold out for a bundle. There's really some big money in that stuff.

R.D. One other funny thing that happened. The school is trying to raise money for the lab school. They are trying to get sponsorships. I guess the lab school is about ready to fold financially. A former fraternity brother of mine that played football at URI, he was a senior when I was a freshman, Vince Saudy, he is the CEO of PPG. The guy makes tons of money but also PPG does a lot of things, but doing a background check on him I found out that his wife has gone blind. As a result he is very partial to handicapped situations or handicapped programs. So Dean Morsink knows about it so they jumped on it. Hey Bob, write him a letter. I'm going in that direction too. I don't know when I'm going to retire Joe I don't have time to retire.

J.R. You shouldn't. There is no point to it.

L.B. This is your third or fourth career.

R.D. Yes.

J.R. So it is an exciting thing.

R.D. I guess I'm the eternal optimist. Anyway, I get involved and I get very optimistic about things.

L.B Well people respond to that, that's great, it works.

R.D. I hope so. Well I don't know in what direction you want me to go in.

JR Oh, well.

R.D. The other day, I sat down in the office and wrote for a couple hours just thinking and writing in between phone calls and interruptions which are very annoying. In writing I figured I said to myself, does anybody really get serious about writing. I can see why they put themselves in a room and don't come out for weeks because when stuff starts pouring into your head, you just don't want any interruptions at all. It's amazing how out of a few phone calls here and there and all of a sudden thoughts were going, they were leaving me.

JR It gives me a good idea. I've got a lovely little portable tape recorder. It's voice activated and it's a battery or also plug in, and if you just had that in your briefcase somewhere, so that when stories cross your mind that we may lose, as we all lose them, you can just flip the button on that thing and put stories on tape.

RD I have one just like that, the one you described. I used it for when I was doing radio for the school the last couple years.

JR If you just have that handy at whatever time at home, or wherever you are, and then all of a sudden you think, I should have included that story, and one's in your mind when your talking with your wife or something and just flip that recorder on and put that thing on tape. And label the tape so that if you use it for some other reason you can put in a fresh tape, and then use it as part of your material.

RD Matter of fact, now that you remind me I've got to get the tape. A friend of my son's got hit in the eye playing racquet ball. He wasn't wearing glasses, and I guess he seriously injured his eye and he couldn't go to class. He couldn't write very well. Anyway, I suggested why don't you take my tape recorder and bring it to class and even when you can't go to class give it to someone else who can record it, and he has used it.

jr Good.

rd He's got over a 3.0 average, best average he's ever had. I said to his dad, buy him a tape will you please, I mean a recorder.

jr Have you ever had student record you in class, blind students.

rd Occasionally.

jr It's kind of an experience.

rd You know what is interesting, Joe? My daughter was having problems with a class, and I asked, well I checked on her to be honest with you. I had called a colleague to find out how she was doing. I said do you mind if I give her a tape recorder and she brings it into your class which would help. It's a form of study obviously. He wouldn't hear of it. You know it was almost like I was shocked when he said that to me.

jr Absolutely.

rd Because I wasn't expecting that kind of answer, and I'm being very embarrassed when I say, well I do it all the time, I said I do it all the time I said I think it's a great form of study but if you feel it's an invasion of your privacy, how else can it be? They are listening to what you are saying. I mean if is he going to say something that he shouldn't be saying he shouldn't be saying it in the first place. I don't know. I mean I don't understand, but he said no. I just thought it was a good idea because I used it all

the time. I have a lot of students who do that a lot. Matter of fact, I encourage the students to do it. I really do. It is one of the things, two things I ask them to do, do that or get into study groups. Those are the two things I always try to tell my classes that work.

jr I've had blind students who ask to use a tape recorder and I say absolutely. And then I think about them carrying out my lectures and I think I ought to shape up a little.

rd There you go, not bad.

lb It helps both.

jr So I started to function in a more orderly fashion.

rd Exactly.

jr Yes. And it was interesting.

rd Not that it is going to change a lot but it does organize you a little better.

This is Joseph Riggs and Leah Brown interviewing Bob Dispirito at Bailey Library on 02 June 1992 and this is the second in the series of oral memoir tapes that we are going to do with Coach DiSpirito and this one is pretty much about the early years so we have a title. Is there a beginning you'd like to make?

rd I tried to make some kind of a connection between my fathers immigration to the United States, for example, and how I perceived him, and how it has affected me. I sat down the other day in the office and just wrote. May I read this?

jr Absolutely.

lb Sure.

rd Just let me kind of read it. It's awkward. It's one writing, but as you've said before, Leah, I'm sure you'll clean it up for me, correct all my grammar, all that sort of thing. Anyway this is what I wrote. Matter of fact it was very, kind of exciting trip of nostalgia for me.

My father immigrated to the United States at the age of nine in 1902 from a town near Naples, Italy. He proceeded to work in a mill as well as practicing his tailoring trade that most Italian youngsters learn in the old country. He grew tired of working in the textile mill and saw little future in it, so he learned the barbering trade at an early age. After serving his apprenticeship he had an opportunity

to buy the business. This again was the new challenge for a young man with good work ethics. He expanded his business from men's hair cuts to women's hair cuts which eventually lead him to mastering the trade of hairdressing. So it was logical for him to expand his two chair barbershop to include a separate floor for lady's hairdressing. His goal was to now cater to the wealthy people of the city so he just simply charged high prices to attract the clientele. The shop was the in place to go so he accomplished what he set out to do. I mention all this because I feel I have acquired my dad's work ethics which sustain me in my life time. Sports is what kept me in school from high school, prep school, college and graduate school. I learned from my dad that in order to be successful one must appreciate what one has, but not satisfied. He taught me to reach for my dreams by setting achievable goals that will lead one to the eventual goal of success, and even more, as a young man I always looked to improve my skills even if it meant a sacrifice beyond what I was accustomed to making. In my early days, playing baseball meant going to the high school games, waiting in the woods behind home plate for any foul balls that might come in our direction. Of course the team had their managers, there too to retrieve foul balls, but we were better organized then they were. We had a relay of three or four guys and when the ball came in our direction we then threw the ball to the next person to the next person to the next person and the last guy did the sprinting. He was the fastest guy we had. Actually the high school coach, Gus Sevarium was providing us with the tools to improve our skills and eventually most of us went on to play for him anyway. Actually I thought he realized this because by the time we entered his program in high school he knew our names and what we did with the foul balls. However, there were times when we were not as successful in getting the foul balls so we did the next best thing. We would place a new cover on the ball by taping it with white tape. The only problem with that was then after many layers of tape the ball became as hard as a rock and it was either stinging your hands when it hit you, and Lord, if you got by it you were really in trouble. Learning football skills also came a bit different than now. We didn't have the advantage of little league, or midget football coaching, as a boy's of today do. But the desire was the same or more. Football playing consisted of little or no equipment or coaching. The neighborhood west side or east side or whatever had their teams and by word of mouth every game was scheduled. We didn't have the advantage of adult leadership. It was just between the kids to arrange the time and the place. Whatever each individual had for equipment is what they wore. One kid might have a helmet, another one might have some shoes, another might have shoulder pads. But most of us simply showed up with two or three layers of sweaters in place of pads and a stocking cap over our heads. The time of the contest was

determined by injuries, darkness, or a fight or just pure exhaustion. What I just described for baseball and football holds true for basketball and hockey which was popular in our early childhood. The reason for my mentioning my early sports participation was that we played and participated in our rate of interest. We did not get burned out by all the stress and adult supervision young kids of today get exposed to. Matter of fact one of my earliest thrills was when I first participated in high school sports and was issued my very first uniform. That has to be one of my greatest thrills. That's where I stopped. I don't know. I don't know what direction you want to go in, dates, times, it was fun doing it. It was a lot of recollection.

LB That's nice. We'd like to have those notes too, or make copies of them. I'd like to hear more about your family your dad and brothers, I know one brother, he was here for a while.

RD My brother Don.

LB Yes, great person.

RD Thank you. He was here for several years as the public relations director. He is now at Washington. Well, we come from a fabulous family of nine children. My dad obviously was the hair dresser, barber, whatever. Probably one of the smartest men because I admired his common sense and that is something I hope I tried to acquire from him. He had very little formal education. He eventually became the head of - the hair dressing board in the state of Rhode Island, and so he moved even in that direction. He had to give tests and correct tests and he did all certification for the state of Rhode Island. But to go back, yes, coming through a large family is quite an ordeal. Sometimes it is the matter of survival. The older boys, my brother Ernest and Nada, for example, were the disciplinarians. My dad was working all the time, six days a week, and then we would all go on Sunday and clean the beauty parlor, you know wash the floors, paint, do that every week, but the discipline was pretty well handled by my older brothers. You would think that there would have been some animosities, but there wasn't. To this day I respect my older brothers to the extent that there is a very loving connection there. It will always happen and that will never change. But we came through. We had six boys and three girls and the only professionals were a brother Angelo, who has since died. He was a lawyer. Then I went to college and my brother Don also went to the University of Rhode Island. One of the kind of thrills going through there to is the fact that when I played football at URI I was a senior when my brother was a freshman, and he wore the same number and he played as a freshman and I was just finishing up as a senior, he went to

the same fraternity, those kind of things, but the family has been a very close family. It has lasted. It has survived the test of time. Because two years ago we had a family reunion, we always have a family reunion in the summer in Rhode Island, my brother and I at this point always rent a cottage, but we always owned a cottage. Or we lived in a tent. My mother, God bless her soul, she would have nine children in a big tent for the entire summer down at Point Judith, which is the tip of Rhode Island. Living in a tent and cooking over a Coleman stove, wash boards, I don't know how she did it, but she always said it was good for the kids. My father would come down on Saturday with his car full of food and we ate good for about four days, and then all the food was eaten and we couldn't wait till he showed up again on Saturday. That bond I think was also realized two years ago, as I started to say, because we had what we call a master family reunion and everyone was there but my brother Angelo who has since died. We had a three day reunion and we were allowed as members of the family to invite any ten guests that we wanted for Friday night. We hired out a hall. So I invited ten guys that I haven't seen for fifty years. It was better than any high school reunion, and, incidently I got lost in the high school reunion. I have never been to a high school reunion. I've never been invited to one. I kept saying, hey, I'm here and the paper at home was usually filled with my coaching accomplishments, but for some reason I've never been invited to a high school reunion. There is a mistake there somewhere. We had maybe two hundred and some odd people at the reunion and it was just as nostalgic a time as I'll ever spend in my life; and then Saturday, was at my brother Arthur's home. He has a big farm, swimming pool, so forth and we had family games, family contests doing the games, the bocci relay games, the whole day was filled with those kinds of things and then Sunday everybody came down to the beach which is in Point Judith, and where my brother and I always rent two cottages, and we had the third day there. You know when you think of all the children, all the grandchildren and all the brothers and sisters, I mean, Dispirito clan's a real gang, a real gang of people. But it survived the test. It's just wonderful. I had a niece who coordinated all this, she sent out newspapers and briefs and updates and she finally did a book. I'll have to look for it. But she did a book on the history of the family, gave all the names, contacts, the phone numbers so that we can never say we forgot the address, or the phone numbers. She brought everything up to date, the children, the names of the children the birth dates, and all that kind of thing. So to answer your question we've had a, at least I've had a wonderful life with my family, and I tried to emulate that as closely as I can with my five children, but that is the kind of family we came through. My dad, I had two brothers, two sisters, and my dad were all hairdressers and they expanded that to two beauty schools and it wasn't until just

recently that they got out of the business. My brothers retired, but I washed floors from the time I could get on my knees every Saturday night or every Sunday I would wash floors and we would take turns as we grew into the job, and it was one of the reasons we hated to grow older, because we knew we were getting to be the next in line to wash the floors of the beauty parlor. My dad always had this white strip down the middle, this big "A". The name of the place was Angelo's House of Beauty. It was a big "A", a big white stripe right down the middle, he had fourteen booths, so it was a big beauty parlor, and that white line had to be perfect. I'd scrub that thing. I hated that white line, I thought at times of painting it black. That was the family affair on Sunday that we all went to the beauty parlor and cleaned it up. That place was spic and span on Monday's. Other than that we as children spent the entire summer at the ocean at Point Judith at Rhode Island. We lived in a tent and progressively built a little cottage in a campground at the very very tip of Rhode Island. The light house was right next door to us. We spent a great childhood there. So we took our shoes off and wouldn't put the shoes back on until we returned three months later. That was the kind of life that was a very simple, a very secure life. The thing that I probably think best about everything was that my mother was a house wife, never worked outside the home, but worked her hands to the bone in the house, but the important thing was when we came into the door, it was always, hi mom, where are you mom, mom, and if she wasn't there, I mean it was almost threatening, I mean she was the security we had all the time. You talk about the Peanuts group carrying the little security blanket around with them.

You know about three year's ago at this reunion I decided to do an oral history of the family, so at that big reunion I took my video camera with me and I sat all my brothers and sisters down and we just started talking about our family, what it was like when we grew up, stories that we heard and so forth and I video taped the whole thing. It was two and a half hours, three hours long and I copied it and sent one each to my brothers and sisters. It is a real treasure because I captured it. It was just of those spare of the moment things. I don't what made me think about it other than the fact that I'm always kind of thinking of those things. I record everything that my kids have done. I've got film upon film upon film of our kids growing up and whenever we go places I'm always the guy with the camera. I thought that at the time it was a neat thing to do and it turned out to be fantastic because we talked about our childhood; and I remember, for example, a story, and it was threatening to me. My father was a barber, a hair dresser. He wasn't earning much money, and nine children. I don't know how the story got to me, but it got to me that my dad and mom couldn't handle the nine children financially and that they

were thinking about putting a couple of the kids up for adoption. Well that always bothered me, you know, all these years it bothered me and I never said anything about it, but when we did this oral history we started talking about different things. I said I got to get this off my mind, so I told the story to the group and they proceeded to tell me it was absolutely nonsense. It never happened. I don't know where I got it, they wanted to know where I got the story, I said I don't know where I got the story, it is something that was in the back of my mind. Isn't it funny after all these years, this threat or this imperfection, so to speak, was erased you know, interesting.

JR One of my topics was things that haunt you through out your life and that's a haunter there.

RD Yes it was, and I must admit that it took a little bit of courage even to bring it up. Maybe I didn't want to know if it was true, I don't know. I did bring it up anyway and they all said it was nonsense, it was not true. Other than a very large family, I used to call it the large Italian family. We always had spaghetti on Wednesdays and Sundays. I never ate anything other than spaghetti on Wednesdays and Sundays, the point being that it seemed that every time we sat down to eat somebody would walk in the house, and it was always, sit down, make another place, you must eat with us, and I must admit it sometimes it got to be very annoying you know because every time we seem to be sitting down to eat I'd say I wonder who's going to pop in now. That was the kind of household my mom and dad ran. People from the neighborhood came in, it wasn't just family, and they were always welcome. There was always a pot of coffee, there was always a little Annasette, which was called coffee royal, which they would put into their coffee, and a little pastry was always there. So whenever you popped in it was always sit down have a cup of coffee, have a pastry and if you didn't do it they were very upset, they were insulted. They did that with the meals too. Sometimes I'd wonder whether we'd have enough food at the table, but they'd invite people to come in, so our house was the house where a lot of the neighborhood kids felt very comfortable in coming in and as I look back that is very important because that's the way I ran my household. I never ever let my children feel as though when they brought people to our home, that it was an imposition in any way, whether it was for dinner or whatever. Matter of fact a good friend of mine who spoke here is a Lieutenant General who is just retiring. He is a fraternity brother of mine, Rocko Negress and he was a Commandant at Fort Dix, and the ROTC people know about it and said, do you know Negress? Yes. I played ball with him in URI and he's a fraternity brother. Could you get him to come up for commencement to speak at the commissioning ceremonies, and I did. He gladly accepted because we haven't seen each other for 35 years and so

he was my house guest for three days, and one of the greatest kicks he ever got was as we sat down to eat my kids would come in with other friends or other friends were just popping in and he said to me, Bob this is like Grand Central Station, and I laughed because that's the exact words of my mother. We used to say, what is this? Grand Central Station. Anytime you want friends to your house, put food on the table, everybody shows up. So it was funny, we had a great reunion with General Negress.

LB When your dad came here, you said he was a little fellow, nine years old. Did he come with his family?

RD He came with his mother and his brother. From Ellis Island they went to Brooklyn, New York. It was pretty in those days, for example I'm reading Gay Folices Unto the Son right now. He's written many books on Italian migration. Anyway this is his life and he talked about his dad going through the apprentiship of being a tailor, and that was a very common thing, and I'm saying gee that is what my dad did as I'm reading the book, and I've gotten a lot of common ground that I've remembered a little bit of, and my mom and dad very seldom spoke of their background. It's not until recently, and I say recent as 15-20 years, that I've really learned the history because my brother Don really did some research into it. My grandmother I knew as a child and she died I guess when I was probably 7 or 8 years old. I was just learning how to speak Italian because she couldn't speak English, so as children we had to learn how to speak Italian. When my mother and father didn't want us to understand what they were saying they would speak in Italian, which always annoyed me. In those days you see if you had an Italian accent or any other it wasn't very popular. People worked very hard to get rid of accents. My grandfather came, didn't like it and went back; and his wife, my grandmother, decided to stay and that was one of the sore spots, the separation, so he died in Italy. She died here. She didn't want to go back to the old country; he didn't want to come back to the United States. So that was one of the things and they were very embarrassed because in those days if you had a divorce or separation or mentally retarded child you put them in closets. Those are the things you don't talk about. As a result I have learned more about the history of my family in the last 20 years than I did prior to that but they just didn't speak about some things. It wasn't until I really got into this oral history of the family that a lot of this stuff was coming out. I learned more in that oral history listening to my brothers and sisters relate stories and things that happened to them, my dad coming over coming to New York and then migrating to Rhode Island as a tailor, and I used to remember my dad always sewing his pants or doing something. It was one of

those silent things I use to say, isn't that a great skill he has. I wonder where he got it. But I never thought to ask him how did you learn how to sew. He was a tailor but I only new he was a hairdresser and a barber. As I look back, reading Gay Salees' book Into the Son (???) which is a history of his father and migration into the United States, it's very interesting. I could relate in many ways to things his father did and my father did. He did come here and met my mother. She was not born in Italy, she was born here, and I knew nothing of her side because there was a separation on their side so they didn't speak of their family. We have a large family, a very close family. There was a chain of discipline that was handed down from the oldest to the youngest. My brother Ernest was my disciplinarian and as a kid I used to some day wish I could get big enough so I could punch him in the nose. He was tough on me. He made me do all the chores around the house, but I dearly love the guy and I call him at least once a month, but it is funny how those things develop. Well, all during the rest of the family years, I think of the history in terms of cousins, the big Christmas parties. In those days when we had Christmas, all my relatives from Providence, Rhode Island and nearby areas would come to our home, and we would sleep in shifts. There was not enough beds and we had about 30 - 40 people and the big banquet tables. We put up special tables, we ate in shifts, played cards in shifts, everything was done in shifts. Those were good times and at Easter we would go to my cousins and do basically the same thing in Providence. Now going Providence which is the capital of Rhode Island, that was going to the big city. We would go to the big theaters, the big stages, that was always kind of special. Then it was the ocean, and as I look back I think of what my mom and dad did; they sacrificed their time. My dad worked six days, would show up Saturday night, spend Sunday at the beach, and be back at work on Monday, and my mother mamaged this with a big army tent and nine kids. I don't know how she did it, and yet in this camp ground everyone became a family, a connecting family. Some of the greatest friendships we had resulted from the campground. To this day, we still meet some people that we grew up with. Every Saturday night was a camp fire big bon-fire, didn't call it camp fire, they were bon-fires on the beach. Everybody would bring tires on Saturday and we'd stack these tires up, then when the boat came by the point going to Newport we would shine the lights and it would throw it's light's out on the beach to us and that was time to go, that was the end of the night. Soon as the lights came up from the New York boat everybody had to go back go to bed, so it was kind of nostalgic too. We grew up, we had a great life, it was a very simple life. We really didn't know how poor we were until, years later, when we saw what other people had. Then we realized we didn't have too much but what we did have was a lot of security a lot of security,. and I think most of us learned the lesson and provided that to our

children. Our place has always been a place for them to come back to. People ask me when are you going to retire, sell your home, and leave? Not me. That home is stability to my family. To the day I die I'm going to own that house. It's a place for them to come to and it's big enough to handle all of them, and it's something that I've learned from my family. That's one of the mistakes that my brothers made with my mom and dad. In Rhode Island, it was very traditional that the homes in Rhode Island were all three story apartments, and it was always whoever lived on the ground floor was usually the owner. We had the whole downstairs and then the two stories up, the two apartments, one on each floor, so there were four apartments that you would rent out. In the house that we lived in there was like five bedrooms, so it was always enough for us when we did move out, get married, and we could always come back. My brothers decided that it was too much for mom and dad to keep and convinced them to buy a new piece of property and move into one of the apartments of the property that they bought, which again was three other apartments, and they always believed that by having the apartments or duplexes it paid for itself and you didn't have to pay for the rent, so it made sense. It was the biggest mistake they ever made. Because when they moved to the apartment, the apartment was not large enough to house Bob Dispirito when he came in with his five kids. That really upset my mother very much; and I said to myself I would never allow my kids to make that mistake with me. So if my house is a place of security and some people feel that their homes are just a house they could sell it and live in some kind of condo, but a house means a lot more to me than that. It symbolizes a lot more than just the physical structure. That's one of the lessons I learned from my family too. So my kids are always welcome, they can bring anybody they want, they know they never felt inhibited in anyway to say to one of their friends, come over to the house for dinner. They always knew there was always an extra plate. If there wasn't we'd make up something, that kind of thing. But I think that's a security, sometimes a mistake I think some parents make with their children. They don't provide that security or the opportunity to feel very comfortable at home. I don't at least.

JR Well it surely happens because some kids grow up and they simply don't come back, you know, and they don't have that.

rd

That's a good point Joe. I think sometimes in measurement of what you've done is sometimes measured by the desire of the kids to come back.

jr

Sure, a fair-sized tragedy is when you see brothers and

sisters who don't speak, or brothers and sisters who don't see each other at all, and it happens, it happens far to often obviously

rd

Yes, I know a friend of mine was recently was talking about his lack of feelings for his mom and dad. They gave him a lousy childhood, he has no respect for them. They are in a nursing home, and thanks God he doesn't have to bother with them anymore. I'm saying, wow man, you missed so much in this life time

They sacrificed, it was constant sacrifice. My mother sacrificed for my dad;, there wasn't anything she wouldn't do. I mean the meals were ready at certain times, and that's it. If he said they were going to eat at five o'clock, that meal was there at five o'clock because he was always on a tight schedule. Even with the beauty parlor he would always work an average day and then go back for two or three appointments at night. He wouldn't get home until 10:30 - 11 o'clock doing special favors, and he was dealing with the wealthy people in town. He was getting twenty-five dollars a permanent in the 1930's. That's a lot of money.

jr

Good night!

lb

That was a lot.

rd

They loved it. They used to say they loved it because it was exclusive. The only ones who could afford that were the wealthy, and they had enough of the trade. I guess in hairdressing you get accustomed to an operator and some of them would stay with an operator for 25-30 years. It's amazing and my dad had seven booths upstairs and three down stairs, there were ten booths. He had 14 operators. All 14 weren't operators. He had a couple of barbers and pedicurists and all that kind of stuff. He had a sizeable but a very loyal following, but there wasn't anything he wouldn't do if someone or something came up and it was a Sunday. He'd do it.

jr

Did he work for the funeral homes also?

rd

Oh yes, they always did those. I could never understand that.

jr

I know beauticians and that's were they draw the line.

lb

But someone has to do it.

jr

Of course.

rd

That's right and not only that, they were their customers.

lb

Sure.

rd

They wouldn't do it, they only did for their customers Joe.

jr

I see.

rd

I recall that, it was just their customers. You know, they all, I guess, developed a real good life style as a result of being hairdressers and barbers. It wasn't for me obviously. Sports was my world. That's what motivated me to even stay in school. I don't care whether it's that or becoming a doctor or engineer, what is the difference. It was something motivating my brother Angelo, being a lawyer as I said, and Don ended up getting his doctorate. We are the ones that stayed in the education field. The rest of the kind of stayed. My one brother worked for IBM for many years.

lb

It is fascinating that your dad was so expert in management and marketing without a degree.

rd

Common sense. Tremendous feeling for people.

lb

But to manage this large business and school.

rd

When something went by him, passed by him, he would learn from it. He didn't have to go through it two or three times and he acquired buildings and land, so he did other than just his beauty parlor. He went beyond that and he had the foresight to develop a cottage for the kids buy all those kinds of things, but Mr. Angelo was very well liked. I mean he was very, very well liked. He was very accommodating to people and people were not condescending to him. He would say funny things and I used to sit around him sometimes and I'd think you didn't pronounce that right dad, but I didn't

have the courage to correct him. One of the things he would say would be a cartoon of cigarettes and I'd always think, dad it's a carton of cigarettes, it's not a cartoon of cigarettes, but I never had the courage to correct him.

rj

Good for you.

rd

And rightly so, so insignificant now as you look at it, but he did have great loyalty in his clientele, and I think that was the success of his business. He was not only accommodating, but a very good man. Didn't try to exploit people.

rj

When there are nine kids, were there behavior problems? I mean, did you have some mavericks from time to time? Who kind of violated the schedule?

rd

No, my brother Ernie was the disciplinarian and if I didn't do it I'd get whacked or something like that, if I didn't do the yard work I was suppose to do, you know things of that nature. Well we never had drinking problems, drugs, you know that today's families have to cope with, we didn't have any of that kind of stuff. Nobody ran away from home, we never got to the point where, even though I resented my brother Ernie, I wouldn't dare tell him because he'd beat me up anyway. I wouldn't tell him, so we always got along. But you know it doesn't make much sense to you but to me it does. The point being that he was my father, because my father was working all the time, he was the one who would discipline us and I've never held any animosities. It was just one of the things. I don't know if I'm saying it right, we never had the inner problems in the family and to this day that same feeling prevails. With my five kids, Lisa being a caboose, Lisa was the one who was like seven years later and the others were like a year, fourteen months apart, but I've never had any problems. People say did you have problems with your kids. We didn't ever. They developed a bond, and I credit this to my wife Marilyn because I wasn't around that much because I was coaching and holding two three jobs, working seven days a week trying to get ourselves through financially. To get in the car, you know when you hear about the car's they get in and the kids fight the kids were so close and to this day to this day they are very close. I mean they can't wait to see one another. We are waiting for the birth of our first grandchild this week everybody is on pins and needles you know. I said, that poor child, that poor child, because it's going to be so spoiled it's going to be terrible. I'm amazed by it and I don't know what we did special, maybe it was the interaction between my wife and I. I don't know but it was always a give and take

situation and we never raised our voice. I don't think I've ever raised my voice to my wife. We've never had any arguments that I know of. We've had disagreements and we disagree but it's always been very private, and it was never in front of the kids. Maybe that's what it was, I don't know what it is, but our kids, thank God, are extremely close and they can't wait to be with one another. Never had any problems. The only one is Lisa, she is spoiled rotten. She is the spoiled one right now. She's a lovely girl. She's the head of the rocklettes, she's captain of the rocklettes this year, but sometimes she forgets to study. All my other kids I no problem with, buzzed through school and so I don't know what it is other than the fact that my wife's done a super job. Sometimes I think that that's the way my family was. I do know kids in school that had a terrible home life. They were arguing, they couldn't say a decent word to one another, they were always at each others throats. I think one of the worst things that ever happened to my family was when one of them came home smoking or they found out that Ernie smoked. That was terrible. Nobody smoked except my dad. He smoked his White Owl cigars after dinner, which I can't stand now. Champ Storch, my buddy downstairs, I played golf with him yesterday, I was riding in the car, and the cigar smoke, I'm saying, Champ, get on the other side of the car. It's not an exaggeration. I tend to think that people don't believe me but it is true. I don't know that I touched the bases that you think I should.

jr

Do you have music at home?

rd

Yes, Dianne was a music major here at the University. She taught voice. She studied with O'Bannon for many years and Dianne is a lovely singer.

jr

Oh yes, I've heard.

rd

She's done well. Jimmy started and he's in a Doctoral program in musicology. He studied the taubla. He's been to India three different times. He has this love for India and the taubla which is a rhythm instrument, and he is one of the few Americans that can play like he can play, and he's constantly sought after in the Indian communities in Pittsburgh for either teaching their children or him playing when they have a big time singer coming in, Indian singer, they always call for Jim to come in and play the taubla. And his roommate played the sita, the long sita, and he became a member of the family. He called me dad, he called Marilyn mom. He was a wonderful kid. He got his doctorate.

An extremely bright boy and in computers and science and works at GE makes about $80 thousand dollars a year. He's done well. But those two guys go around playing in the Indian community, matter of fact Jim right now is traveling throughout Canada with a guy from Grove City, who is originally from South Africa, doing puppet shows. They spent eight weeks in Canada doing high schools, grade school puppet shows, and Jim runs one of the puppets. Jim is a drummer, he's played all kind of drums so, Robbie played an instrument. Robbie played the trumpet. David would have been a super drummer, but his brother was a drummer. We do have a strong background.

jr

Tradition to that when you were a child?

rd

I played the piano.

jr

Do you remember your piano lessons?

rd

Never had a lesson in my life. I had an operation, an appendix operation. My sister always played the piano, my sister is Dick Mannings mother. Dick Manning, the recreation director, that's his mom, my sister.

End of Tape #3

Robert Dispirito Interview

rd

I learned how to play by ear. And Marilyn plays piano. Whenever I would get nervous, or something was bothering me my wife always new because I'd go to the piano and play. It was very relaxing to me. I always felt that playing the piano took total absorption of my thoughts and I couldn't think of anything else. I would be totally absorbed in playing. I'm not a good player, I just play by ear, I just play for my own enjoyment. I wouldn't play it before anybody but I play. But Marilyn is a good pianist. So then again Jimmy would bring all his band to the house and they would practice in our living room, our ears oh God and I taped it. It's wonderful now to look back and say, there they are. Jimmy and Diane have been the real music majors in our family. A little background, as I said, my sister, my wife, but we've always encouraged that kind of thing.

jr

Can we go to elementary school. When you first started your formal education? What town was this all taking place in when you were?

rd

It was the town of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and I remember first grade very much because I stayed back. I stayed back in first grade and from that time on I was always onward but I stayed back in the first grade I guess I was not emotionally ready. You look back and you remember, I don't know if you can remember all your grade teachers but I know them all. Mrs. Lucy, who used to give me the strap when I would do something wrong. I'd get slapped, oh boy she could hit. Mrs. Jones, people like that, elementary school was pretty average for that time. We went to school in the morning, break, go home for lunch, come back in an hour. That break was always great. I was never in a hurry we'd walk, I could walk, it was a neighborhood school. I'd walk home, have lunch, be back by 1 o'clock and be out by 4. And other than the interesting teachers we had I don't remember a whole lot, other than getting the strap occasionally because we were talking in class or something like that.

jr

Was it a Catholic school?

rd

No, it was a public school. In those days you could get the strap. You could get the strap by your teacher or the room you are involved in. First grade, second grade, third grade but if you are really bad you went to see Mrs. Lucia, she was the principle. She was a big woman, and man when she gave you the strap you weren't supposed to cry because that was not the sign of a man if you cried. It was tough

sometimes not to cry. But in those days, if I recall, it was interesting versus some of the experiences that I've seen since I've gotten to the teaching field, in those days when I got the strap, if I dared went home and they found out, because I certainly wasn't going to tell them, but if they found out Mrs. Lucie gave me the strap then I got a second strap when I got home. Okay. Today, when that happens, they come with their lawyers, they want to sue you for touching their child. It's a totally different concept. It was a very tranquil time, very pleasant memories the elementary school, great friends. The only tragedy of the whole thing was the first grade. I think one of the things that helped set me back was that my brother accidently shot me. That was one of the only things that ever happened in my house. We were painting the house, redecorating the house. My dad always had a big safe, one of those floor safes, and for some reason it was left open. I never found it open because we used to always see if we could find him and get in and see what was inside. He would never show us or once in a while he would show us some of the coins. He collected coins and things like that. But it was open one day and he had a revolver, he kept a revolver in there, and my brother Angelo, I was doing a somersault, it was a hand stand, that's what it was on the bed. He said I'm going to shoot you, and bingo he did. There was no clip so he thought it was fine. He was too young to know there was a bullet in the chamber, he shot me and he hit me in the arm, maybe about four inches more and it would have hit me right through the heart, but he hit me in the arm. It went through my entire arm came out below my elbow, went into a ceder chest into my brothers suit that he had in there. He had a wallet in the pocket of the suit and the slug lodged there. To this day I have that slug, but it went through my entire arm without touching a bone.

jr

Unbelievable.

rd

It really is, especially the joint, and the only thing that saved me was I remember running out to the kitchen and saying look what Angelo did to me, and the thing was just spurting. My mother was peeling potatoes, for some reason I remember that, and she looked up and she didn't know what to do so she called for my brother Ernie, my disciplinarian brother, whom I dearly love. He was in ninth grade and he had just learned first aid and he new how to put a tourniquet on, so he put a tourniquet on, that's what saved my life. That blood was just flying out you know and the worst part of it all was after my dad got home. The ride to the hospital was so frightening, the guy was on two wheels. I forgot about my injury, I was worried about getting to the hospital safely. That was probably the only tragedy. It was purely an accident. My brother jumped out the window, and

the kids, my brothers, were in the yard. They heard the shot. They saw my brother jump out and go running so they chased after him, and brought him back. They didn't know why he was running from something, and they brought him back. He stayed under the bed for days. He was ashamed to come out because he shot his brother. It was all purely an accident. But I think that is the only tragedy we ever had. We lived around the ocean all summer, nobody ever came close to drowning. They did leave me on the beach one time. They all left. I woke up and there was nobody on the beach and I didn't know what to do. I was probably four or five years old and this policeman came along and he asked me my name and the only thing I knew was Bobbie. I didn't know my last name so he took me to the police station and bought me an ice cream cone. In those days that was quite a treat to get an ice cream cone. Hours later they came back looking for me. They finally realized one of them was missing.

lb

There's an empty seat at the table.

rd

They went to sit down, who's plate is empty. So they ended up calling the police and they found me. But you know it is funny when you think back. We were traveling as a family, Marilyn and I and the five kids, and we drove away from a restaurant. It was miles down the road and somebody said, where's Diane. We had left her back at the restaurant.

lb There is a movie Home Alone, based on a story like that, very popular.

rd

Yes, I saw the movie, interesting.

rj

With nine youngsters and a mother and a father, three meals a day must have been an enormous volume of food that had to be prepared. I gather she had help in the kitchen.

lb

With three girls.

rd

Well, I guess she did to some extent, but I guess for periods of time she didn't. But the two girls were of course hair dressers and they were off working too. I guess as kids, our whole staple was coffee and toast, maybe some eggs in the morning, and that was breakfast. Lunch was always soup. To this day I love soup. My mother would come up with every kind of concoction you could think of. It had left overs in it, but she made great soups, and that's what we had for lunch. It was soup. That was it, soup and bread. Dinner was the big meal. I remember we were at points where I don't know if you know what poelenta is,

poelenta is like a corn meal, it's a...help me.

lb

Like cream of wheat.

rd

Yes, it's that kind of texture, only it's yellow and poelenta is made and covered with sauce. And that was many times all we had to eat. We'd all eat from the main dish. You'd fill your plate with poelenta. To this day I love palenta, I buy instant palenta though. It only takes two minutes to make, but it's something that when it's left over you'd slice it the next morning and then fry it.

jr

We call it mush.

rd

Exactly. You know as I look back, cholesterol, fat, who thought of those things? We just ate good. Right? But as I look back, soup for lunch, there was all kinds of nutritional soups and then for dinner my dad would have what we called colonsolad - the lettuce. He always had a huge bowl of lettuce and he could eat the whole thing himself. He just loved lettuce. So we all were very accustomed to eating the salads and we always cooked with olive oil. Never. I can't ever think our cooking with animal fat or lard. It was always olive oil. The calories were there probably, but the animal fat wasn't there, and I guess when she made some of our favorite meals like veal cutlet or something of that nature, a lot of veal cutlets had to be made, but my mother always made a huge pot of sauce, spaghetti sauce on Saturday. That was very traditional and she always put in tons of meat balls or other kinds of chunks of meat and that was our Saturday night meal. Either that or the pizzas she would make, but that was the meatball sandwiches and then we'd have the spaghetti and meatballs again the next day. She was also wise too. Those big pots she'd put out in the unheated porch area, then all the fat would be on top and she would always scrape the fat off. Today I do that but nobody told her to do that it was just good common sense.

lb

Never heard of cholesterol but protected you anyway.

rd

Right, sure. I mean as I look back, we ate you know probably within the standards of today's nutritional understanding that we know in terms of cholesterol animal fats and all that kinds of stuff.

jr

Were clothes handed down?

rd

Oh gosh yes.

jr

That's a dumb question.

lb

Did you ever have a new suit.

rd

I'll tell you, yes. The first new suit I had was my first pair of long pants. That was the very first suit and it was for a confirmation, and I got a pair of long pants. My Lord, I could have pranced right down the street. But it was always nickers and to find socks that didn't have holes in them was unusual and we were always embarrassed because we didn't like holes in those argyle socks that you had all the way up to your knees, but there was an awful lot of hand me downs. But you know here's what my dad use to do, again a smart man, he was a merchant himself of course, a hairdresser barber. He knew the merchants and he'd always tell them, hey, when you run a sale, let me know first. I'll come in and I'll buy. So before they'd open the store for sales, my dad would go and buy ten pairs of shoes, he didn't care what size. He brought it home. Who could fit into it, good; if you didn't it was tough luck. It was as simple as that and he would buy clothes, pants, shirts, sweaters, a lot of it was brand new; but you had to grow into it, you couldn't wait to get a year older to wear the new stuff. That's the way he always bought. He bought food the same way. We didn't have big grocery stores as we know today, but he would go to Providence to Federal Hill, which is the Italian district in Providence, and he would buy crates of spaghetti, boxes of tomatoes and what ever he could get, but he always bought it by the case because he always said it is always cheaper to buy it by the case. Shoot, he was feeding eleven people he had to buy it by the case. We had a stock room downstairs and you know people during the war years, you know to hoard food was not to be very popular in the neighborhood, because you were depriving someone, but we always had it, we always had that closet down there I mean before the war. My dad always had that stock and he continued to stock, I mean there was no change and after we wouldn't talk about that room downstairs because during the war years because people would interpret that as we were hoarding food. He always bought everything by the case and we had this room. It was like a little well-stocked grocery store, it's the way he always bought. He bought shoes, cloths, everything. They made their own wine, so they were okay. Every two years the truck would come in the yard. One side of the truck would be red grapes, the other side would be white grapes, and we had the big squeezer and that was our job as a kid to turn this big wine squeezer, grape squeezer and we'd make two barrels three barrels sometimes

and whenever it would sour, it would be the greatest wine salad dressing, but it would be a whole barrel.

lb

That's a lot of salad.

rd

Made our own pop.

lb

Rootbeer?

rd

Rootbeer. We used to hear every know and then bang! Bang! We used to tell my mom and dad, we need to drink this right away because it's breaking downstairs. We didn't have the availability as we have now but we made our own.

jr

Did the family take wine with meals?

rd

Always.

jr

And how old did a youngster have to be to participate?

rd

I was just, like I always did it. But with the kids, all they did was add it to water. They would put a little bit a wine in it to make the color, so we were thinking we were drinking the wine obviously, but it was so diluted and I think what we learned was sensible control of liquor. Hard liquor, it was there, my dad had it, none of us ever touched it. Only on special occasions, like wakes or funerals or weddings would hard liquor come out, but they always had anisette. I don't know if you have ever had it. Anisette was what they put in their coffee, for coffee royal. It was always a bottle of anisette with the coffee and but wine I can't remember a meal without wine, ever, and I think we just learned how to drink responsibly. It was available. I could go in the house anytime I wanted and have a drink, but we just obviously didn't. Sometimes when you withhold from people, that increases their desire. I guess.

lb

It was no big deal it was just part of your meal.

rd

It was no big deal. The philosophy that they arrived at was that in Italy the water was so poor you didn't drink the water, and even when I visited there a few years ago, everybody buys bottled water. They don't have ice cubes. That's another thing about Europe that I found, very few

places with ice cubes because they don't like their drinks cold. I remember one time in Italy we were staying at a pensione, which our family owned and I said you wouldn't happen to have some ice cubes would you; and this kid who was running the pensione in Italy also owned two shoe shops in Chicago so he could speak English. But the family owned the pensione. He said, yes, I'll get you some ice cubes. I put them in the drink I was going to make myself, and I realized I'm not supposed to drink the water. I don't want to get sick, so I obviously threw it out. But everything, that was the way they were brought up, the village. He came from just south of Naples in Delacopine which is a district in the city of Delecoponia. Matter of fact, we had some Italians here on campus recently. We had a display of Italian art pictures about a month and a half ago and they brought in the Italian delegates from Washington and so forth. I was invited to the dinner. We had a dinner at the president's house and I went up to this man and I introduced myself and I said, you wouldn't happen to come from Delecoponia. He said, that's my home town. I said, you got yourself a friend. I want to talk to you. That's where my father came from, so anyway it was interesting. We have some relatives still there. He's what they call a commodore, a commodore is a poet, writer, journalist and he has a title of commodore, and he's done history of that area, because that was a summer residence for the king. It was in the same town so he's done a lot of history.

jr

Do you have a spelling for that?

rd

Yes, if I can find it. This is what my little niece put together. This is the family and this is the whole thing. This gives the whole background, the whole family. She put that together. I thought that was kind of neat. They looked up the seal, and what it meant, that kind of thing.

jr

We should xerox, and have a copy that we could take a look at.

rd

Sure.

jr

We can take care of spelling and dates as well.

rd

The reason why I was able to say to you that my dad came over when he was nine years old was that my dad was born in 1893. So when he was nine year's old he came here. That's how I figured the date he got here. It didn't say the date other than the turn of the century. It would be 1902 anyway

that would give you the whole background.

jr

In elementary school, do you recall activities or sports or things you did of an extra-curricular nature? You know, like what did you do the first eight grades, then four years of high school? No, you had a prep school.

rd

We had a junior high school. We had six grades and then we went to the junior high school, seventh, eighth, and ninth grades, then high school. Then I went to prep school, then I went to college, the big deal from elementary school of course was the graduation, to go from the neighborhood school to the junior high school which was on the other side of town, and it was by itself almost like the system we have down here in the middle school. That was kind of big time, I mean you had to either take the bus or walk. That's another thing. We used to walk to school to the junior high and high school everyday. We weren't wealthy enough to buy bicycles or anything, so we'd walk, and certainly didn't have the money to take the bus. So we walked to school. It was nothing, it was about 4 miles, We walked every day, rain, I didn't care what it was, we walked to school. Occasionally my uncle, who lived right next door, used to take his kids to the same school, but couldn't give us a ride because he had other children that they used to share rides with their families, so therefore there was no room for me so we had to walk. It was like four miles every day. We walked, thought nothing of it, and a you know once and a while we could borrow a bike and it was kind of fun to go to school by bike. Other than that it was the thing to do, right, the rich kids rode the bus and all of us walked. No big deal.

lb

Nobody worried about being attacked on the streets in those days?

rd

That's interesting, I'm glad you brought that up. When I told you that when we would get in that house my mother was the security blanket, and "ma, ma", and if she didn't answer man, we were in trouble. She was always there. She always seemed to be there. She was always there for us, but in those days it was go out and play, come back for lunch. She didn't know where we went. It was always don't stay in the house it's a nice day, get outside. They didn't know what we did. We learned an awful lot of dependence to some degree, but we also became very independent, and we learned to fend for ourselves. In many ways we developed a lot of confidence in ourselves and what we could do, and in those days it wasn't the traffic obviously, it was considerable, not like it is today. We didn't worry about, I guess, the

molesting, and so forth, which triggers another story I got to tell you Joe. I remember in the very first grade walking to school, and a I was about halfway between the school and my home and there was a car parked. In those days they had the old cars with the shades. You could pull the shades down in the back of the cars. I was walking and I said, isn't that strange, he has the shades down, and a guy opened the door and he had candy. He said he wanted to know if I wanted candy and would I come in the car, and I started, I took about one step and all of a sudden I had this sensation that went through me which was fright, I guess, but I didn't know what it was. All of a sudden I just got scared and I ran down the street and I said to them I realize--and those are the days of the Lindburgh kidnapping and all that--I came very close to probably being kidnapped, I don't know molested. I don't know, but that is the only time that ever happened. Other than that we were on our own. We'd go out and play. We lived near woods. We had our own camps. We played cowboys and indians constantly. We built our caves, our shelters, lived in our worlds, cooked our meals out there, all those kinds of things. I guess it all kind of went by. I remember when my dad would say to me, either when I was participating in high school athletics, which he never saw other than my last game in high school, and my last game in college, because they were working all the time, they couldn't afford to take the time off, and he didn't understand the game but he was always proud of his sons, but he always asked, the only thing he ever asked us was did you have fun? Never asked me how many hits I got and that used to annoy me and I'd say yeah I had fun but don't you want to know what I did. If you want to tell me yeah, what did you do. I got four or five hits. Oh, that's wonderful. It was never very important in terms of how many hits I got, which is kind of reversal sometimes, because I coached Little League and I've been in coaching all my life and I've seen parents who are so involved and mean well but yet they live their lives or their expectations of what they could have been through their sons or daughters, and the stress and the pressures are fantastic. With me it was, did you have fun? And I read Joe Paterno's book and his father said the same thing to him. I said isn't it something I could relate to that because his father always would say, Joe did you have fun? Yeah. That's all he wanted to know, did you have fun? Even at the beach you can't stay in a tent. In a tent, for example, we'd play cards and go to different tents and all that, but we were on our own. They didn't worry about things we worry about today because you want to know where your kids are today. I don't know why it is so different. The world has changed that much, it's amazing. I don't know.

jr

Did you have to learn to fight? I mean fights were common?

rd

Oh sure. School yards, recess, those were when you were challenged, at recess. If somebody wanted to challenge the bully, or the leader of the school yard, that's when the fights occurred. Very seldom did we have fights after school. I don't know why but it was during recess. The only humiliating time I ever had in my life, there was nothing more humiliating that I can think of right now than when we were at the ocean, and we used to be there all summer, and there was a little red headed young lady. She was from East Providence. I can't remember her name, red headed girl. She was the toughest of the lot. She beat me up one day. I get into a fight with her and she actually just beat me up; and I couldn't face the guys for days because she beat me up. Boy she was tough. We had our fights, battles, but there was so much freedom. We had so much freedom to do what we wanted to do in those days and I guess it was a good foundation for us all to depend on our own judgement and sometimes we over protect our youngsters today. In those days we kind of, we had a lot of security but yet we developed a lot of independence.

lb

Was there a problem, being an Italian kid in this town?

rd

No, because I lived in the Italian neighborhood. In a sense it wasn't all Italian, but there was a lot of Italians in my neighborhood. It wasn't a problem, but in those days it was the parents who had an accent that were not accepted. My dad was accepted, and yet sometimes I always felt maybe he wasn't accepted because he had an accent. He would say cartoon rather than carton. You might have ten doller, that was the French district. In my neighborhood, in my city, there was the French neighborhood, the Irish neighborhood, the Italian neighborhood. They all kind of joined because of common interest, acceptance. New York City is full of Harlem's, Italian Harlem, Polish Harlem, Black Harlem, Spanish Harlem, they all tend to gravitate because of acceptance of language barriers, food, customs, and all those kind of things. Now that you mention it to some extent although it was a mixed there was a distinct districting, I guess, in the city. Fairmount was the Irish, Providence Street was the Italians, and we had the French district, and so forth. I remember French was the big thing and I always remember it was down the street the band would come marching up. That's what they would think in terms of their language, speaking in French, but it would come out in English and it would come out funny because it was in French. I guess if you were translating it into French it was down the street the band comes marching up but when you say that in English it doesn't sound very good. Or a big thing was always, they'd always say ten doller, it was never dollars, never put an "s" on anything. I always thought that was funny. We all went to the Italian church, St. Anthonys. One mass was

said in Italian, the children's mass was in English which was at 8:30 A.M. In the French church only French was spoken. Sacred Heart was where the Irish kids went. That's how we used to play baseball as I mentioned earlier, football, baseball. Fairmount played Cold Spring Park. Cold Spring Park would play the Providence Street group, and even though we always seemed to show up and play the game, we had no leadership, we had no signed contracts. It was okay. This week Providence Street is going to be playing Cold Spring Park and we'll be playing at Cold Spring Park this week. We'd all show up and we'd play; and we'd play for hours until we got tired or somebody got hurt or a fight broke out or something like that, and that was the determination of the game. Sometimes I feel like today's living is so much more restricted than we did. We didn't even have umpires. But the greatest thrill was for people like myself growing up playing sports, I loved sports, was to finally get to high school where they gave us uniforms. God that was a thrill, and today, they give uniforms out to five year old's. The glove is bigger than the kid. By the time they get to high school they get burned out. Many times as I sat in the office, the football office here, when a young man came to me and was gracious enough to tell me he was quitting, I always encouraged them to come and talk to me about it. The question was why. Was it something with the program, something we can change, improve on? They'd always say, I'm just burned out;, and I'll tell you what, I totally understand. Because when you go through the midget football, the junior football programs. We waited until the day we got into high school so we could get a uniform. It was fantastic you know, fantastic, but I think to some extent we were deprived, but I think to some extent the kids today are deprived of some of the things we had experienced, too.

jr

Was there a family car?

rd

Yes, a big Studebaker with the monkey seats in it. Do you know what a monkey seat is?

jr

The little seats on the side.

rd

You know these big funeral cars where they spring up, come out of the front seat. They fold up in front of the back seats. In order to put us all into the car my dad always had a big Studebaker with the monkey seats, that's what we used to all get in. And we had so many in the car, Joe, that whenever we hit a hill he would put it in neutral and coast for about two miles because that was saving him gas. Do you remember that? We'd coast, we used to have a contest as to

how far we would coast.

jr

Who got to drive the car?

rd

Just my daddy, as I remember.

jr

When did you learn how?

rd

When did I learn how? In the back yard, I guess.

jr

Sixteen, I mean did you get a drivers license?

rd

Yes, by backing the cars around. My dad would finally let us back the car out of the garage, bring it to the front door so he'd get in it and go to work. And that was a big thrill for us to be able to learn how to back it out and bring it to him. Getting on the road was quite an experience too. My brothers and sisters all taught one another, we all taught one another how to drive. My dad didn't have the patience to do that sort of thing. It was always either the big Studebaker or do you know what a rumble seat is? Remember a rumble seat? We had a two door coupe. Rumble seat, and in those days the rumble seats were very deep. We used to go to games, football games at the high school. We'd pile about twenty kids in the rumble seat and close it and lock it and then when you go in you'd pay for two tickets or one, get in the game, open the rumble seat and all these kids come pouring out.

jr

Alright

lb

Just like the circus.

rd

It's the truth.

jr

Dangerous things, those rumble seats, when you hit a car.

rd

True, but those are the funny times, but I guess we all basically all taught each other how to drive.

jr

How many bedrooms did you all have, for sleeping eleven folks?

rd

Four bedrooms, and my two brothers slept upstairs with my grandmother. She lived up on the third floor; she had an apartment up there. My dad provided her the apartment and my uncle next door owned a grocery store right next door, Dispirito Groceries. We would bring the meals up every day to my grandmother. That was their routine, so two had to live up there and we all hated to move up there, not that we didn't like our grandmother, but everything she had was in moth balls. Food smelled of moth balls, cookies smelled of moth balls, everything. Those were funny times, but every time you walked into grandma's apartment, the moth balls would kill you. No moth would dare go into that house; it was dead, just coming to the front door.

jr

So the bedrooms were almost like dormitories.

rd

No, so we had two, four, six, eight, two upstairs, and one lived downstairs in the family room. We made a room downstairs in the cellar. Then, of course, we got some breathing room; the war came and brothers went to war, and so that opened things up. Nobody had to stay with grandma, and that was funny.

jr

What about early romances? Did you discover girls somewhere along the line?

rd

I told my wife she was the only girl I ever dated in my life and I'm going to stick with that story. Of course it's a lie, but you wont tell her will you. I had girlfriends in the first grade. Used to go get peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. That was when you knew she liked you. You could go to her house and she'd make peanut butter and jelly sandwich for you, oh yeah.

rj

It was like getting engaged.

rd

Oh, that was the big move. If you could get a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you were in. I loved to dance, matter of fact in my senior year one of the nicest awards I ever got was the best dancer in the senior class. I loved to dance, so, my mother would always encourage me, push me out the door, to go to dances, at times we didn't want to, but she'd push us out because my mother used to love to dance. In those days, Joe, there very few personal involvements with any one individual. We kind of hung around in packs. We dated in packs, went to the movies in packs, we went to the beach in packs. There were always three of four couples. We

never really paired off. But we all kind of moved around in packs; I guess that's probably the best way to describe it. The YMCA always had the Saturday dances and then from the YMCA's we would graduate to Sacred Heart dances and that was one of the churches that had the older kids. They were beyond high school kids so once you got out of high school you graduated from the YMCA dance to the Sacred Heart dances, and you never had a date, very seldom had a date, we went there and we danced with everybody.

jr

That happened clear through into high school? So a steady was something that wasn't, that only happened to some isolated folks?

rd

Matter of fact, they were in the minority. Even proms, the prom was always the big thing in those days. We'd go, listen, go to after prom dinners to Vaughn Monroe's Place, which was a place in Massachusetts, just across the border from where we were, with the Meadows, which is where Vaughn Monroe owned. Do you remember him?

jr

Oh, very well.

rd

And Lake Pearl, places like that. The prom was the big thing; and again at proms we always kind of went in packs. I guess you might call them cliques. The athlete's kind of kept by themselves, and other people did, the guys who had cars kept by themselves. None of us had cars. I think the only time I really first got involved, I thought I had a steady girlfriend. We went to a nearby lake; and one of the skills or the macho things for us to show off to the girls was to get on top of the slides and dive off the slides into the very shallow water. The idea was as soon as you felt the water was to arch your back; if you got scrapes on your chest and stomach that was kind of a badge of courage because that was how you escaped? Well, this young lady that I was dating at the time was a terrific dancer, and that's the reason why. We very seldom dated because of sex or anything else, it was because she was a great dancer. So you know you wanted to capture her time at the dance. Her brother as he went to dive his foot slipped on the slick metal slide and he fell the wrong way. It broke his neck and he died and that was a very difficult time for us. The week before it happened to me; that's why it was so dramatic. When I went to dive I slipped and I realized what was happening and I put my two arms out in front. And I went wham. I went in. They had to pull me out. I mean I actually I think I dug a hole. I would probably have drowned because I was stunned. But I didn't panic. The next week her brother died doing the same thing. Isn't that wild, but

those are the kinds of crazy things that happened. It was a very crazy thing to do.

jr

So you went out for football when you were a freshman? In the tenth grade? Junior high you didn't play football?

rd

Well, we played football all the time in the neighborhood, the pick-up stuff. I played in high school for a year, then I transferred to Catholic school, St. Charles, for one year, and then I transferred. I said I made a mistake. I didn't like the disciplines and the things that were going on there, it was run by the brothers, some brothers and they were tough. I mean they'd put you against the walls, crack your head against the wall, all those kinds of things. They were very tough disciplinarians. I just didn't care for it, so I transferred back to high school. I was mature when I was in the ninth grade, physically, enough to play. As I think back it's almost unbelievable that I played for a semi-pro team when I was in the ninth grade. I was a running back. I played one year and then I went to the high school and played the years in high school; and then I played semi-pro on the weekends when I was in college; and boy in those if you ever got caught doing that it was your eligibility. You know we were always looking for some ways to earn some money. It was always the big rivalry, we never played during the season but after the season we always had these big rivalries between the Slatersville Bulls and the Mules, whatever they were, and they would draw 10,000 people to a game. We made good money to play after the season under assumed names. They all knew who we were but we were, of course, all under assumed names, and that's how I got recruited for college. The college coach came down and saw me play semi-pro. He said, I got to have this kid, and I got a scholarship to the University of Rhode Island by playing as a ninth grader in semi-pro.

jr

That's when he saw you? As a ninth grader and then three years later when you finished high school he was waiting for you?

rd

Isn't that something. I impressed him so much because of the early age and then I was successful in high school, so that just solidified, and then I went to prep school before I went to college. He didn't see me until four years later, but he still wanted me. _____ (#189) _____ coach from Rhode Island, I went to Marianapolis Prep because I needed a second year of a language to get into the University. I had one year of Italian, one year of Latin, one year of French and Spanish, but I never had two years of anything. We didn't have any counselors in those days. There was somebody

designated but that was about all, if you went to that person, but we got no direction at all. So I have one year of all these, so I had to go to Marianapolis to take a second year of French to get into the University of Rhode Island.

jr

Do you recall how much you were paid by the semi-pro teams?

rd

I didn't get paid in the ninth grade, but I did get paid for the Mules. We played the games. I played for the Slatersville Red Raiders and it was a unique experience, because in those days we got about $75 to $100 dollars which was a lot of money.

lb

Per game?

rd

Per game. Yes, plus all the beer you could drink at half time.

jr

At half time, what a terrible time.

rd

Well we had to drink something at half time. They were drinking beer, I said, well, I might as well drink beer too. They were crazy, practice and drink beer after. Crazy. There were three of us from the University of Rhode Island that played and we were all from the neighborhood, from the area, so they all knew who we were, but we played under assumed names and we played two or three games after the season right on through Thanksgiving, and we'd make ourselves two or three hundred dollars.

jr

10,000 fans, wow.

rd

Oh God it was packed, and they would steal us blind. The promoters, when they would come to dish out the money, they'd say about five hundred people were there. What are you talking about the place was packed, 10,000 people out there. We got so mad at the guy. I'm not saying who because I wasn't a part of it, but his car was rolled into the river. He was unbelievable, he stole us blind. We were the only three college guys that played the rest of the guys were guys that never went to college but wanted to continue playing football. We played at night, night time in Blackstone, Massachusetts, which was just over the border from Nounsocket. Nounsocket was right on the Massachusetts border. I mean we would draw all kinds of people, the place

would be packed. That's how we earned some money for Christmas other than the big job at Christmas time which was to work for the Post Office delivering mail in high school. Everybody would take off two, three days from high school and deliver mail. It was an acceptable thing, the high school knew that, and all you had to do was show a slip that you were working at the Post Office. We'd work like five days and that was big money delivering mail. One kid was caught. He used to get done early. He would sneak out early and weeks later they caught him. He was throwing his mail down into the sewer. I'll never forget that.

jr

I used to do that with hand bills when I was kid.

rd

Imagine that.

jr

Merchant would pay to take them to the house.

rd

This was mail, I mean kids didn't know, they should have gone to jail, right, federal offense.

jr

That's a felony.

rd

They let him off. It was the same kid, matter of fact, he was a Jewish boy, and the reason why I bring it up is because one Saturday we were playing and once the game started these people came walking out in the middle of the game, right on the field. You can imagine, this is a high school game, hundreds of people, all of a sudden these two people walk right on the field, grab this football player and escort him right of the field. It was the Jewish kid, it was high holiday, and he wasn't to play. He couldn't play, so they ran on the field, grabbed him pulled him off the field. The kid was so embarrassed. We couldn't figure out what they were doing, but that's what it was; it was one of the high holidays, Jewish holidays, and he was not supposed to be playing that Saturday. They took him off the field right in the middle of a game, crazy.

lb

I worked at the Post Office but they didn't let girls deliver the mail. We had to work in the Post Office and sort the mail.

rd

Is that right? I didn't know any girls were hired. It was all the guys, I mean that I was aware of, and you were picked. You had to go up in a waiting room and we happened

to know Mr. Shevrolin who is our mailman, whose son played with us on all the teams we played on, so we were the privileged few.

jr

The fix was in.

rd

The fix was in. Mr. Shevrolin would pick us out. It was kind of hard work because you'd have to make two deliveries. It was good money.

jr

So in the tenth grade you went out for all the varsity sports in high school?

rd

Yes, football, basketball, baseball, played all three.

jr

Did you make varsity, did you get some playing time fairly early? Football, yes?

rd

Basketball, I was a starter in all three.

jr

In the tenth grade?

rd

Yes, I had this maturity because I played semi-pro in ninth grade, and I thought I was going to be a big guy. I just stopped growing. I think, gee, you know ninth grade when you think about it, playing with guys who were beyond high school and beyond that. I had no problems even at the University of Rhode Island. I started at football and baseball, the two sports I played at the university.

jr

I was ninety-eight pounds in the ninth grade.

rd

I was 185 pounds.

jr

Wow, good night,

rd

In the ninth grade, I thought I was going to be.

lb

So you reached your growth early.

rd

I did. I was one of the few kids at that time did any weight lifting at all. It was purely by accident because in those days it was not the thing to do because you become muscle bound and you wouldn't be as agile and flexible. I used to lift weights down at the Y, not to any great extent, but I probably had about a 2. fat fold on my whole body. I just didn't have very much fat, I was lean. Of course you can't tell now, but I was lean in those days.

jr

You know John L. Sulliman and his top weight was only 185 pounds.

rd

I played college football and 195. See I only changed about 10 pounds from the time that I was in ninth grade till I was in college. Amazing.

jr

Amazing.

rd

Yeah I matured, some kids mature physically obviously at different ages, as well as mentally and psychologically I don't know about the other two but physically I did mature at that time. I had no problems as an athlete; my only problem as an athlete at the University of Rhode Island was in those days it was a two platoon and you were only supposed to play offense or defense, and I was very upset because I always was able to play 50-60 minutes and I had a verbal disagreement with the coach, Vic Palladino. I'll never forget his name. He said, I suppose you think you are better? I said, yes I am. If you give me an opportunity, I'll prove it and he said, okay big mouth, I'll give you a chance, and I played 60 minutes from that time on. I proved myself and I was a two way performer, played offense and defense, kicked off extra points, field goals. I always had those skills. I was a catcher in baseball. Those are skill positions; we had to have good eye hand coordination. Obviously I matured physically early so I had no problems with that at all. Even when I went to prep school, for example, Marianapolis Prep School is run by the Marian fathers, a Catholic prep school, but they were very strong in football. They played nothing but college freshmen, Boston College, Boston University, Yale Freshmen, we played most of the big schools. University of Rhode Island freshmen, University of Connecticut freshmen. So prep school at those times were strictly farm systems for the colleges, and the coach from the University of Rhode Island sent me there for a tryout. In those days, it was the tryout. You went there for three days and you played football for three days.

Tape 5

Robert Dispirito Interview

This is Joe Riggs and Leah Brown interviewing Bob Dispirito on June 9, 1992. This is our third in the series of tapes about Coach DiSpirito's career. When you got out of junior high and went into high school you were talking about how you played semi-pro ball, and then you started playing high school ball. Was it the kind of the transition from being a kid to being a man playing big time football, amd was it gradual or was it sort of an instant thing?

rd

I don't know how I can define that Joe. It was just kind of a natural move into the transition of playing that one year which is kind of unusual at that stage really. A tenth grader playing and a they accepted me, and I didn't think it was any big deal, and it was just kind of a natural transition. My size was and my abilities, coordination, was set at that time. Some peoples coordination comes later; mine came obviously a little bit earlier, and it was just a natural transition into it.

jr

Had you played more than pick-up ball previous to that, in the junior high years, formal football?

rd

No formal.

jr

It was all pick up style.

rd

It was always east side vs. west side and that kind of thing.

jr

Playing Saturdays and Sundays.

rd

Saturday, right. It's surprising everyone would show up. We'd make arrangements. Next week we are going to play Cold Spring Park, and they would show up.

jr

It was tackle football?

rd

Oh yes.

jr

The whole business, that was when you were talking about

everyone had a little piece of the uniform or extra shirts.

rd

We all had to get there a little bit early in order to get the lines on the field. We played near a sand bank and we use to get the light sand; that's how we made our stripes for the football field. So we had to get there about a half hour before game time to line off the field. It was done with sand not chalk as you know it today.

jr

And you had referees?

rd

No.

jr

No referees.

lb

Just arguments about.

rd

Yes, who made the first down. It was amazing, very few encounters, fights. Usually we ended the game because of an injury; someone broke his arm or something like that, or a shoulder pad. I look back at it today and I wonder as to how we survived all that, yet how much we enjoyed it. I guess being a coach the rest of my life later on. I used to have young men come into me and tell me they wanted to drop out of football because they were burned out. It was quite the opposite for us, the expectation of playing on a team and getting a uniform was just burning inside of us. It was quite the opposite. We played so much informal athletics that we did not burn out and we were not over supervised, that sort of thing. My father would say, what happened, what did you do today, play football, did you have fun, yeah I had fun, that was all he'd want to know. He'd never come to see us or anything like that.

jr

So the first year of formal football was the tenth grade?

rd

Yes, it was.

lb

When you played the semi-pro you were really a kid and the rest of the team much older.

rd

Older, high school graduates.

lb

How did you manage or what kind of effect did those big guys have?

rd

I knew so many of them because they were also part of that growing up period; we all kind of played against one another.

lb

Age didn't matter.

rd

Age never mattered, size never mattered, and I used to play with the big boys, in a sense. So they knew of my abilities and asked me to play. I think I only played like three games, and actually that was the first time I ever put equipment on.

jr

Then that was the first time you were ever coached, in football?

rd

No they didn't coach. You just played a position, nobody really coached it.

jr

Was it platoon?

rd

In those days? No.

jr

Where did you play on defense?

rd

I was a line backer.

jr

Aah, I know.

rd

I was a line backer and an offensive guard and fullback. Most of my high school days I was a fullback offensively; I didn't play the line until I went to college. That's another story.

jr

We'll get to that. You had the same coach in high school for all three years in football?

rd

Well I played at Monsacket High School, which is a public school for one year, then I transferred to Mt. St. Charles,

which was a Catholic school for one year, I didn't like that so I transferred back to Monsacket High School. So I played with Coach Savaria for two years. But with a year in between at Mt. St. Charles.

jr

And you had a different, obviously different coach there.

rd

Yes.

jr

Were you at Mt. St. Charles because of your athletic abilities?

rd

They sought me.

jr

They hustled you then?

rd

Yes they did. Typical catholic school. They still do it today.

jr

Not uncommon.

rd

Not uncommon. No. The catholic coaches go around and scout a lot of young kids and will offer them scholarships to the school. That's what I had.

jr

And in those cases it didn't have anything to do with districting I mean,

rd

Oh no.

jr

No. You could live anywhere.

rd

I also played on a hockey team in high school at Mt. St. Charles and they, today, they've won five consecutive state titles. They are still very powerful. It's a boarding school and they brought a lot of young men in from Canada; so when I played we had a front line of all Canadians and then they had the goons back there, that was me, and whoever else. I remember Brother Elard would say, Dispirito, don't worry about the puck just hit the man. So we were goons and we would get the puck to these Canadians and they could skate up. That's why I thoroughly enjoy watching the

Penguins because I played hockey all my life, not very good but I did know how to body check.

lb

Transfer from one sport to another.

rd

Very little transfer of skills.

jr

I refereed high school basketball for several years and they had goons, they had some large people who were football players fundamentally and were second stringers on the basketball teams until they wanted to injure the other teams star player and then they'd send the thug in, and as an official I had to deal with some semi-violent people, of course I kept my eye on them and once I'd refereed in the circuit then I knew the coaches who would do that kind of stuff.

rd

I don't think I've ever encountered that in basketball, you know from my experience.

jr

It was in the deliberate fouling stuff and hurting people. Well West Virginia what do they know.

rd

You're right.

jr

Were these coaches significant influences on you for later years?

rd

Oh, yes. My high school coach, Coach Gus Savaria. He was a Lehigh graduate. He was a physicist and he taught Physics. He was an engineer and a very bright man. Matter of fact, he always called me Rob rather than Bob, and that's what I ended up calling my son, because I always liked that. I always preferred to be called Rob than I did Bob, or Bobbie which was basically what most people called me in New England. He was a great influence. Because I respected his academic as well as athletic abilities, I kind of followed in the same path. He was a very interesting man. I think the last time I did get to see him was so disappointing. When I got home to Rhode Island it was usually a very fast two weeks at the ocean with the family so all the family came to the ocean rather than us try to see people in Rhode Island. I kept putting off seeing coach and I understand he was not feeling well and he was declining so I went over to see him and it was so disappointing in that when I walked in his wife said he won't recognize you, he doesn't recognize

people. And when he came out that's the first thing he said, Rob how ya been? Good to see ya fella. That's the way he used to talk. I was kind of thrilled and taken aback by that. We were playing Lehigh, I say "we", I was at Bucknell at the time, and we were playing Lehigh. No, I'm sorry I got to go back, that's wrong. It was here we were playing Lehigh. We were going to play Lehigh but that fell through when I was at Bucknell but when I was here at Slippery Rock we played Lehigh. That prompted me even further to see him because that was his alma mater. We talked and his wife said it had been years since he had been that coherent. We discussed football, we discussed Lehigh, we discussed all these things, but it was sad to see him in his declining years. I remember taking him in a car. He loved to be taken and driven around town looking at the old spots. We'd go up to Berry Field which is where we played our football and baseball. That's the last time I saw him, he died shortly after that, but he was a great influence on my life without a question. He was never just a jock coach, if there is such a thing, he was an academically oriented man, very bright man, and I think that always kind of stuck to the back of my mind, that that was the way to do it. I never really wanted to go to big time football, because I didn't want to just coach, I wanted to teach and coach, I think he was the influence in that.

jr

So you played four sports, hockey, basketball, baseball, and football. Did you have the same passion for the other sports as you did for football?

rd

Baseball. Baseball and football were my two passions. Coach Savaria coached both, and we were very successful in both. My senior year we only had six points scored on us the entire season that was against LaSalle which was a catholic school which was a class above us; and they were the only team that ever scored six points or any points on us the entire year, so we had an unbelievably great football team. And then in baseball we won the class B championship and won the state title, so we had some great athletes coming through at that particular time. Obviously we have great memories of going through, it was funny it was the sane group of fellows who went through pretty much the three years. I remember my junior year. Bob Dispirito, BD. I remember the newspaper sports editor writing Bob Dispirito, Big Disappointment. I was never so crushed in my life. I was so embarrassed this was in the paper. I wasn't having a good year in my junior year. I wasn't hitting up to expectations. I always felt it was very cruel of him to do that. That always stuck in my mind, and I would never do something like that especially publicly, because I remember how embarrassed I was. That really motivated me. The second year I hit well over 400 and made all state. I had to go back and thank Greg

Green later for motivating me in my athletic career. He didn't know what I meant but I knew what I meant. He said, well, thank you. I could have said if you hadn't written that article on me I wouldn't have been as motivated.

lb

But you don't approve of that kind of motivation?

rd

No, I never once ever as a coach tried to embarrass a young man, never. In football I was not a yeller, not a screamer and I could take a young man next to me during a game, we could be talking on the sidelines and I could be literally chewing him out but you wouldn't know it. There was never any show of emotions. It was just dealing with what had to be corrected. I always tried to keep the emotions out of it because in order to solve any problems you've got to deal with the problem not the emotions. As soon as the emotions get in the way it clouds the issue so you never really solve the problem. That's always been my philosophy, so a lot of those little seeds that were planted way back became part of my philosophy. I can't ever think of embarrassing a young man. I just couldn't do it, it's just not the way I like to be treated, so I didn't treat anybody else that way. I think sometimes when you get carried away with your position or your importance and you think that people you are dealing with are not as good as you are or they are not in the same class as you are, therefore they tend to abuse them but I think if someone deals with anyone on the same level as they feel they are on and I think the treatment will be the very same treatment a very humane kind of treatment. Most people don't like to be called idiots so why do I feel I have the authority to call somebody else an idiot. In football we used to call them animals, studs, those were very offensive to me. I don't use those terms.

lb

Do coaches who act in that way are they feeling the pressures from above? Is that why the behavior?

rd

Well, I suppose so but I have pressures too. I have the same pressures. I've seen see Mr. Savaria and I can't ever consider him calling him anything else but Mr. Savaria or coach; but he was so bright and so humane. He'd do the same thing. He'd very seldom explode on anyone, but his look and his feelings would penetrate you. He didn't even have to say a word, but he also knew that when you made mistakes that you probably felt as bad or worse than anyone else that makes mistakes, so why remind you. Why chew somebody out in baseball if they made an error? They know they made an error. It's not going to do any good; it's over. It can't be rectified so why embarrass someone. In football, things happen so fast I don't think you have time for the emotions.

Of all the time we used to have, just a little bit of that time was used to correct what had to be corrected. After the game you can pull somebody into the office and discuss it, but very seldom during the game. It was very distracting to see a coach running up and down the sideline yelling and screaming and he's got everybody confused. Looking at Mr. Savaria, all the years that I played with him, and in my career, a team is pretty much a reflection of the coach. The temperament of the team, the way that you approach it, if you allow somebody to play dirty. Kids knew on my team that if you threw a punch you were out for the game, period. Not for that play, you are out because that was a reflection on the entire team. Everything they did I told them as soon as you join my team you lost your individuality. Your identity was with the entire team, the entire program. I've always felt very strongly about that. The only rule I ever had for my players was that if you embarrass the university or the team, then we will provide some incentives to correct it. That was the only thing I ever told my kids. I never said these are the do's, these are the don'ts. That kind of hogties you to a certain decision making process that I didn't like; therefore I used to always set up a group of players which represented the freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior years, and my captains, and they were my discipline group. So if anybody got in trouble they had to go through that group. I had the final decision but I never had to change it, never had to change the decision that the kids made, but I had the final decision. They knew that I would listen and nobody else, no one from the rest of the staff would be allowed to be in on these meetings, but I found out that the players themselves, the peer treatment and justice was tougher than anything that I could have given them. I always followed that philosophy. I didn't have any trouble with my boys because of that. I had to let them know what we were all about when representing us as a discipline committee. They assumed that responsibility.

jr

Was the upshot of that through your coaching years the people who really couldn't make the team effort usually quit before you had to kick them out, from the peer pressure? I mean when they weren't putting out, you know, giving it their very, very best and playing up to their talents, the guys they were playing with all knew that and they would put pressure on them.

rd

You knew guys were drinking during the season, smoking during the season, carousing during the season not taking the games very seriously. I think, at least in my experience at the University of Rhode Island, was that the peer pressures were the ones who I think solved most of those cases. I happened to be in the position. I was fortunate in the four years at the University of Rhode Island I was

freshman captain. I was appointed a captain for one game against Springfield, I remember as a sophomore, then I was a captain my junior and senior years so I was always in a position of authority in a sense dealing with disciplinarian problems, and I always took that very seriously, so as captain if some of my teammates were making a fool of themselves in some way or breaking the training rules I felt I had an obligation to talk to them and I did. I probably would not have done that if I hadn't been their captain, but I felt that obligation, so I transferred that into my philosophy of coaching so my ball players my kids would do the same thing.

jr

So it was very clear that they knew who was breaking training. Were your training rules absolutely ridged or was there some flexibility to them?

rd

Always flexibility. I never liked to put myself into a corner. I would just say that if you in anyway as a representative of the university or the team acted in an adversary manner then we would deal with the problem. That was all I would tell them. They would go before a committee. Sometimes it was a first offense. sometimes it was a second or a third, and you dealt with it differently.

jr

Is it fair to say that coaches with personality problems, the ones who explode on the side lines and are always berating the youngsters in public, that they are an exception in the coaching ranks, or are there a fair share of those people?

rd

There are a very fair share of them, especially in Division One, where there is big money. The pressure is there and usually get those kinds of reactions from the very young coaches who are trying to make it and trying to make an impression on the coaches. Again the head coach sets the tempo. The way the program should go. if he tells, like I've already told my coaches, I don't want any swearing on the field. I just don't like it. When you hear me swear then you can swear, I just don't like it. Now I'm not talking about being a holier then thou, but its very demeaning. I never liked to be sworn at. So that way I set the tempo right off the bat, and if some kids would come out with a swear word they took a lap immediately. I wanted them to know I wouldn't tolerate it, a fight and they were gone. What I tried not do, where some coaches, I think Joe, fail is that when the ball player makes a mistake they pull him out immediately and then kind of chew him out on the sidelines. I always felt that it was almost like a gotcha. Everyone was thinking mistakes. Since they were afraid to make mistakes

they were thinking mistakes and I thought that was a very negative way to think about your performance that if I make a mistake he's going to pull me right out. If somebody made a mistake I would make a play or two, if it was consecutive then we'd pull them out. I think Slippery Rock University was very fortunate to have the staff that was put together. I can't think of one staff member that I ever had here who treated anyone other than very humane They were super guys. They were all teachers. This is why, the different concept of a full time coach, they have no bridges with the faculty and the academic program, and that's why I enjoy this kind of system vs. the high pressure coaching that goes with the big programs. It's funny how these little seeds that were planted as I go back way back in my high school or junior high school or whatever.

jr

When I watch athletics on the television it seems to me that whoever is guiding the cameras will always give far to much time to the explosive coaches and that the camera is on the coach when he takes someone out and chews them out or he like Bobby Knight throws the chair across the floor or whatever, that it really takes away from the game and the abilities of the kids. And it becomes a kind of negative side show of some kind when you watch the NCAA tournaments. You know, say the coaches who are famous for explosion get a lot of camera time and I think that's terrible, personally I think its terribly unfortunate.

rd

I do too. It takes away from what the game is all about. High publicity, big money. They're paid high salaries, extended contracts. They get paid well and they feel that since they're being paid well that they can abuse them like that. I'd rather be low paid and be respected than go through that nonsense, but coaches that are on that level do get an awful lot of money, they get compensated quite well financially compared to what we were making. We were making subminimum wages compared to what they were.

jr

Was there preferential treatment for athletes in high school or college when you were there as a student and player, no one working out any deals or cutting students any breaks or anything, because some institutions were kind of notorious for that where they had selected teachers and those teachers passed the athletes and all that sort of thing. It's a rap that athletics have had for a long time.

rd

I really first saw that for the first time when I got into Western Pennsylvania football. That's where I first saw it in the high schools as I recruited in western Pennsylvania, because Western Pennsylvania has very high profile football

programs. One time I got three all-state athletes from one particular high school. It was my first year here and the president said go after them and I did. Their academic achievements up to this point weren't very sound. We were going to take them into a special program and we did. They obviously all flunked out. It was a waste of their time, a waste of my time, a waste of school time, and we never did it again. That happened my very first year here. I remember one of the coaches, Bill Yeomans, who was working with the defense at Bucknell with me. He was a central Pennsylvania native.

He used to tell me, because I was new to Western Pennsylvania, he had to get out of high school coaching because of the pressures. I said, Bill you are very successful, and he was very successful, but he said, you know they begin to bet on the games, and they were betting on the games in terms of whether you won or lost, and then once you developed a good football team then they began to bet on point spread, so even though you won if you didn't win by enough points it wasn't enough. He said things like, I go down for coffee before the game or meet the boys just informally before the game down at the restaurant, and people would say, don't forget, Bill, I got my mortgage bet on this game. I'm sure they were just kidding, but there was a lot of money placed on it and there were a lot of pressures. He decided to get away from all that and he got the job at Bucknell and then decided to go back to high school and got extremely frustrated. I guess he got into some trouble mishandling a young man and he got out of coaching. The next time I see Bill he's an insurance executive, very successful, and I said, Bill how did you make the transition? He said, it was no transition. He said, the hours are the same, you got to go out and recruit the right people for your district. The only difference is in insurance you get paid for your time, in education you don't, so now I got a lot of money. He's very successful but it was interesting to see where his career went.

jr

In the high schools when there was a youngster who was a good athlete was there money around to get his dad a job and move him closer to the school?

rd

No, we didn't have that kind of football program. Matter of fact very few football players or baseball players went on to college when I was in high school, very few. The great years that we had in high school we were not only undefeated but we only had six points scored on us, and that's unheard of in football circles. I think of that team five of us went

to college, which was probably the most they've ever had. I think three of us finished, but it wasn't that kind of football as you see it today, where people were moving families into districts. I've seen it even here in Slippery Rock where a family was moving in the district to improve the basketball program, for example, and that sort of thing. They didn't do that in those days. The only rewards you got for playing athletics in high school when I went to school was the little recognition you would get from the community, from the girls. You could get more dates, but it wasn't thought of in derogatory terms. In some way some athletes and football players are thought of today studs or whatever they want to call them.

jr

Was the support for all varsity athletics kind of uniform in the community, that is to say did they attract crowds for hockey and baseball as well as football?

rd

Yes they did, because that was before television, so if you wanted to see a football game you had to go see a high school football game. A Thanksgiving football game was like five thousand people. You couldn't put anybody else in the stadium, and most of your high school games were always well attended, especially by students, which is not always the case today. That's one of the problems we have here at the university, for example, to get students interested enough to go to football games. They support basketball.

jr

The same thing is true of cultural events here. We've had stunning stuff.

rd

That's worse. It's unbelievable and I know people over in the dance department are constantly frustrated because they put in so much work and they have great shows and the student turnout, unless it is required by a class, it's hard to get them there. I agree.

jr

I taught at Lehigh and at Lehigh football games didn't attract very many folks, basketball didn't attract anybody.

rd

But wrestling.

jr

You couldn't get in if you wanted too. To watch the wrestling match you had better get there very, very early because eventually the place would fill up with standing room people, and you couldn't get into the building. But wrestling was wow, of course they won NCAA Championships.

rd

Oh, they were outstanding actually. But even at Bucknell, even on our best attended days, at halftime they were all gone. They were gone to their parties. They'd come for the half and then they go to their parties. It was hard.

jr

I was at West Virginia University as a student when Hot Rod Hundley was a freshman. The field house seated four thousand, and at six- thirty or six o'clock, when they had the freshmen game, they'd have four thousand people watch Hundley because of his reputation in high school; and then when the varsity played at eight o'clock there would be five hundred left. Thirty five hundred would take a walk after they saw him because if you had seen Hundley you'd seen it all.

rd

That's amazing, but you know it's one of the things that I'm trying to work on very hard this year for homecoming. I've been very involved. This years homecoming is the parade of champions. I'm bringing back thirty-six champion teams, football, the sixty-one, sixty-two, sixty-three, seventy-two, seventy-three, seventy-four, seventy-six, football teams back, plus the championship teams in tennis, women's tennis, the championship team in soccer, plus the original Rocklettes. Some people tend to think that pep rallies are dead, it's passe, it's corny, and I look at it from a different aspect. I look at it as a great tool for motivation to get people interested in your programs. So I worked very hard on this. Matter of fact, I'm going to a meeting today on homecoming. They're meeting all during the summer. The point I'm trying to make is that when we had the good teams and we were winning, we were like 34 games at home in a row without losing, kids would graduate from here who never saw us lose so that has to be a positive influence on the attendance. Again it has to go beyond that. What we are planning for homecoming is having it in front of the library. It's going to be in front of the quadrangle here. We have a laser show. I'm trying to bring back members of the past teams. I want them to speak. We used to have Shirley Comstock. She was one of the original cheerleaders and she would get before the groups during those days up at the stadium, that's like five thousand people, I mean that stadium was almost full and she'd go out and she'd lead the students in cheering. I said to myself initially this is not going to work but the kids loved her and they couldn't wait for Shirley to come back year after year. It was nostalgia and it was attractive. Then we brought in the entertainers. That was entertaining at homecoming. I guess what I'm trying to do is to provide some motivational factor. People just don't come because you ask them to come. They have to want to come. I can ask for a hundred percent from an athlete, and until the moment he decides to give me a hundred percent

of his effort, there is not much I can do about it. So we are trying to bring champions back this year. It's going to be interesting to see how this works out. The people are not turning out to games. A third of the people at the games are students, the rest are parents and friends.

lb

That's a big change I know when I was in high school and college we always went to the games. I didn't know that much about football and sometimes we froze to death, but we went it was a great social occasion.

rd

There are so many alternatives today. It seems to me that they have so many other things to do. TV is so saturated with football. If you are a football fan, for example, between high school as well as college as well as pro unless you give them something to identify with, I don't think they are going to come around. That's what I'm trying to do this year, see if it works. We are working hard at it to see if we can reestablish that; that's what we had here. In high school on a Saturday afternoon that was the place to be. Unless you were working that was the place to be. You went to the game. Thanksgiving morning if you weren't at the game you were kind of left out. But there are so many other alternatives. I didn't have a car to drive around in. I didn't have any money in my pocket to that extent. Life was a lot more simple.

jr

Do you remember teachers from your high school years?

rd

Yes. I remember the one who told me that if I promised not to go to college he would pass me in Spanish. I said I'm not going to college; and four years later I was a featured speaker at the sports dinner, and he was sitting there. It was one of the greatest achievements of my life to see him there and have him see me and I was the featured speaker. I was president of the senior class. At the university I was captain and all those kind of things, and here is the guy who said he would pass me in Spanish if I would not go to college. There was also another one sitting there. He was a speech teacher that said I wasn't college material so it was interesting they were both there. You know sometimes you need a negative motivation. Sometimes a positive. They were negative. I remember those two in particular but I also remember some very good ones.

jr

Do you remember some for their teaching style who are just excellent in the classroom?

rd

Yes, and I think I reflect that today. I think that in order to be a good teacher you've got to show a lot of motivation, same as coaching or whatever. It makes no difference to me. I think I always felt that when I walk into a classroom, I'm on stage. I've got to be interesting. I've got to make it interesting, and I change the pace as much as I can. I can't stand at the podium and just drum on and on and on because I hated those kinds of lectures. I tried to break it up as much as possible by getting class participation. I put them in circles. I don't like rows in classrooms. As soon as I get in I say, get some space. I want to see everybody's face I don't want these people hiding behind people in rows. Those are the people that I enjoyed being in their classroom, the ones who made it interesting. Some with stories I could relate to and entertaining. There is nothing wrong with telling something humorous once in a while to get their interest and that's exactly the what I've had in my teaching career.

jr

Did you see any science teachers that were ham actors?

rd

Yes, Coach, Mr. Savaria, physics. I hated physics. He got us through physics but he would make it so simple for us. He would relate it to things that we could relate to and understand. Obviously he didn't give us grades. I can assure you coach didn't give us grades because he felt that education was number one. He was a Lehigh graduate. He was very proud of that. But he was so good. I found it very difficult.

lb

So he was a master teacher as well as coach?

rd

Oh yes.

lb

Were there any subjects that you did enjoy in high school?

rd

That I did not enjoy?

lb

That you did, anything new.

rd

I had an language teacher. One that I thought was outstanding. I can't even think of her name right now. A French teacher who I enjoyed tremendously because she never spoke a word of English, and would give all her assignments in French. We'd come in saying we couldn't understand the assignment. She taught us after a while then if we didn't start understanding our assignment we were just going to

fail this class cold. So she forced us to think French, if you will, because down the street the band comes marching up. When you're structuring French it's not in the same form as we know English today. Anyway everything was in French and I enjoyed her. We thought she was really eccentric and she used to laugh; but by midterm we all loved her. She was a great individual. But she was persistent; she persisted and prevailed.

jr

Did everyone take languages?

rd

Yes. As I look back I had Italian, Spanish, French, and Latin. And I think we'd better start doing that in our education today. I think we need to be bilingual to some extent.

jr

Were there classes that the athletes steered clear of or males steered clear of like typing?

rd

No, it was not in our curriculum, that was in the business course. I was in the general studies class course. Typing was not a part of it.

jr

In high school you mean?

rd

Yes, it was not a part of it.

jr

So you sort of majored in something in high school?

rd

Yes, you were in business, you were in general. Business and general, and college. I think college was the third. I went through the general and still went in to college. I don't know exactly the name. I don't think that was the term. The title that they used, but there were three classifications. We never learned how to type, but we had to take chemistry, physics and biology.

jr

So there was a core curriculum?

rd

We didn't have any electives. This is what you take. When I went to college it was exactly the way it was when I went to high school. I went through four years of college at the University of Rhode Island and never had one elective, not one elective. I tried to get into one elective, an art

class, and the class was so jammed he said, if you are not a major, you're out. When we were in Physical Education at the University of Rhode Island, we minored in Biology and Psychology, a double minor with a major in Physical Education. That was it. It was all set for us. I never had an elective but I survived.

lb

Probably more than a hundred and twenty-eight hours.

rd

The hardest thing was that in zoology, for example, and in kinesiology and even physiology we were in with some of the medical students; and some of the guys were grading on curves, and we were getting killed. I guess the one memory I'll always have about zoology is when we were all given a cat right from the beginning; and by the end of the semester there was nothing left of this cat because we dissected it section by section from the digestive system right on to the nervous system. We used to take it back to the fraternity house and work on it there. We all had a cat name and by the time we ended up dissecting it that was the end of it, but it was a it was difficult in a sense there were a lot of pre-med students and they were hurting us I mean to get a "C" was to be like a triple "A". To get a "D" was satisfactory to get through these classes but we had no choice as to what we could take.

jr

I went to a catholic university night school in San Antonio and same deal. They had all these professional people taking these basic English courses for refresher courses, and when they all walked in you say there goes the "A's". Another group comes in, all these professional women, there go all the "B's"; and there were just "C's" left if you were good enough to get one.

rd

There was a certain amount of stereotyping too. I remember going into an English class and the English prof asking how many physical education majors or phys. ed. majors as they would say and we'd raise our hands. He'd say, only two of you are going to pass this class. He'd say, how many engineer's? I don't like engineer's either so only a couple of you are going to pass. This is from the very beginning. You know he was right, and he was tough.

jr

He had a lot of experience but he should never have said that. That's terrible, terribly unprofessional.

rd

Yes. There was one educational prof. I remember him very distinctly. His name was Dr. Casey and he disliked football

players and athletes in general and physical education. They were kind of all bundled into one, and he said that he's never known a physical education major or a football player to warrant more than a "C" in this class, so we're fighting to get through the "C". But we had to take him like three times, and the third time, the final time was the senior year course. He knew who we were by that time. He'd already had us twice and we'd already gotten our two "C's" from him, and he said, this is the last class and I'm going to give you an opportunity. If there is something on your chest and you'd really like to get it off next class period instead of meeting I'll have office hours you come in. I want you to talk to me about it. So we talked about it. Four of us, and it's funny, out of the four that went in there I'm the only one that didn't end up with a Ph.D. The rest of them did. We went in and we told him. I remember John Colly who ended up at the University of Connecticut, head of one of the department's there, very bright man, he said, do you mean we can say what we want? He said, no problem. Well, Jack lit into that man like I've never heard before, and he just laughed. He thought it was funny. He said, don't worry guys, you're going to get "A's" this semester, and we all got "A's". I don't know what that says about our education system. It's kind of weird but there are some of those kinds of people.

jr

Coaches at Rhode Island monitoring all the athletes like you do today?

rd

No.

jr

Beause today faculty all get little pieces of paper and are asked for midterm grades and progress reports and all that stuff. At Slippery Rock have there been faculty who have refused to do those things--they see it as special assistance or something--where they see it as something they shouldn't do for athletes?

rd

No, I've never experienced that simply because I kept my role as a faculty member quite visible. I served on all kinds of committees and that sort of thing.

jr

It was a sincere effort to help?

rd

Yes. I didn't have that problem. The one thing that I didn't do that they do now, and again it is probably a reflection of what I went through, that I didn't have study halls. I didn't have my grades going out. I only did it a few times,

but I didn't have my grades going out to the faculty. When I spoke to my ball players I told them they were here as students first and I'm here as faculty first, academic faculty first, my other job happens to be coaching football, and your other responsibility happens to be playing football. They would see me in a classroom and I would see them in a class room and they would see me on the football field and I would see them on a football field. There was a difference and there were different responsibilities, and a I never felt I had to have study halls. I felt the kids had to learn how to develop that maturity to become students. They knew the game plan. They knew what they had to have in order to participate, and I never went to a professor and spoke to them in behalf of a kid that was failing. If a kid was failing that was his problem. Maybe it was part of the growing up that I went through and that the responsibility for my education was laid in my lap, and I laid the responsibility in their lap and that's the way I always proceeded. That's not to criticize Coach Mihalik because they have study halls and all those kinds of things. I went through a private school system, too, and I also coached in prep school, and I used to go through study halls. You can't force anybody to study. Most of the kids were either writing letters or falling asleep. I remember in these small private schools that I taught in, at Cheshire Academy, for example, which is an Ivy League prep school, and they all had a certain grade level where you had to be in study hall. Kids were tired. It was after dinner, and all those kinds of things. I never felt it was very a productive time. So that was kind of a carry over into the kind of responsibility that I laid down. We had for the longest time, and I'm not going to mention the boy's name, which is the one boy I remember, he was the only boy who didn't graduate. They went through. It may have taken five years, but in those days when I was coaching here everybody was getting out in four years. Now it seems you have got to have a fifth year to get through college. Most of my ball players got through. A very small percent did not graduate, and yet I didn't have study hall. I just felt that they had to grow up and assume that responsibility which was what was given to us in the same way. Coach Savaria, even when we were in his class, we either did the work or we failed, and Coach Carp at the University of Rhode Island was the same way.

jr

Was he a big influence on you? Carp?

rd

Yes, he was as a motivator. He was probably one of the best motivators that I have ever known in my life. He helped me get my first job in a private school system at Cheshire Academy in Connecticut. I see him every summer. He has a cottage down in Rhode Island where I go. So I always call him. He had a stroke two years ago. He was doing the color

for the radio for the university for years; and now, I think, this is going to be his first year back. He is a legend down there. He is a tremendous motivator. We were eight and one my senior year at the university and we started out with only twenty-two ball players. By the time the season ended we had close to forty. That was the first time that I ever saw a team grow in number, motivating people to keep coming on the team. They don't do that today. But we went 8-1 alumni year, first time we beat Brown in thirty-five years, so we had a real good year. He was a great motivator. I learned an awful lot from him. It's like I always tell my students in the classroom, unless you live in a vacuum of some sort it's impossible not to learn something. I've been in situations where, very negative situations, you know coaching. I've seen a lot of bad coaches, but I've learned from them. I learned not what to do. It's impossible not to learn. Although I doubt it about some of the kids in my classroom where they didn't learn anything. Maybe they are in a cocoon, I don't know.

jr

Teachers that you particularly remember in Rhode Island, did you have a major advisor and all that sort of thing?

rd

Coach Paul Seraso, he was our instructor in the Physical Education Department, but he was also football coach. He was also my house father in the fraternity and he and Mae and the two children lived in the fraternity house, and they were like surrogate parents for us. That's what I talk about here at the university. In order for fraternity systems to succeed, I think they have to have a house parent in there. I mean it's just because when we did anything got to loud, Paul would knock on the door and he'd say, ok guys, cut it out and that would be the end of that. But he was very kind, we all loved him. He came in and talked to us, you know, evenings and social times, because we always had study hours from seven to ten in the fraternity house. There was no noise at all. Nothing. Those were study hours. Then we had the social hour from ten o'clock on when sandwiches were brought in. We had our own kitchen, and that's when he would come in and socialize, but he was a great influence I think. If I had to name anyone, Coach Searaso. Matter of fact, a good friend of Paul's today is, he is the CEO of PPG, his name is Vic Santy. He was a senior when I was a freshman. He belonged to the Beta Si Alpha fraternity that I joined.

Tape 6

Robert Dispirito Interview

R: Were there other teachers that you remember from college particularly and for any special reason?

D: Not really. Other than some of the teachers in the Physical Education Department which we had most contact with The head trainer at the University of Rhode Island, I got to be very close with him in terms of what he would have to do, but other than that I don't think so.

R: Did your sports that you embarked on at the University did they overlap in terms of practices and games and all that stuff?

D: I was the only football player that played baseball. So therefore, I didn't go to spring football. Fortunately enough I had established myself well enough in football where I really didn't need to be in spring practice. I remember there was a big article in the paper at that time that I was the only football player that was playing baseball. So that was the only overlapping in seasons.

R: And hockey was your winter sport?

D: But that was in high school. I only played hockey in high school I did not play hockey in college.

R: And then basketball you didn't play basketball in Rhode Island?

D: Not college.

R: That would have been impossible.

D: In those days, I think you might have alluded to it earlier, but every now and then they would get a football player on the basketball team to be rough off the boards, to be strong off the boards, but once you got into college it was almost impossible to do both. I don't know of anyone that played football and basketball. I don't know how they do that academically in high school. I knew it was hard for me, but the increase in demands of education today, an athlete who

can go play consecutive sports and go from one season to the other and carry off some very, very high grades is a very unusual young man or young lady, and yet they do it. Some of them do it.

B: Were there some good fraternity experiences? You liked your house?

D: I loved fraternity. I loved them. I had the greatest four years of my life in college and a lot of it had to do with the fraternity. There is no resemblance of what fraternity life was then and what it is now. It seems there's an emphasis on drinking in fraternities that was never present. For example, I joined an all Italian fraternity and it was Beta Psi Alpha and it was formed because Italians were not allowed to go to fraternities for a long time at the University of Rhode Island. So they decided to have their own fraternity. We had the Jewish fraternity, the Protestant fraternity. I mean they were known for all the Protestants would go here and all the Jewish kids were going there. It was because of the discrimination at one time. When I was there that was not the case at all. But when we joined the fraternity I had an opportunity to go to four other fraternities. I was pledged, rushed I'm trying to say, and I chose Beta Psi Alpha not because it was Italian because that had no bearing on it for me. As a matter of fact it was kind of an embarrassment for me. It was a very academically oriented fraternity. I mean most of them were pre-med and engineers. These were very serious kids and I figured I needed all the help I could get to go through college; so I decided that would be the best influence for me. I could always go socialize with the other fraternities anytime I wanted, but I needed to go home and study. There were a number of other fraternities I didn't think I wanted to go into for one reason or another, but the fraternity system in general at the University of Rhode Island when I was there was the center of all campus life. The dances, the social events, everything was there and there were very few students living in the dorms at that time. In answer to your question, with Paul Searso as the house parent I enjoyed the fraternity. There were twenty-two of us, which is the largest class they ever had. Thirty-four living in our fraternity. We had a beautiful home, southern brick, white, a gorgeous home. We decided to open it up to non-Italians. The alumni were going to withdraw our shares, close the house down. We said, go ahead close it down, we'll work it out somehow. We had many meetings with our alumni and then we opened it, so we brought in two non-Italian's and from that time on it was open. I can understand the feelings they had because they were discriminated against, and they decided they were very proud of this fraternity, probably the nicest fraternity house on campus. I mean they put a lot

of money into this beautiful fraternity. Everyone of the pledges had a daily duty to do plus every Friday I had to wash and wax the master's room. We were all assigned to another upper classman, we'd call them the master and we had to wash and wax their rooms which were study rooms. In fraternity we had the social, but below that in the basement was the eating areas. The first floor was social rooms, the second floor rooms was study rooms, the third floor was the sleeping deck. That house was spotless. I mean what a contradiction. I went into the fraternity house. I'd driven onto campus many, many times. Two years I decided to stop in and actually stop and go into the fraternity house. I went into and the place was devastated. It was terrible. It just made me angry. I've stopped donations to it. I don't give them donations anymore. The place is a pigpen. I couldn't believe it. What a contrast from when we lived there. The influence of Coach Searso and his family plus the academic atmosphere that prevailed in the fraternity was conducive to a real good education. They were good for me. Fraternity sings were very popular. Everybody worked very hard on that. We had social events. Every fraternity at the University of Rhode Island would have a theme dance, a theme affair, once a year. It was the big thing. Ours was the Basin Street _____. It was always New Orleans sytle. We'd have the black band, and we'd have the costumes. Phi Gam would have the Blue Hawaii. You had to go dressed Hawaiian. Somebody else would have a western. I mean that was the center. It was just great. I really thoroughly enjoyed that. I feel that our students today miss an awful lot.

B: Innocent times.

D: The fifties. No drugs. Very little liquor. Beer was the worst thing you could do. Nobody decided to go to fraternity affairs to get smashed. I've had students in my class tell me what a great weekend. They'd say, yes, what you'd do? I don't remember a thing. That was their version of a great weekend. I was so smashed. What a great time I had. I don't remember a thing about it. I'm glad a grew in a life of innocent times.

R: You dated through college?

D: I didn't personally date. In order to teach us how to develop some social skills, we used to have sororties over for teas and dances. We would have to serve them as pledges and all that. We would have to learn what spoon to use and all that kind of stuff. So we learned some of the social graces. We ended up a lot like in high school. There were very few studies in high school. We ran in packs. The girls and the guys were all kinds of packs going to Y.M.C.A. dances. Nobody really gets that emotionally involved, seriously involved. We

travelled with them because they were super dancers. Because you loved to dance with them more. They were just good time gals or good time guys. But the jocks _____ because they were jocks. College was pretty much the same. We travelled in groups. We'd have a dance and we didn't necessarily have a date. The sororties were invited over. The fraternity guys were there and that's it. It was a different kind of time. I've heard that expression so many times, the age of innocence, but you're right. I never heard of anyone ever using the drug, marijuana. That wasn't part of our vocabulary at the time. I didn't even know what marijuana was. The biggest word we had was the Korean War. In my senior year the Korean War had broken out. A lot of fraternity brothers had gone into the service, and some of them got killed. The Korean War was our biggest worry, but by the time we graduated, my senior year, the Korean War was over. Most of us were ROTC guys anyway and to commissioned. We were going down to Fort Benning for our training. We figured we'd get to Korea, but Korea was over by that time. But that was the biggest concern that we ever had. Other than that it was a pretty carefree kind of life. A great life. Greatest four years of my life. I think that anybody can say less than that has been cheated. College has to be it. You don't have any responsibilities of family, jobs, all those things.

R: It's a greatly romantic adventure.

D: Camelot. As a matter of fact, that's what they refer to the times here at the University for Al Watrel.

R: Is that right?

D: Everybody was winning. Everybody was having a good time. The President was happy. We were happy. They called it Camelot. A young president with a young family.

R: You were in high school through the World War II years?

D: Yes. The prep school was the only change in between high school and college. I went to a Catholic prep school, Marion _____, run by the Marion fathers. That's when I think I related earlier in terms of the tryouts. That saved my hide in that I was able to get my second year of French so I could get into the University. I needed two years of a language. I had all these languages, but I didn't have a second year of any of them. But the University required two years.

R: What did you play in baseball?

D: Catcher.

R: Catcher. Oh, boy.

D: That's all I was good at. I was boring at any other position. I think all the time I played in college, I played one game in the outfield because I had split a finger. Couldn't straddle.

R: Did you have any injuries in football?

D: No.

R: Never. Didn't have any problems. Nor baseball outside of that.

D: I was very fortunate. All the years I played. I played semi-pro, high school, college, service, never got hurt.

R: What did you do your summers?

D: Worked construction. Five dollars and hour. That was a lot of money.

B: Good pay.

D: Alumnus had a construction building bridges, and they put us on the job. Three of us. It was hard work though. We worked from seven o'clock in the morning until four o'clock.

R: Big bridges?

D: Just open passes. They weren't huge.

R: So you wheeled concrete and stuff like that.

D: I was what they call a carpenter's helper. I would lug the lumber up to them and then clean up. Then when they did finally do the pouring, we used to put our boots on we used to have to get into the cement. It was hard work. But it's funny when you think about it because I had to leave by six o'clock and get to the job and you worked from seven to three, and then on the way back they would drop me off at the baseball field, and I would play a baseball game, and I would get home about nine or nine-thirty and get dinner, and get up at six o'clock the next day. Long days.

B: But you were young.

D: Tuition was only a hundred dollars a semester so we could work our way through college. I'd wait on tables for my meals. I got a scholarship for $200. No big deal, but that was tuition. I worked in the fraternity. They gave us jobs. I mean I made enough money during the year with

work study to pay for it, but the summer was always bonus. I made a lot of money during the summer. But today a youngster can't do that. How do you earn ten thousand dollars. How do you earn twenty thousand dollars in the summer to pay for your education.

B: You borrow and end up with a big debt.

D: That's true.

R: Did you have two scholarships? Did you have scholarship in baseball?

D: No. It was just one. Just football. Just to pay the tuition. That was all. They gave us $180 for a room. That _____. We'd wait on tables for our meals.

R: Where there many black youngsters in college then?

D: One.

R: At the University of Rhode Island?

D: He played football. Slick Pina was his name.

R: Running back?

D: Yes. Always ran east and west. Never north and south. Maybe he dreamt that way but never on the field. There goes Slick. Don't give Slick the ball, he's going to lose yardage. He created a real stir on our campus because Slick was an outstanding athlete, and he was dating white girls. Well, in those days it was a scandal. He had a rough time because of that. I see him from time to time, and I enjoy listening. He's one of those guys who always has a smile from ear to ear. Very personable. He was the only black. No, I'm sorry. There was one other kid. He was a tight end, but we didn't see him very much. On campus, period. About as many as what I got here at Slippery Rock. I think there were like 40 or something like that. Very few blacks. Still you wonder where they went to school.

B: Or did they go to school.

D: Or did they go to school.

B: On the teams with the athletes, he was accepted?

D: Yes. He was loved on the campus. Everybody. We never looked at Slick as Black anyway. He happened to be Black but we never gave it a thought. There was a young man named Wylie, Black, George Wylie. Excellent student, chemist. He was freshmen, sophomore, junior class

president, and my fraternity wanted me to run against him my senior year. I did and I beat him for senior class presidency, but we became very good friends as a result of that race. It was a very close race. George got his Ph.D. when I was ____, and went out to Washington. He was one of the national leaders. As a matter of fact my brother Don worked in Washington for Representative _____. There was a big disturbance out in the corrider outside the office of the House of Representatives. He said, there was George in his overalls, and he was trying to make a statement. He was really deeply into the Black movement for equality. But he was out fishing in the Potomac and the boat tipped over and he was drowned. That was the other. There weren't very many Blacks, but they were outstanding Black students. His brother preceded him as one of the big judges in the state of Rhode Island. Excellent students.

R: Back to World War II.

D: I have to go back to one more story about George. We never thought black, white. In our junior year we went to camp, ROTC camp, in Fort Meade, Maryland. We drove down from Rhode Island. Well, being from Rhode Island, a little state, that was a big trip. An hour from here to wherever you wanted to go in New England. And when we drove to Maryland, we had to stay in a hotel. Every time we went in they said they were filled. We looked at three motels, and every one said it was filled. We said, there's no sign out there saying we don't have any room. George finally said, as long as I'm in this car, you're not going to get a room. He said, drop me off at a motel that says it accepts Blacks. That was our first experience of Black _____. Really. And we did. We went back to the other motels and we got rooms, but we had to put him in a black one because we were in Maryland.

B: This was about 1950?

D: 1952. The summer of 1952. That was the first realization that he was Black.

R: For me, I taught at Memphis State in the mid-fifties and the southern speech convention was never held. It was always held at at segregated hotels, and the Blacks could not stay at those hotels and they couldn't ride the elevators to the mezzanine for the meetings. So they had to take the stairs. We put a stop to that. We just outlawed all segregated hotels. I mean legally. We passed all kinds of stuff. That was going on all over the South, and at conventions, segregated. That was really so uncivilized. It was hard to go around and tell people that.

D: It's really hard to understand it, and you really don't understand the impact until you're involved with it yourself. It's always somebody else's problem. _____ It's difficult.

B: That was your friend.

D: Yes. And we were so naive. We just didn't even think. The guy who told us you can't have a room because there's a Black with you, we never thought of George as anything but George. We had gotten so close that _____ It was just crazy. Other than that we didn't experience too much of that. On the teams we didn't. There was no problem there. We never traveled south. In New England there was never a problem with Black athletes. Interesting.

Tape 7

#7 Robert Dispirito Interview #7

B: This is the next interview with Bob DiSpirito which will cover his years after college and before Slippery Rock.

R: There's nothing before Slippery Rock.

B: That's pretty many years.

R: This is Joe Riggs and Leah Brown doing our fourth session with Bob DiSpirito on June 16, 1992. We're going to pick up with graduation at the University of Rhode Island and where you went from there and why.

D: There was a decision to be made at that time. I was commissioned as a Second Lieutanant, ROTC. I had a choice of either going into the service immediately or stay out for a year. I thought it might be best to try to get a job first and then have something to come back to rather than going into the service. So I did get a job at Cheshire Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut. It's outside New Haven. It was kind of a prep school for Yale. So I went there as an assistant coach and had baseball coach. Assistant football and then baseball coach at a private school. It was a very interesting experience. It was an experience whereby I was brought up in the public school system all my life and this was nine in a classroom, six in a classroom. I had to eat all my meals at the tables with the boys. It was an all boys school. Study halls. Your time wasn't very much yours at all. It was kind of confining. After serving a year, I had to go into the service. I had a two year obligation with the ROTC commission. That's when I went to Fort Benning went into the service. Again I kind of lucked out. I even thought I was in the infantry. I was given an opportunity to become A&R officer which is the athletic and recreation officer for the regiment. So I had myself a gymnasium that I was running. I think the funny experience of it all as I look back was day that I reported to Fort Dix, New Jersey. I had to go to regimental headquarters to report in and get my orders and so forth. I walked in and met the colonel. His first words where, so you're Bob DiSpirito. Oh, my God, I felt like I could fall through the floor. I mean I had never met this man. I'm nervous enough as it is going into my first assignment and he's saying, oh, you're Bob DiSpirito. He said, a lot of University of Rhode Island former ball players are here. They said that you went out and coached for a year, and we need a coach for the regimental football team. So he said, Lieutenant, you are it. So I became a head coach at Fort Dix for one year until such time that I had to go in the service, but the very first game that we ever played which was hilarious because an awful lot of Yankee Conference football players were dispersed throughout

the base. In the very first game, guys from the University of Massachusetts and Springfield were guys on the other side and they were laughing at me because I was the quarterback. I'd been an offensive guard all my life in college. I was a linebacker. I never played backfield in my life in college, and here I am. I'm the quarterback simply because we didn't have a quarterback. At least I knew the fundamentals since I coached for a year what to do at quarterback, and we won six to nothing on a pass. I was selected player of the week. It was my first and only time ever to play quarterback at the base. It was an experience because I guess as you get older, and I was only two years out of college, the injuries don't respond as quickly as they did when you where in college and you're in good shape. Because when you're in the service, you have your regular routine to go through, and you weren't lifting weights. You weren't running. So the injuries stayed with you a longer period of time. But after spending that year. _____ Walter Reed Army Hospital for quite a while and coming back from that so I had to leave the base and coming back I was reassigned again to an A&R position. So my experience in the service was one in which _____ in my area, but it was an experience that was holding me back career wise. I just couldn't wait to get out. After the two years, that's when I returned to Cheshire Academy. I had been in the hospital for quite a while. It was good that I do something physical to get back in shape, and the head coach at the Cheshire Academy was one of the head counselors at Camp _____ in North Conway, New Hampshire. He said, I need a counselor. Why don't you come along. So I did. I did the canoe trips for the whole summer. I was just in fantastic shape because we go for four days out on the river and camp out and all that thing, and it was something that was absolutely beneficial to me at that time. But in the meantime, I got a call from Mr. ____, who's the headmaster of Cheshire Academy. He said, Mr. James has resigned as head football coach at Cheshire Academy, do you want it? I said, well, yes, but I'm here with Coach James and he's not said a word to me that he resigned. I said, I think that very odd. He said, well, if you have any problems, you can call me back. So I went to see the coach. I said, Coach, you didn't tell me you resigned. Well, he hadn't. Oh, my Lord. He was all upset. He said, would call Mr. _____. This is my job. I don't have another job. It's in late July. What would happen if you called back and said that you want me back as the head coach for at least another year. I was naive enough to that. So I picked up the phone and I called Mr. _____. I said, Mr. _____, thank you for the offer, but being in a situation where Mr. James should be returned as the head coach for at least a year. It's short notice. He just simply said, no, we've made our decision. I remember him being very kind. We've made our decision, and if you don't care to be the head coach, he said, then we'll get someone else. The one thing we do know is Mr. James is

not returning as head coach at Cheshire Academy. So he says, you make your decision right now. I said, well, Mr. _____, if he's not going to come back then obviously I'll take the job. So then that was a very difficult last two weeks in our relationship. There wasn't anything that I did because I was just getting out of the service. But anyway, that was my first experience at becoming a head coach, and we played the West Point plebes in our opening game. The West Point plebes had been in training constantly, and Dr. _____, who's a legend in football was the head coach. I was in awe of him. I was awe of West Point. They brought us in on Friday night. Everybody was in awe of the whole situation, and they absolutely annihilated us the next day. But it was an amazing experience. We survived the season. Then I went to graduate school. I went to teacher's college next. Because the coaches that were coming through since we were servicing a lot of the colleges and prep schools. A lot of the football players were going to the Ivy League or other schools. I asked them, how do you get into college coaching? They said, well, the first thing you need to do is get your master's. So I decided to give up the head coaching job to go to teacher's college in Columbia for a year. I held down the job for one year at Barnard School for Boys. I taught until four o'clock. I got on the subway. I was in class from five until ten forty-five. Five days a week. Then I went from eight to twelve on Saturdays. I got my master's in one year because I didn't feel that I could stay out in the field more than one year, and I didn't. Upon completion of that then I was offered the freshman assistant football and head baseball coach at the University of Bridgeport, and I took the job, and I got married that year. That was my break into college football. I only served the second year. I was moved from the freshman coach to the assistant coach, varsity, my second year, and the third year I was made head coach for both football and baseball. That's what launched my career. Seven years at Bridgeport. Five years as head coach of football, and seven years as head coach of baseball. One of the most exciting things for me was to take the University of Bridgeport to the NCAA playoffs in baseball. Baseball was also one of my loves, and we went to Springfield, and got beat by Springfield, but beat Boston College, and got beat by Vermont. But, anyway, being in tournament for the very first time was very exciting for us, but the one lesson I did learn was that I'm walking on campus very proud as a peacock because we came back. This was the very first time we had been in the playoffs, and I bumped into Mr. Littlefield, the president of the University, and he said, how's every thing going? Fine. He said, when were the playoffs? I said, well, Dr. Littlefield, we've already been there, and we did this and that, and he said, oh, that's very fine, and with that he walked away, and that was the kind of climax that kind of was climatic in terms of my decision to leave

Bridgeport because nobody really cared. One of the experiences up there in New England. They're a very tight comaraderie, and it's very good with football coaches in New England. In otherwords, once a week we would go to a different school. Yale would host one week. Bridgeport would host another week. Coast Guard another week. Wesleyan another week. And all the schools in New England would meet every Monday, and the reporters would show up, and they'd have a nice cocktail dinner or luncheon, and then they would ask questions of all the coaches. It was a very nice deal. The last year that I was there which was also the year of the baseball thing, too, I was very proud to be able to get the opening session, and that meant the Yale-Connecticut game. And in that area the Yale-Connecticut game was the big thing. It was the big game of the state. What I thought was really fantastic was that we got the luncheon that day because that meant a lot of reporters would come to that. So we were getting ready for that, and worked on that, and the president, Littlefield, came in and I'm talking to John _____, who's the head coach at Yale at the time and Bob Engles who's the head coach at Connecticut and I'm speaking to both of them and the president came in and I introduced the president to Coach Engles and Coach _____. He looked at them and said, do you play one another? I almost died. I mean this is the big game. I said, yes. He said, and where do you coach? _____ said, I coach at Yale. He said, oh, that's good. Bob Engles said, I coach at Connecticut. He said, oh, do you play one another? I wanted to fall through the cracks in the floor. But that was the kind of attitude. They really didn't care about athletics a whole lot. So I decided I needed to get out of there. That's why I got out of there and went to Bucknell University.

R: Did the students support it?

D: No. The University of Bridgeport is a commuters college. Most of the students were made up from either New York or New Jersey. With the expressway in five minutes they could be home. Although we were located on Long Island Sound, the campus itself is located right on Long Island sound. I used to practice right next to a beach. We used run the boys in the water on the beach on real hot day. It was kind of neat, different. But our facilities were terrible. We had to carry our dummies and all our equipment almost a mile. We had to carry it out to the practice field. So there wasn't too much concern for athletics. And it was very difficult to survive in that kind of setting. As a matter of fact, the school has been bellied up recently, and the Hari Krishnas have now taken over, I believe. Either that or Reverend Moon. I think it's Reverend Moon is now the owner of Bridgeport University.

D: I don't know what they're going to do with it, but it's a different kind of a place. But the student support is dead now. There wasn't very much with the students, because kids were not in and not only that but they were kind of scattered. The faculty were scattered all over the place. There was very little comaraderie within the faculty. It's not like Slippery Rock where everybody _____ in town.

B: So it was coaching, not teaching, _____

D: Yes. As a matter of fact, I started and headed up the recreation department at Bridgeport. I _____ They didn't even give us release time. I taught fifteen hours which turned out to be 21 contact hours, and I was head of baseball, and head football coach. People they tell me they're overloaded teaching twelve hours and that's more than they can handle. And I hate to say, in the old days I used to teach fifteen hourse, had 21 contact hours. Head football. Head baseball. And I was also recreation director for the town of Wilton because I wasn't earning enough money at Bridgeport. My salary there was $2900. The advantage was we lived in the dorm, and we had free rent. That's the only advantage. So I have very little patience with my colleagues today who say they are overworked.

R: It must be something in the water or the air.

D: The transition to Bucknell was quite different. I was looking at a different caliber of student. Intellectually as well as their social backgrounds. Completely different than Bridgeport's. At Bucknell we went in and won the championship the very first year that we were there. So we didn't have a problem with that. We were considered successful immediately. I went there as a defensive cooridinator. The student body was totally different especially from the coaching aspect because a Bucknellian student was a better prepared student. They probably have a whole lot more intelligence to be honest with you than what I was to working with so as a football coach as you them what to do, they didn't make that many mistakes. So you didn't have to constantly go over and over and over the mistakes that the kids would make. Usually the Bucknellian football players are either engineers or business majors or something. They were very intelligent kids to get into the school in the first place so they grasped pretty much what you wanted them to do immediately. From a coaching point of view, I found it very much easier in that I didn't have to constantly go over repeated mistakes. It was the type of job that just wore you down because it was interesting intially because I used to teach one class eight o'clock in the morning. Coaches taught one class from

D: eight to nine. Then we were in the football office from nine to about eleven at night. Point meaning was that we never got home. We had to eat our meals with the football team. So as a result I think I ate three meals with my family from the 28th of August until Thanksgiving because the coach felt we should eat all the meals with the team. My youngsters were so young that by the time I left at seven o'clock in the morning they were still asleep. Obviously they were asleep because I didn't get home till after eleven at night. So I very seldom got to see my own children, and certainly didn't have much time to spend with them. You say, well how about Sundays? You were tied up with the game on Saturday but Sunday you're tied up in the office all day. Films, reviewing the films. We were there early Sunday morning. He allowed us till ten o'clock to go to church, and after that we were in the office from ten o'clock to eleven or twelve o'clock at night. So I tired of that very quickly. I felt it was too much of a price for me to pay. Seeing my kids grow up. I was tired all the time. It was not the kind of life for me. So after short of two years I left, and got this job here because I felt I'll call the shots from now on. So I went from a head coaching position to an assistant to a head coaching position. It's okay if you're working for somebody that you agree with, but if you philosophically disagree with someone, you know, I need to get out of here. So I was fortunated enough to get this job here. At the time it was President Carter. He was a Bucknellian so that kind of helped out a little bit. So when I applied for the job, and I guess I didn't you know, that helped. He never said so, but I think it did. That I was from Bucknell. Plus, they were starting a recreation department here, and I had a degree in recreation so that helped, too. Everything kind of fit. But Bucknell was good. It was quite an experience. I just have one story on Bucknell that really stays in mind. I'll never forget it because I was the defensive cooridnator. We played University of Pennsylvania, and a week before, that was always the big game. The week before we're playing Temple. Temple with, I guess Bucknell had beaten Temple like thirteen years in a row, so nobody took them real seriously. We prepared for them as we normally do. On Thursday the head coach called the defensive coaches in and he said, I don't like what we're doing. I think we ought to do this. We're going to change the game plan. Which in football sense he was going to go from a three deep to a two deep secondary which meant the middle was wide open, but we were going to cover man to man so he felt this was the way to do it. And we looked at the defense and we said, well, you know what? If their quarterback, if the backs ever flair out and we're all man to man and there is nobody in the middle and the quarterback keeps the ball in a quarterback sneak, he going to go in for a score. He

D: got very mad at us. He said that's the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard and if they don't do it blah, blah, blah. Well, what do you think they did the very first play? The very, very first play. They flaired their backs. They knew we were manned two deep. The quarterback took the ball and went 82 yards for a touchdown. Nothing said. We're all fuming because we know what had happened. He changed this on Thursday. What do you think they did the second time? Same play. Quarterback sneak. And he starts yelling at me upstairs. I'm saying, Coach, you changed it to two deep. We don't have a free safety back there. There's nobody in the middle, and everybody's man to man. There's nobody on the quarterback. The quarterback is not accounted for. He's the only man, and they're smart enough to see this. He says, well, what are we going to do? I said, we have to go to prevent. Prevent was our only defense that we had with a free safety. He thought that was sarcasm. He chewed me out for that. I didn't like this. I didn't like getting chewed out for something that I thought was not my fault. It was ridiculous. The eventual score was 82-28. Everytime they threw the ball it was a touchdown. It kept hitting the middle. There was nobody in the middle. So anyway, we come back on Sunday, the head coaches door is closed. We don't see him. So we do what we have to do. Get the game plan. Come in Monday, door is closed, don't see him. Went out to practice, no coach. He did that for three solid days. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Didn't see him. The door was closed. He didn't come to practice. Thursday I think he came out to practice. He just stood around, and didn't say a word. He hadn't spoken to the entire coaching staff, and we're putting this whole game together, and we're playing the University of Pennsylvania. A big game right? So we leave Friday for the University and we upset them, but before we upset them again warmup and all that, he's out on the field. The team comes back in. He doesn't come back in. We're waiting and waiting. He doesn't come back in. So Coach Oberlin who's on the staff at the time at Bucknell with me, we looked at one another, and I decided to say something to the team. We had to say something. So I gave the pregame talk, and I was furious. I must admit I gave a very firey speech that day. A very emotional speech because I was not upset with them. I wasn't upset with the game. I was upset with the head coach. We went out on the field and we upset them. We beat the University of Pennsylvania after getting beat by that crazy score. So as we come back in as most lockers go all the reporters gather in the room and that's where he was. He was telling them how a thrill it was to beat Pennsylvania, and he gave the whole speel to the reporters, and didn't ask us one question. So I said to myself, I think it's time to leave. But that was quite an experience.

D: That taught me that if I'm going to go down _____ making a mistake, I'd rather it be my mistake only because of what I do not because of someone else. So that was interesting. But overall Bucknell was a great experience. It's a very fine school academically. Nice community. I would love to have stayed there, but not under those conditions. Then the job opened up. The athletic director said that I had told him that I wanted to leave and he said that he had a friend who was president at Slippery Rock University and they were looking for a coach, and I said, I don't want to go to Arkansas. I was thinking Little Rock. Up in New England Slippery Rock is not a household name. It really isn't. Out west, I guess, _____. So honestly I had never heard of Slippery Rock, and I was in coaching _____. I had no idea where it was, and they told me it was _____ _____. So I came up here for an interview, and I got the job, and I'm glad I've been here ever since.

R: When you were doing your senior year at Rhode Island, where you then planning to become a coach and a teacher? Was that in your mind?

D: Yes. Always was. From physical education. I was a physical education major, and the natural thing to do with me was to coach. I was offered the head coaching job in my hometown.

R: That was Port Chester?

D: No, this was in Winnsockett, Rhode Island.

B: In the public schools?

D: In the public schools is that what you mean? I'm sorry.

R: Yes. When you graduated from Rhode Island. You were offered a job there?

D: When I got through at the University of Rhode Island that's when I moved to Cheshire Academy.

R: What's the story on the job in your hometown?

D: Oh, now that was when I graduated. When I graduated from college I was also offered the head coaching job in my hometown. I was glad I never took it because they will always remember you as who you were, and I wasn't the best student in the world because I didn't care about academics. I was just interested in athletics when I was going through high school. No interest at all. And I just did what I had to do to get through. Remember what I told you earlier about the teachers who said, I'll pass you as long as you _____. All of a sudden I would have had to be on the faculty with him, and I don't think that would have gone over too good with him. It

D: was not a job that I wanted. I didn't want to go back to my hometown. Fortunately, I got the prep school job.

R: And at Cheshire you were teaching?

D: I was teaching biology. No, the first year I was teaching elementary math in the lower school. They call it a middle school. I guess it was middle school. It was sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. And that's interesting. You talk about motivation. Again, somebody must have told me about this years ago, and it always kind of stuck in my mind in terms of people generally don't do anything or perform well unless they're motivated, I guess. I was teaching math and in order to raise the grades because there are only five or six in a classroom so you could really get into substance, but they weren't too motivated, and in order to motivate them, I started a club. I was dating a girl that worked for the electric company. You know the redi-kilowatt figure? She used to get me these and I formed this club called Rho Kappa Kappa, the redi-kilowatt club, the Rho Kappa Kappa, and in order to become a Rho Kappa Kappa I would have secret messages placed throughout the middle school that they could read. Then we also had a ceremonial kind of initiation where they dressed in all kinds of weird costumes. It caught the imaginations of the kids, and in order to do that they had to have a certain average in the math classes and then an overall average, and it raised grades. Just raised grades. It was unbelievable. I don't know. It was something that I just happened to do that just caught on. So that was my first year of teaching to motivate the kids into Rho Kappa Kappa's and it was the redi-kilowatt and they wore those pins. That was the badge of honor in middle school. It was a secret society because I would put the messages like the Jack Armstrong's of years ago where they gave you a key and they'd give these special messages over the radio when I was growing up. Well, that's what it was like. I remembered that.

Then the second year when I went into the service for two years and came back as their head coach and I was a biology teacher. That was my minor, biology.

R: So when you first started teaching math, was that a surprise to you what you were going to do there?

D: Oh, sure. I didn't know what I was going to do and they said you'll teach math. I said, okay. It was no big deal. It was addition, subtraction, multiplication and get into the fundamentals of algebra. Well, I had no problems with that.

R: So you put together your own lesson plan and tied into it.

D: Yes, and tried to imporve the grades. We started the secret society of the Rho Kappa Kappa's, and I still have a picture

D: to this day of all the kids in all their outfits in the secret initiation, and that really caught their imagination, and the head master was really enthused about it. That's why he offered me the job to come back, and actually fired Jim James. I found that out later. They wanted me back.

R: He fired James because he wanted you?

D: No, that wasn't it, but that is the reason why they offered me the job. No, they had other problems.

R: So how many youngsters came out for football at Cheshire? They were playing a high school schedule?

D: No. They played a college freshman schedule at prep school. It was usually the athletes that Yale, Harvard, Princeton were sending to the prep school for a year, and we were getting these terrific athletes, and we didn't have to recruit them. They were being sent to us, and they would perform for us for a year and then they would prep them. Obviously try to raise their grades or whatever to try to get them into _____. So we were getting terrific _____ athletes. We played the Army plebes. We played the University of Connecticut freshmen. We played the University of Rhode Island freshmen. We played Southern Connecticut freshmen, and then we played a very big high school, St. Aquinas, in Rochester, New York. I don't why I remembered that, but I did. They were the top high school team in the country at the time. We would go out and play in the big Red Wing stadium in front of thousands of people and it was a thrill. They played just top teams because we had the top athletes. Most of our kids went to Yale.

R: So the athletes that were going to go into the Ivy League came to Cheshire for a year. Were they already high school graduates?

D: Yes.

R: So they were kind of post graduate high school people. Was your football team made up of these people or where you playing juniors and seniors alongside.

D: All post graduates.

R: All post graduates?

D: All post graduates.

R: A lot of people then?

D: Not a lot. We only had maybe 28 to 30 guys on the team.

R: So you weren't a platoon?

D: Oh, no, they were going both ways. In those days, it was both ways.

B: Regular Cheshire students didn't get to play on the team? Did they have another team?

D: Yes. They had another high school there. They had a high school team, and they had a junior high school team. It was like in baseball. I coached baseball team at Cheshire, but I was the high school and prep school coach with another level in baseball, but I had the top level in football, and the second level in baseball. Again, those are the things that helped me in my career because the University of Bridgeport, for example, was looking for a head baseball coach and I had the background for that, and for recreation I had the background for that and I football thrown in. Even when I arrived at Slippery Rock, they were looking for someone with experience of head coaching which I had. They wanted to start a recreation program, I had that. So you know things sometimes just fall into place. And I was at Bucknell, and the president was a Bucknellian so I think that helped.

B: They only fall into place when you've got it. When you've had the experience.

D: Right. As I used to tell a lot of the young men that I recruited here at the University. They just place themselves in the position of choice first. They have to be accepted. In recruiting a young man here at Slippery Rock, I'd say, where have you been accepted. Well, I haven't been accepted yet, but so and so and such and such school is interested in me. I'd say, you really don't have a choice until these three schools accept you along with Slippery Rock. Now once you have four schools accepting you now you have a choice, but right now Slippery Rock is the only school that accepted you so you really don't have a choice. Any other place but Slippery Rock. It's the same kind of concept whether you're dealing _____.

R: Did you have a lot of support at Cheshire? Did you have assistants?

D: I had as many assistants at Cheshire that I had at Bridgeport. I had one. I coached a college team at the University of Bridgeport as head coach for five or seven years and there was only one assistant coach. Amazing what you can do. I look around here and I see Coach Mihalek with ten assistants, and I'm saying, phew. Times have changed. Yes, two of us. One would handle the offence, one would handle the defense. When defense wanted to work, our offense had to supply the offence and vice versa. So it wasn't as much work to accomplish, but what it did accomplish for us is that it kept it simple. It couldn't get very complicated. We had to be very simple,

D: and we really had to know what we were doing, and by keeping it simple we were able to accomplish what we wanted. When I became the head coach of Slippery Rock I carried that same principle here. You watched our teams for years, Joe. We were a very basic, simple team. We knew what we wanted to do and we would force our opponent into certain defenses that we wanted because we wanted to run certain things. That's the game you play. For example, in football there's a lot of shifting around, and they give you one look and they take it away and they give you all these kind of things. That's if you split an end, but I was taught and I knew that if I didn't split my ends and I kept two tight ends they had to be very basic. They couldn't shift around. So in order for me to attack them defensively I always put two tight ends and they couldn't fool around, and the kids up front knew how to block the basic things, and what we did was out execute teams. I think we had better personnel and we out executed that's why we won, and we were smart enough not to try to out smart ourselves. To this day it's still true. Every time Coach Mihalek gets in trouble he goes to two tight ends then they can't fool around over there. That's the basics.

B: When you have ten assistant coaches, you've got another team to take care of you besides your players.

D: It's interesting. When you become a head coach and you have a staff of that size, your job is to keep them happy and to provide them with the tools in order to get the job done. So you have to be an administrator basically. This is what Coach Mihalek is. I didn't find that out before in the sense all I knew. I knew this. I didn't have the luxury of building it. I used to have to coach the offensive line. All the years I coached, I coached the whole offensive line. A lot of responsiblity along with all the other responsibilities as head coach. But when I came back, Don Ault left, and the president asked me to take over for the year before Coach Mihalek took over, I was not going to do any coaching. I was just going to be an administrator. So the very first thing I did was I met with the staff and I told them, you all have your assignments. I've talked with you individually in terms of what I want you to do and in terms of philosophy. I even set my philosophy and these are your responsibilities, coaching responsibilities. If there's anything that has to be told to the president or to the athletic director, to the admissions or to the alumni that is my job. I don't want you to interfere. I don't even want you to think about it. I want you to coach on the field. That is your job. I'll give you the best equipment. I'll give you the best uniforms. I'll give you a tent for the injured. On the hot days, I'll give you all the drinks you want. I'll take care of all of your needs, but you do the coaching, I'll do the administrating. The first thing I did was I met with the coach's wives. I met with the coach's wives at a luncheon at my house, and I

D: told them that this is what I will be doing with your husbands come Sunday. Sunday afternoon and night they're mine. Other than that, Sunday morning they're yours. Monday night they're mine. Tuesday night they're mine. Now once the game plan is in Wednesday after practice they're free. Thursday after practice they're free, and all day Friday they're free. Now you plan your doctor's appointments, your dental appointments, and everything you have to do on that basis unless there's unusual circumstances, and then of course we'll deal with it. But I wanted the wives to know because prior to that Don Ault never let them understand when the meetings were going to be over and what their times where and there were things that the husbands should have done or tried to help out, but they didn't know schedules. So I thought it was very important that they know the schedule and what the philosophy was, and they could count on their husbands on Wednesday after practice, Thursday after practice and they had all day Friday and all morning Saturday morning till such time as the training table if we were playing at home. So by letting them know that morale just ____. But that's what a coach does. Coach Mihalek has to do that. He has ten or eleven coaches now, maybe nine. I think two left and they didn't replace them. But he has a very difficult job in keeping them all happy, and giving them the proper time and tools to get the job done, and giving them space to operate in in doing it their way, and not interfering, but keeping it within the realm of varsity. _____ That's the job. Some coaches learn that. Some coaches never learn that. It's amazing.

R: Was that your first time to have that kind of a meeting with coache's wives or had you done that before?

D: First time.

R: But in the years that you were head coach before that you knew your coache's wives very well so on an informal basis those things were all said previously.

D: Sure. I always let the coaches know when the meetings where so I didn't have that problem. When the other coaches came in they didn't follow that philosophy and coaches never knew when they were going to have time off. Coaches spend more hours than I would in the office. I've always felt that it's very important that they have a family life and not be interrupted as much possible.

R: Because you had experienced this?

D: Because I wanted time to be with my family. I learned that at Bucknell. For almost two years I never had any time with my kids. My wife never knew when I could be home. It was extremely frustrating for us. I knew that when I became the

D: head coach I wasn't going to let that happen again. So I didn't let it happen again. My philosophy for time off _____plus when I was coaching we were all teaching. So I had to schedule meetings and operate my program around everyone teaching nine hours. Coach Clinger was teaching kinesiology. Coach Kendzorski was in allied health. Bruno and so forth and so on. Their number one priority here was teaching. So was mine. Football was secondary. Now when you bring in a full-time coach who doesn't teach priority is football and now you are dealing with some faculty members it drives them crazy because they're not aware of the problems of the classroom. That's why the philosophy of this University has always been very sound. Not because I was here with it, but I think our philosophy fit in. That we were here academically first and our program had to be academically accountable. So therefore, the students saw me in the classroom, and I saw them in a classroom. They saw me on the football field, and I saw them on a football field. So I knew them as a student athletes, and it was good for them. And we were not unreasonable because we had to put nine hours in. To just get three hours of release time is not a whole lot. They're a little more generous now. I used to teach six hours during the season and nine hours in the spring, but it was good academically for the kids and it created a good academic atmosphere for the kids because it was very sound. I think this school operates best in that manner. It was proven because after me they brought in two full-time coaches, and they both failed, and now Coach Mihalek has got the program running on all cyclinders again. Because again here's a guy teaching. He has his Ph.D. Some of his faculty teach. Some of them don't. He has a nice balance there because he has three members of his staff that are on the road full-time which we couldn't do. We used to try to squeeze our recruiting in between our teaching schedule, and we weren't even given preferred teaching schedules. Every department did what they wanted to do, and we had to work around that. It was on a sound basis because we were academically accounted for. The faculty, people like you and Ted and so forth, I think, I hope, this is what you saw that I was a member of the faculty. I served on committees like everybody else. I didn't shirk my responsibilities. So I wasn't that kind of different guy over there. I mean I was part of the faculty. I did my thing, and I got a lot of faculty support. The Quarterback Clubs in those days were always packed. We built the following that way. We did a lot of entertaining. The wives did a lot of cooking after games. We had people over. We did a lot of that at our own expense, but it developed a following. They didn't do that anymore. So when I took over again I said, _____. I started with the luncheons. I started with the after game parties and all that kind of stuff.

R: When you were at Cheshire, were you a part of the recruiting

R: process there?

D: No, everything was sent to us.

R: I see. Then at Bridgeport you were in charge of recruiting. Whatever recruiting you could get done.

D: Yes. We didn't get out on the road very much because we had too much of a teaching load. So everything kind of would come to the University. We would make the local runs within a thirty, forty mile radius.

R: A local run means to see the kids play?

D: Yes, plus visit the high schools. I never had a free day. I couldn't take a whole day and go out to someplace other than vacation time, other than Christmas time when we had semester breaks. When everybody else was on semester breaks the coaches were on the road constantly trying to visit high schools try to get to as many schools as we possibly could hit to make up for the inability to do that during the regular semester. So coaches were always working, and then I became the recreation director of Wilton, Connecticut. Gosh, that was a full-time job because whenever I wasn't involved at the University I was involved as the recreation director. I didn't have a vacation for five solid years because I was running recreation programs.

R: Was that out of economic necessity?

D: Oh, sure. When you have four children and you're not making a whole lot of money, yes.

R: When you recruited at a high school, did you predetermine the players you wanted to meet with and talk to or did you go in and address an entire team?

D: What we do is a whole lot of homework has to be done. For example when I was at Bucknell, my territory was New Jersey. New Jersey is a very productive area for football players, and usually pretty good students at well. So that was my area, and I would go to say northern New Jersey, and I used to get the papers from the cities, and I would constantly follow the all-stars and the kids who were the good football players and then I would call the high school counselors and find out what their academic. In those days, you could do that. They would give you. They'd say, well, the kids did this or that and this is his grade. Now they won't give you that information. But anyway, I did a lot of homework so I knew when I went into northern Jersey, I knew exactly who I was going to see, whether they could get into Bucknell or not, because I did not waste my time with any football player that could not get into Bucknell. So when I went into a high school, in those days you had to

D: go into the office, get permission to get into the high school. The coach knew you were coming and who you wanted to see. So you arranged that. But most of the time a real top athlete you wouldn't even bother to do that other than finding out whether he could get into Bucknell or not. The arrangements where then made at the youngster's home. Take him out to dinner. So a typical day for say like nine days. We'd go out for nine days at a time basically. I'd be up at seven o'clock. Catch a quick breakfast. Be at the school at eight o'clock, and I would be running schools all the way until evening, and take out an athlete and his parents for dinner and then visit another one that evening. So the day was like seven o'clock in the morning till like eleven o'clock at night. You did that for nine consecutive days, and if there was any break in between you looked at the films that you were getting from the high schools that you were bringing back. So it was an exhausting nine days. Then you made arrangements for them to be at campus two weekends down the road so when you're coming off the road you'd walk into the house, give your wife your laundry and say, hi, give her a kiss, kiss the kid, and then back off to the college entertaining these kids on Saturday and Sunday. Getting them back on the plane or wherever we had to take them, and then in some cases I was back on the road on Monday.

B: Had you seen these kids play?

D: No, we'd get the films. Everything was done with film. Viewing films. Now if I either had the films in advance which was probably more times than not then I would find out whether he could get into to Bucknell. If I found out he was a good ball player, saw him on film, got his grades, SAT's to get into Bucknell, then I'd arrange my recruiting trip, my visits and then recruiting. The other thing was to tie in alumni in those areas and they would host us. We were trying to save money. So if I could get Joe Riggs who's in an area to take me to the country club with the parents and the youngster then we were saving money at Bucknell. So we'd try to do this as much as possible. Trying to get the alumni to pick up the tabs for these dinners which was not an NCAA violation at the time. It is now.

R: In the recruiting wars, they call them recruiting wars _____. What in most cases causes the youngster to choose one school over an another? Does the recruiter have a lot to do with that?

D: First impressions are extremely important. You've got to have a lot of background on the youngsters as well as their parents in the background in terms of what they do. What their lifestyle is. As much information as you can get in. To illustrate the point that you just

D: asked, I remember when I was at Bucknell there was one young man who was an outstanding linebacker and he came from Allentown, and I went to the home. Visited with him at his home. I knew the parent was on welfare. It was a single mother bringing the child up and they were on welfare so I didn't know what to expect. I walked into the home. The house was immaculate. You could have eaten off the floor. It was just a very well kept home. Mother was extremely, highly intelligent, and I was trying to get this boy to come to Bucknell of course. Well, it was between Bucknell and Syracuse, and as I began to talk to the mother she said, well, let me ask a couple of questions. She said, what would you do? You know that we are on welfare. _____ and she was doing an excellent job at bringing this child up, and keeping the right environment for him. She said, Syracuse has offered him a full ride. They also have given him a sponsor and that sponsor has agreed to buy all his clothes, all his shoes, and make sure he gets home. He'll get him a job in the summer to make sure he earns enough money. She said, can Bucknell match that? I said, no mam. She said, well what would you do? I said, I would send him to Syracuse if he was my son. I mean she had me I had to be absolutely honest with her, and she was so sincere. She had no problem sending him to Bucknell. The difference was somebody was going to sponsor him. His shoes, his clothes and get him a job _____. Then she asked me the question, what would you do? I think if the head coach had heard me, he would probably have fired me, but I had to be totally honest with her. I said, absolutely, I would have done the same thing. And he did. He did go to Syracuse, and he played three years as a starter at Syracuse. _____. Now the recruiting wars that you're referring to, I could've lied to that kid or that mother. Oh, no problem, I'll find an alum... Maybe I could've. I don't know. And we could have done this and that, but at that time I knew we couldn't do it _____ and besides _____NCAA violations. I could have gotten fired over that if I had answered differently, but everything was under the table. But the wars that you're referring to is that there's an awful lot of lieing going on. They don't care how they get a kid as long as they get a young man to play they don't care how they get him. You've heard the stories about the young man going into the motel where he is being kept the night before and opens up the closet and there's all clothes, suits, jackets, everything else was there. They're his. Things like that.

B: That happens now?

D: Yes.

R: But once the people are pedaling are well known across

R: the high schools circuit and the high school coaches know them, do they run out of gas pretty soon or does this stuff catch up with them?

D: See the kids hear all these stories so when they go to a school they'll say, well, where's my closet or where's this because you know. They're expecting this because what can Notre Dame offer more than Michigan according to the NCAA? Nothing. The NCAA dictates exactly what you're going to do. So therefore the athlete should make the decision based on the academics of the institution or the environment of the institution, the team records or whatever. That's what should be what the younster has to make his judgement on. But if you're trying to be competitive, there's money under the table. There's clothes. There's women. All these kinds of things incentives for these young men to come, and they expect it after while this mentality permeates the high schools and the top athletes go and say, well, you know what else are you going to offer me. If you don't, see you later. I'll go to somebody else because they'll offer. Then you have the institutions who are trying to catch up to the Michigans or the Notre Dames, for example, they don't have the reputation and the history. So they're breaking rules constantly. It's just a question of whether you get caught or not.

R: The only crime in America is if you get caught.

D: It's only a crime if you get caught. Exactly. It's not as prevalent as it used to be, but it still exists. j

R: When you say the word women in this context, that means that there will be dances and social gatherings, and pretty girls will be there with the guys as escorts?

D: Escorts. They provide them escorts for the weekend. That's what they provide. It's as simple as that. At Slippery Rock when the recruits came on to our campus, we spent very little time with them. We would put them into the hands of our ball players, and we would let the ball players do that. Because we felt that our program was sound enough for our own ball players to sell other kids. When a boy wants to know about the coaching staff, he's not going to ask a member of the coaching staff, he's going to ask a player, what are these guys like. And from time to time, we used to have Rocklettes and cheerleaders come in and do the same thing and we'd have lodge groups. In those days, we used have maybe forty boys at one time come in, and we used to bring the parents in as well. Then we used to go down to the bookstore

ROBERT DISPIRITO #8

D: That's when we used to use a lot of the football players and cheerleaders because we wanted the kids to be able to be in a position to ask other students, what's the school really like? What's the social scene like? But we were not obviously providing escort services, but we used our own ball players extensively because we felt very good about our program. We felt it could sell itself.

R: When the recruiter goes on the road, they have to have some notion about the various ways or the things you can major in at Slippery Rock or at Bucknell to the extent where they could talk about a degree program.

D: Yes, they have to. In my case, we were all faculty so we were very tuned to it all so it was never really a problem, but I'm sure Joe Kopnisky, who's a full-time coach and defensive coordinator, for example, is well versed in exactly what our curriculum offered, and that's one of the things that you have to sell. At least make that information available to them. I would say for the vast majority of coaches the worst part of their job is recruiting. Nobody likes it. It's hard work. Your on road hitting four or five schools. You go from one school to another. The point I was going to make was this. If you're in a situation long enough you get to know who to trust in terms of coaches in high school. When a high school coach at a certain high school says, this is a good one, and he'll play for you. I don't even have to look at the film because I know from past experience that he knows what we're all about. What a lot of the high school coaches today with a school like Slippery Rock, you know we're a second or third choice in terms of Penn State and Pitt. They'd never probably ever come on this campus, get to see us play a game, and they'll say, this young man can play at your school. And my question to him is, have you seen us play lately? If they say, no, then I'll say, then how do you know? Well, he can play in _____. How do you know that? I mean there are certain coaches that in sense you almost have to give them a bad time because they're going to pawn off as many kids as possible on you, and we have so very little money to give when we make a mistake it's terrible. We don't have a lot of money to waste, but we can't afford to make mistakes. So what the good coaches like Coach Kendziorski, I'll use him as an example, he was probably the best recruiter I have ever had. He had his area well organized. He knew the coaches that he could trust. We all do a lot of viewing of film before we go on the road so we know who we're looking at. We do check their academic records to see if they can get into Slippery Rock. Then they go out on the road and do their job of selling as much as you can to get that youngster to come to this campus. We used to do it in terms of sometimes small weekends, other

D: times large weekends. It's a lot of hard work, and it's a lot of selling. It's a selling yourself concept. It's not easy. It's not easy to constantly sell the University versus another university. You have to look at the advantages. Wherever we could get an advantage over Indiana we tried to exploit that. So we have to know what Indiana is doing.

R: So are the recruiting coaches and the assistant coaches who are out there recruiting, they're in some sense competing against each other to come up with the better ball player.

D: Constantly. Repeating. We're going after the same ball player. We may have six schools within our conference competing for that same ball player.

R: And the coach's skill at recruiting has a lot to do with what happens to his career a lot. PR is such big stuff.

D: Usually when you recruit assistant coaches, you usually recruit assistant coaches based on their personality and their ability to express themselves because you know coaching is like any form of teaching the better the teacher the better informed the kids are the better you can bring out their skills. Well, when you are on the road it's the same thing. I very seldom looked into what we call the x's and o's. Whether they know the football game or not because usually when they are at this point, they all know the x's and o's. That's usually not a problem. And even if it is a problem you can teach them your own philosophy anyway. But I've got to have the personnel. I've got to have the person that has an outstanding personality, can sell themself, and I go see how he fits on my general staff. Does he fit into the mold we've created? Is he a person who is more personally motivated or self-motivated or has goals for himself? Goals that they are going to benefit from rather than the school's goals or the team philosophy which are secondary. Then I can't deal with you like that. You won't operate very well. We've got to deal with people who are sincere, believe in what we're trying to do and believe in our system and have a personality where they get along with everyone. To this day all the coaches that I've had one of the greatest accomplishments that I think I've had in my coaching career we're still friends. We're still socially good friends, and we do things and we never forget one another. Whether it's a grandchild, I'll call them. It's that sort of thing. One of the nicest compliments I think that they paid is they still call me Coach. Well, that doesn't mean a lot to some people but in our profession that's the ultimate respect people give you when they call you coach. Your own coaches call you coach.

B: Back to the business of money for recruiting. You're not allowed I mean there isn't money to give kids for clothes

B: how about living when you're out on the recruiting run? Is there decent support or do you have to spend two dollars for breakfast, and is there support for this kind of activity? Reasonable support?

D: Well, for the most part most of the meals come out of own family budget. There's a rule that you have to be overnight or something there's some kind of rule that would never fit into recruiting so we ended up we had coaches were the money was coming out of their own pockets. Whenever we could help them out, obviously, we would. We would use, for example, University cars. Well, you know, when your on campus and you're trying to get cars and everybody else is trying to get cars a lot of times when we go out there are no cars available so you use your own car. So what most of the coaches were doing in my day we were using those tax right offs. I didn't even file half the time. I could never get a car. It was always such a hassle to get a car on campus. I'd use my own car, and I'd keep track of the mileage. I'd keep track of my lunches, and that was deductible on my income tax because it was such a hassle to do that. In contrast, friends of mine who are on the University of Kentucky staff, they're head coach at the time insisted that they never have less than two hundred dollars in their pocket, or buy somebody lunches or whatever might be and everything obviously was paid for. Even the pro coaches, the guys who are on the Steelers staff, when they go on an away game even though the staff meals are provided in the room, they are provided in advance, they are given three to four hundred dollars pocket money just to be a good guy when you need to buy somebody a drink or a dinner or whatever you want to do. So that's in contrast to Slippery Rock. Well, we're taking it off our income tax. That's the level we're at. We do what we have to do. I still think they do a lot of that today. But the large schools always have. When I was at Bucknell I could go in and say I need four hundred dollars for the short trip, and they'd give me four hundred dollars in cash. All I had to do was come back with the receipts. They always gave me money in advance. They can't do that anymore. That's why we always use credit cards all the time. Most faculty do when they go to conferences because by the time the state reimburses you it's like a month later. Hopefully, that's about the time your money comes back and your credit card bill and the state has paid you.

B: Actually we just got you here to Slippery Rock. Dr. Carter brought you in and we didn't here much about what happened then.

D: Well, I arrived here March 15. Two weeks before spring practice. I was just getting my staff. I hired Mr. Oberlin, Coach Oberlin, and Larry Pasquale, who played for me at

D: the University of Bridgport, who is now with the Philadelphia Eagles on their coaching staff. Then I hired Coach Clinger, and I didn't know much about Coach Clinger only the fact that he was on the staff earlier, but Coach Clinger was the only one who knew western Pennsylvania. He was a high school coach, and he was from this area. He's from Oil City. So I just handed him _____. President Carter did a very strange thing. He was so upset with the previous coach that when he got fired and in the process of my getting hired in that interim period all the reports are coming in from high schools in terms of their athletes, and what positions they played, things like that and you know they went to the President's office and he collected them. So when I got the job, when I was hired, matter of fact it's the office where Bruce Rossiter is now. That was the President's office downstairs in the Advancement Office there, and when he hired me, he gave me this big stack of cards. He said here are your recruits. Well, this is much. It's very late to start with, and nothing had been done in the interim period. So that's when I said to Coach Clinger, you want to be hired? You want the job? Yes. Okay, here's your cards. In the meantime the other coaches really are ready for spring practice. So I went into the equipment room here that you mentioned. There were 19 green away uniforms and 22 white and that was it. Everything else had been stolen. So I had to order everything. I had to order equipment. At that time the people said, well we had this equipment down at the other cage. Want to use the football equipment. Well, good, let me take a look at it. And it was equipment they were using for the physical education classes, and it was inferior equipment obviously. Something I wouldn't use, and they were astounded when I said, I can't use that. It's not standard. It's substandard. They said, well, we're using it for the football class. I said, well, first of all you shouldn't be, and second of all I won't use it. I will not place myself in that position to allow the kids to use _____. So I had to buy all this material, all the equipment, and so I had a tremendous two weeks of trying to get to talk to kids, and then there was an attitude. You know when you first walk into a room as the classroom teacher, or whatever and it's pretty important at the time, _____. It's a pretty good starting point. I knew from other people that they had problems, morale problems and so forth. So I had to go in with the attitude that the first one who steps out of line he's going to get it real good. I think I fired about five or six guys right off the team just like that because of attitude, cussing, all those kinds of things. I told them I just couldn't stand for that kind of stuff. I said the stuff from a discipline point of view, and one of it was their attitude on the field, fighting, using bad language. I wouldn't accept these things so I ended up firing one of the co-captains, and that got their attention. But I had to let them know that they were going to do it my way, and as long as I was to be the

D: head coach they were going to do it my way. I wasn't going to do it their way at all. I would listen to them and I'll try to do whatever I can. So, anyways, that was a very hard period of time to develop the attitude or the philosophies that I wanted, but I was firm with them. I think from that time on they called me the godfather because I was the boss and they knew that, and I wanted them to know that I was the boss. Then again I also wanted them to know that I was concerned about their problems as well, but that comes a little bit later. Anyway, that's spring was a very hectic time. We got through spring practice. Kids were joining the team late. Ball players who wouldn't play for the other coach were now coming out. If they didn't have the experience, then I fired a few guys because of their attitudes. Their philosophy didn't fit in with my philosophy. So we opened up the season. We got ready for the season. We got beat 61-7 in the opening game by Waynesburg. Waynesburg went on to average 59 points a game, so it wasn't just us, but we won, I think, three games. Then it was just a matter of my being consistent with what I was trying to do. If I was consistent, they knew what I would do. I would tolerate this. I would not tolerate that. They knew that. Then in order to develop discipline on the team and strength for my position, that's when I started to develop a group of ball players that dealt with the discipline problems of the team. That's when I brought in a member from each one of the classes plus my captain, and if anybody broke any of the rules that we had set, we had them appear before this committee. I found out that the peer evaluations were a lot tougher than what I would do. They weren't fooling the kid. They could con me a bit because I didn't know what was really going on in the dorm but they were not going to con their own ball players. You know it's funny. Once that responsibility, at least the ones that I chose, assume that responsibility, and by assuming that responsibility they would _____, and that helped tremendously. Then as you go along you've got to try to show improvement as you go along, and your philosophy has to keep coming out. I think it has to be consistent. I didn't have one set of rules for first _____ and another set for second teamers and so forth. Everybody lived under the same umbrella. Once they began to get that idea, it was _____ We recruited better athletes. It just got better. And we had a very good staff. I was very fortunate. I think I only had one turnover in the first ten or eleven years. I had the same staff all the time we were building _____. The championship years. We were building foundations. And the school was very supportive. Dr. Watrel was very supportive of what we were trying to do. So was Dr. _____

R: Do you remember how scholarships for athletes when you
R: came?

D: We didn't have any.

R: There were none.

D: No. We didn't have any. We just had work study.

R: Work study. Was that again a twenty hour a week possibility?

D: You got it.

R: Yes.

D: Maximum of twenty a week.

R: At minimum wage whatever minimum wage was.

D: That's all we had. It wasn't until we started to develop a booster club, Quarterback Club money, getting some support, that we started to have some money that we could give as scholarships. What you would call an outright for not working money that they didn't have to work for. As a matter of fact, Rick Porter was the first full-scholarship boy that we had here. I think the very first. He played in the 1970's.

B: Full scholarship meant tuition, rooms, board?

D: Yes. We would pick up his tuition, room and board, and some money for the books that's what the NCAA allowed. We had one. In order to win in that kind of situation you had to have a sound program that motivated them. You had to find other ways to motivate them, and you motivated them by treating them like human beings to start with. I would do little things that turned out to be important later on but at the time it was a good idea to do it. If they had a good practice, I would cut practice short. That's enough. You've done the job. You've done a great job. See you. Things like that. Fifteen minutes off practice is a big thing. Some days I would just call practice off. I felt they were tired. I was tired. I was physically tired. I was mentally tired, and I felt the team knew it. So I decided take the day off. Things like that. It refreshed us many times. I think the reason why as I look back on my coaching career the reason why I think I was successful is because I like people and I respect people. That's something I learned from my father, mother, in coming through all my experiences. If you're treated like a human being, you react like one. It's worth it with my kids. There wasn't anything I couldn't do. They knew there wasn't anything I wouldn't do for them, but they also knew what happened if they stepped out of line that they had to answer to me for it. It worked. It worked for me.

B: So they live up to expectations? I liked your peer team discipline that the cases went to first. They felt

that responsibility.

D: They assumed it immediately. It was amazing. As a matter of fact, there was one time I let a young man who was a problem, a discipline problem, drinking and whatever, and I appointed him on that committee, and a coach would say you are crazy. I said, I don't think so. I think he's going to assume the responsibility. He turned around and he didn't drink the whole season. He was a model ball player. I never _____. I had a young man, for example, when I came back six years ago, he was a terror. I mean nobody could seem to handle him, and I'm saying this with pride because we did handle him, and that young man wanted, he'd been thrown off the team, wanted to come back on, and I made that young man wait, and wait, and wait. Come back in the office. I'd say, _____. _____ talk. You're going to have to make an appointment. You're going to have to talk to the staff. You've got to convince the staff that you should be a member of this team again. He came in and talked to the staff, and then he came in and said, how'd I do? I said, I haven't made up my mind. I made him wait and wait. Then the last thing I made him do I made him _____ and explain to the captains why he should be on this team. He did that, and then he came back and said, how'd I make out? I said, I haven't made up my mind yet. I made him wait. I made him wait. The last thing I had him do was at the end of a practice I had him come out onto the field because he wasn't practicing, and I took all the coaches. I told all the coaches to go in. I was the only coach there, and before the team I said, now you plead your case to the team, and after you give your case to the team and then you leave, and then the team is going to vote whether you come back on this team or not. He did it, and he left, and the kids where tough on him. I mean they were hitting him with all kinds of questions, and he left, the team voted him on, and the kid was a model. I said to myself, if I've done anything in my coaching career, if I've saved just this one kid from going in the wrong direction, it was worth it. That's the _____ of what coaching is all about. That's what coaching is all about as I see it. Wins and losses. You could be a bum, and being a terrible influence and still be a winner because you've got the talent and everybody considers you a quality person. I'm a product of the small school system. I think the products and the values that we get from our coaching is what we do with our kids and that's probably one of my, I think, without a doubt in my mind, my crowning achievement here at the University with turning this kid around. To this day, he's playing Canadian football. But boy, did I make him sweat. Oh, geez. He loved me after that. I thought he would never speak to me again. I made him really work at it, and he knew. we had a rule. The first time you get in a fight in the game you're through. That's it. We don't even talk about it

D: anymore because we've already talked about. Never get into any fights. He wanted to, and he was big enough, and he was bully

enough, but he used all his energies in a very positive manner. That was probably the greatest achievement, I think. I've had some good times here, but that was unbelievable. I was amazed myself that this kid turned out so well.

R: You know you forbade fighting and the nature of football, college football, any football, is that you can lose your temper very easily from a foul or just from playing with hard nose folks and for a guy to play football for three or four years and not blow up and retaliate is extremely difficult for a young student to do.

D: Good training for him though isn't it.

R: Oh, I think it's superb.

D: Good training for him to learn how to control himself in adverse situations.

R: Especially with the frustration of losing at the same time.

D: Well, you know it prevents probably down the road an awful lot of young men burning a lot of bridges. You know yourself as you get into the profession as you begin to burn a lot of bridges some of those bridges are the same bridges you've got to come back and try to go across, and if you can't control your temper it could really hurt you down the road, I think. I think the basic achievement or the crowning achievement of any coach is to be able to have his or her players play at their potential or above it. That's what coaching's all about. There's a lot of kids out there with a lot of talent. They know to play to their potential. Even their discipline is the same way. You just can't allow it. There's so many lessons to be learned in playing football and that's the ability to get up. As they say, if you get knocked down 12 times, you get up 13 times. You've succeeded. This is what it is. We've all had setbacks. We didn't get a job we applied for. So what are you going to do? We've been fired, so what are you going to do? We've met some setbacks. Whether it's a setback in terms of a death in the family or a lose or whatever, we have to learn to get up that thirteenth time, and that's what athletics is basically all about, as I see it. They talk about good citizenship and all that. I think it's your ability to respond to adverse conditions, and to respond to them in a positive manner. This is what we try to do as coaches. We try to reflect that, and they say a team reflects the personality of the coaching staff. I think that's extremely true.

R: So the morale has to be relifted after a big defeat that you didn't expect or weren't emotionally ready to handle, and the coaching staff has everything to do with that.

D: Yes, it's very important what you do the next day. As a head coach it's very important what you say after a defeat of that

nature. That's where I had that experience with one of our former presidents here. Walked in a locker room after a very stunning defeat that we had. We were on television. It was a nationally televised game. ESPN. We were upset by Millersville. I debated what to say to them. I was so furious because we did not _____ off our potential. That's when I really got mad. Anytime we got beat and we performed up to our potential it never upset me one bit. I just believed that they were better, but when I walked in and saw that strange guy in my locker room I wasn't sure if he was the new President or not, and at that time, I think the psychology of it came out and I said, maybe it is. So I went in a totally different way. I talked to them in a very encouraging manner, and I got the nicest letter, one of the nicest letters I've ever received from the President stating how impressed he was in terms that I didn't go in there and yell and scream and accuse everybody. He looked at it in a very positive manner in what we had to do. So the next week is just get on with the job. There's no sense in screaming. There isn't anything you can do to recapture the moment. I think one of the lessons I remember reading an article on the Dallas Cowboys and Tom Landry. Within the realm of his philosophy.
He only showed the positive highlights. He cut out the rest of it. He never wanted to reinforce the negative play. Only showed them the positive things.

R: There's a success story.

D: And he succeeded.

R: Twenty-six years.

D: He succeeded, yes. I used to think, I wish I had the facilities and the man power to do that. I'd have done it too, but we didn't have time to breakdown the film and do all those kinds of things. Those are the things that were done, but it was an interesting philosophy. So you do the next best thing. You don't go down on Monday morning and start yelling and screaming at the ball players because it's not going to change anything. So you just get on with your time. And this is what the kids have got to learn. That's what young men and young ladies have got to learn. You know that through defeat if you learn something from it count your blessings because now you have to get on with the job. Maybe you can correct it, but there isn't anything you can do about it other than the fact that you're going to correct some of things that went wrong. See in a very positive manner you try to progress and try to continue to reach their potential, but what I said before, in a contest or anybody, I think, in any endeavors, if you've done everything you possibly could have done, and you were defeated

D: or you didn't win or you didn't accomplish at least you feel good about the fact that you did everything you can. One of

the coach's philosophies, a good coach's philosophy, I think, is that when you walk off the field in defeat that if you had done or you did everything you possibly could the previous week for that week to prepare for that game and it wasn't good enough then at least you feel good about yourself and know that you've done everything you possibly can. It's when you come off the field and you don't think that you have done the job that you should have done or the kids did not play to their potential that's _____. At least it bothers me. I think most people are the same way.

R: Were fans or alumni ever much of a problem for you in terms of wins or losses or stuff like that?

D: No, not in this situation a whole lot. I was very seldom used with alumni. Some schools would take the football coaches or basketball coaches around and utilize them in their programs, but that was not part of the philosophy of this school. So I very seldom was used along those lines which I think should be the opposite. I think over all the years I've been here the great success we've had in wrestling and football and basketball and baseball, mens and womens, should be used. They're great ambassadors for the University and I don't think they've been used enough or if they were used they should have been used more. I don't think you can use them enough.

R: In terms of public exposure?

D: Positive images.

R: Alumni chapters?

D: Yes. I don't think that's been exploited. I know I certainly was not exploited. I have never been invited to an alumni meeting in the 25 years that I've been here. It's just something. It's an observation. Maybe someday that observation may change because I think the coaches as well as administrators as well as faculty present some very positive images. I think faculty have got to be used as well as coaches to go to alumni meetings because some of the strongest ties, bonds, that were created on this campus were by faculty and students and they should be utilized.

R: What about your sons and daughters, do they ever have anything to say to you about the game?

D: No.

R: They knew you had given it your best shot.

D: No. Never did. They grew up in that whole atmosphere. No, I never got too much. It's funny. Out of all the years that I

D: was here. We had been on string for wins. We hadn't lost a game in five years at home. I think that string was 34 games

at home, and we got beat by East Stroudsburg, 7-6, in an opening game, and coming off the field as I was going to go in that little runway that players go in this father started yelling at me, you idiot. You dummy. Well, I was upset enough because it was the first time we had lost in a long time, and I looked up at him, and he was spitting, and he was raving. Well, I started to go up in the stands after him, and the coaches had to restrain me. I lost it. I mean I think it was the only time in my life I ever lost it, but fortunately my coaches were there. I couldn't believe this guy. I mean we had won like 34 games in a row. We hadn't lost in five years. We lost one game by one point, and this guy's screaming at me because I don't know what I'm doing. So that was the only time. It's funny.

B: You were ready to take him on?

D: Oh my, yes. I lost my cool on that one.

R: That would have been 1976, 1977? Right after your 1976 game. 1972, 1973, 1974, 1976.

D: It would have been the 1975 season. Beginning of the 1975 season.

R: Oh, 1975 season? Yes. In between _____.

D: Yes. Because we had won three championships there, consecutive championships. I couldn't comprehend this man.

R: As there are 14 schools in the statewide conference, are there any non-football schools? Do all 14 play?

D: Yes, they do.

R: So there are seven in the western conference and seven in the eastern? Is that the way it works?

D: Yes.

R: So you have six conference games. My question really was. You had four state championships in five years.

D: We had four western division championships, but we had three state championships.

R: Are there other schools who have dominated our conference that way?

D: Nobody's matched that record.

R: Yes. Now IUP, I gather, has what would you call an unfair
R: advantage because of their size? They have 15,000 or 16,000 students. Does that have something to do with all that?

D: Well, they have more money.

R: Yes, but that's translated into more money.

D: Right, they have more money. Their scholarship program is extensive compared to ours. I think somebody had told me at one time we are ranked down in the middle of the schools in terms of what money were available for scholarships, but Indiana right now has scholarship programs that far exceeds anyone in this conference, and my only problem is that I'm envious of them. It's a program that they've developed. They've created, and at one time when we were winning, we were in that situation. We certainly had enough, we didn't have scholarships, but we had enough work study to take care of all our needs.

B: That was from alumni donations?

D: No, just the college. Work study on campus. We very seldom got any money from alumni.

B: How does IUP finance all those scholarhsips.

D: I don't know the exact, but I do know that they have excess. So much money from every student goes into the athletic fund. They have a larger budget to start with in terms of student enrollment. They do an awful lot with fund raising. More than we do. That's one thing that they do. They have an athletic _____ for that scholarship purpose, and it was _____, it was just accessed. Right now they have what they call a red shirt. A red shirt in football is a player who practices with the team, but is not allowed to play. At one time you could complete your eligibility, your four years eligibility, within five years. Well, today's ruling is you complete your four years eligibility within no boundaries anymore. So it could be five years. Six years. You can still play as long as you just use those four years eligibility. So they have an extensive program of what they call red shirts. These are the young men who practice but don't play, and they're either maturing them or saving them because they have a wonderful quarterback right now, and this quarterback is almost as good as he is so why have them compete against each other so they hold this one back for a year. Let this one use their eligibility, and then move this guy in. So it's a complicated program like most schools in the country use, and Indiana uses it too. Not that Slippery Rock uses it very minimal. We have a few, but they have 30 guys or so in their red shirt program. So they're always good. One of the reasons why we were very good in our program was that for every senior, we were graduating an average of 14 seniors a year, but we were

D: winning so consistently that the backups were playing as much if not more time than the regulars. So when we would lose 14 seniors they would say, oh, oh, Slippery Rock is

going to be vulnerable because they are losing 14 stars. Well, I had 14 other guys that probably played just as much as these and they weren't starters, and that was how we perpetuated our program. We played a lot of people. We weren't interested in building scores. We were interested in building the experience of the team to develop that kind of continuity, and it worked. We dominated four out of five years. We dominated the league.

R: If you hadn't gone into coaching and teaching, did you have alternative careers back there that you gave thought to?

D: Well, since my family were all hair dressers. My father was a hair dresser. My brothers and sisters. I don't know if I would have gone into hair dressing. I never really thought of anything else. I always wanted to be a teacher. Coach. Teacher. I admired my high school coach a great deal. He was my role model. Never really cared a whole lot for academics until I got into college. My very first semester in college I did my _____ after that I had no problems.

R: And grad school. Was that fun?

D: Yes. I enjoyed that. I went to Teachers College in Columbia. Living in the big city was fun. That's where I met my wife. We had a ball. I was going to class until ten forty-five and she was studying with Martha Graham, dance. At Martha Graham's she wouldn't get out until about the same time so we'd go out and have dinner about eleven or eleven-thirty at night. By the time I'd get home it would be about two o'clock in the morning, and sometimes we wouldn't get home until six o'clock in the morning so I could change my clothes and go to class. That was amazing how you keep your what you can do with your energy when your young, but it was an exciting time. New York City was an exciting place. She lived in Greenwich Village, and I lived at the other end up by _____ Park which was the very end of the subway line up by Manhatten College. So we were at opposite ends. We were teaching right there at a private school. That's were we met.

R: At Barnard?

D: At Barnard School for Boys.

R: What was she teaching?

D: She was teaching English, and I was teaching physical education. She was studying dance with Martha Graham and I was doing my thing at Columbia, and then we would meet for dinner because we didn't have time because we were running

D: from the teaching job to graduate school. It was exciting times.

R: It was a twelve month program there? You went through Columbia in twelve months?

D: Yes. Not really. Almost less than that because I just went. Yes, I went to the summer session. The summer session was the last. I needed four more hours, and I took my four hours during the summer session, but it was exiting times. It was a safe time. Matter of fact, the fifties were the last good years.

R: The Eisenhower years.

D: Well, you know, there wasn't so much drugs. It was young. Plenty of jobs.

B: No crime on the subway when you took those long rides.

D: Long? I used to go from one end to the other. My only problem was that every now and then they would express 116th Street where Columbia was which would drive me crazy because I would have to go all the way to the next stop get on the subway and come back. I never understood New York as to why they would spontaneously express a stop. I remember one professor I had. He was very renowned. He had written many, many books and so forth, and he said, if anybody comes in late one more time in this class, and that includes you, DiSpirito, and I tried to explain to the guy I was just getting out of my teaching job at four o'clock and I had to make the five o'clock and the subway sometimes it would express, and I'd be late. So sometimes I didn't go to class and I would be late, and he wasn't going to let me come in.

R: Better to be cut than to show up late.

D: That's true, but it was a fun time. She lived in Greenwich Village which was a very exciting place. A very safe place. It was the only place where you could cash a check. Nobody in New York trusted anybody. I lived in a garage apartment on a big estate overlooking the Hudson [River] right across the street from the bridge Ambassador. I had a nice set up. It was country. If you've been in New York where they do alternate side parking, you had to get up by seven o'clock in the morning and change your car from one side to the other side because otherwise you would get a ticket. It was crazy. When I got this other apartment out on the estate, I didn't have any parking problem, but the subway, you're right, the subway. You know, coming back at five, six, or four o'clock in the morning, I never felt threatened. I never did. I probably should have, but I didn't. Washington Square at NYU was a very exciting place on Sunday. Performers, all kinds of performers. It was just an exciting place. I
D: loved it.

R: Can I ask how you met your wife?

D: We were both teaching at Barnard.

R: So you just started dating?

D: Well, she used to giggle at me. I would bring the kids out. I'd be in the back leading this whole row of either fifth or sixth graders. She used to get a kick out of that. I obviously noticed her at lunch, and then I got the courage to finally say to her that I was tired of eating by myself, and it was true. It really was. I was so tired. I always went to a restaurant or a cafe and eating by myself. New York can be extremely lonely, and if you don't know anyone. I didn't know anybody. So I told her, I am awfully tired of eating by myself. Can I buy you dinner? And that's how we started. She was broke. She didn't have much money. I was always buying her dinners. That's how we started.

R: What did you teach at Barnard?

D: Just physical education. I would be given all the trouble classes. A private school and sometimes they tend not to be as aggessive with their discipline because it's a private school and if they get to aggessive with their discipline, they're going to leave, and that costs you money. That costs the school money. So a lot of times a lot of the discipline is overlooked to keep the kids happy, but when they did get out of hand, they would give me that class, and I would have to shape them up.

R: _____

D: That's about right. Because one boy who was really a problem, I remember, he just brought me to the brink, and I put him up against the locker. I grabbed him by the shirt, and drove him up against the locker, and spoke to him in a very loud voice about one inch from his face, and he got frightened and he turned around. He was my helper for the rest of the semester, and he just loved me after that. He was looking for that kind of discipline evidently. He wasn't getting any. He was very sarcastic and very undisciplined, but I threatened him. I could have been in trouble. I should never have touched him, but I did. ____ I didn't hit him, but I just brought him up against the locker and spoke to him in a very loud manner about an inch from his nose, and after that he was my buddy.

B: He didn't go home and complain to his folks?

D: No. One other kid did though, and I was brought on the carpet for it. Fortunately, I was in a position where I had to deny
D: it because I knew I would have a lawsuit against me. What I did was, it was crazy as I look back. You know sometimes when you're trying to be forceful with the kids, get back in line, I hit him in the rear. He went home and said I struck him.

Well, literally I guess I did, but it wasn't in the frame or the content that I would strike him in anger or anything, and I didn't hit him that hard anyways. Anyway he came in _____ because I knew they were going to nail me. They were looking. It just happened. But it's hard. I spent a year in private school, and I taught two years in private schools, and I _____ so I had some idea of what private schools are all about, and a lot of the kids are undisciplined kids. Kids that mothers and fathers can't control so they send them to private schools. A lot of them are because they are traveling and they really don't want to bother with their kids so discipline becomes a problem. A lot of times in private school systems a lot of young men because I always went to or taught at the boys school, they were looking for someone to show them some discipline. In that case at Barnard, one of them was. He did. He became my helper and my confident. He always brought all the equipment out. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for me. The other kid and that was a much younger kid. He was like a fifth grader or something like that. The one that complained. But private schools are different.

B: It wasn't a boarding school?

D: No. This was a day school. Cheshire was the boarding school. Private schools are a whole different world than public school systems. There are some advantages, and there's some disadvantages. A lot of problems. A lot of homosexual problems. Real problems. You have to deal with it.

R: The Army was good times? You didn't have any shortage of equipment.

D: I never liked the Army. Never cared for it. I had some good times, obviously, but it was hindering my professional career. I had to put my two years in and didn't take an early release because I did not want to be called up again. I stayed to the very end to make sure I had my two years in. Anybody at that time they gave you a window so if you went out six months before, but you had to serve x amount of times in the reserves I didn't want any of that. I did not care at all for being in the Army. Just didn't. That was not my world. I didn't care for it. A lot of my time was spend in Walter Reed so that was a different thing, too. Funny when you're in the service like that you don't have the freedom of choice. If I wanted to stay an extra day at someplace I couldn't do it. You had to be there. You had to be where you were supposed to be. You had no choice or freedom. That kind of freedom. And I felt very closed in, and I didn't like it.

R: When I was in the Army and Air Force in San Antonia, we used
R: to have great admiration for the guys who ran the field house and the athletic director and all those folks because they looked like they had the gravy train to end all gravy trains.

D: They did.

R: And they did.

D: When I first went in, I was the exec officer at a training company and we would go through cycles. Beginning cycles, advanced cycles. It was at boot camp, and you were always out in field. When you got an advanced group, it was a lot of night problems, and you were out all night. It was not my...I couldn't get too excited about it. There are a number of things that would happen, but it wasn't until I became the _____ officer that life became the good life in a sense. I still didn't care for it.

R: You could make your own rules pretty much?

D: Oh, yes. You had your own gymnasium and you ran it, and you ran it the way you wanted to do it. Make sure you catered to the colonel and all his needs and that kind of thing, but I never cared for the service.

R: Did your teams travel when you coached in the service?

D: No. It was all on base.

R: All intermural.

D: It was like every battalion had their teams. I'm glad you brought that up because after a year of that, I was asked to become the base coach. They were going to have for the first they were going to have a base team that would do the traveling, and I remember doing an inventory of all the equipment, and the buying of the equipment and before I accomplished that I was assigned to go to Walter Reed Army Hospital. I had a problem that had to be corrected in so I was sent there. So I never became the head coach. I was there for 20 weeks at Walter Reed. So when I got reassigned to get back Dix.

R: You went in at Benning?

D: Yes. I had to go through Officer Candidate School there. Even though you were commissioned, you still had to go through the Officer Candidate School, and if you didn't pass or you didn't meet the qualifications, they decommissioned you and you were then drafted into the service as a private. So just a little pressure there.

R: _____

D: Well, you know. If had my choice, I would still go back in as an officer because there are certain advantages like putting your civies on and going to the Officer's Club and have a nice meal at night. Okay? You didn't have everybody jumping on you.

You had enough people jumping on your back, but you didn't have the enlisted men jumping on you at least. When you're a private everybody jumps on you. You're a nothing. At least we had a gold bar and it helped considerably. I wanted to go overseas very badly. I wanted to see Europe, and that was my problem. When they gave me the physical. We went through Benning, if you can believe how the Army works sometimes, we went through the Officer's Candidate School, and they forgot to give us a physical. It was scheduled, and things didn't work out, whatever it was. So here I am at the next base and they discovered in my record that I haven't had a physical. So they put me through this extensive, everybody was in my company, and they come up with something that had to be corrected for me. So that's when I was send to Walter Reed Army Hospital. That's how I got out of as I said I was going to be the head coach of Fort Dix, but by the time I got back they reassigned me to _____. I don't look on it as a very fun time. I met a lot of fine people, but I didn't like their restrictions. I had to be back at camp at a certain time. Things like that. It was crazy.

R: At Bridgeport did you have some really outstanding athletes?

D: Yes. We had a boy by the name of George Dickson who went on to play in Canadian football, and won their, what is their MVP of the Canadian football. I forget the name of the trophy. He won it twice. As a matter of fact, Pat Abruzzi, who play with me at the University of Rhode Island, went up to Canada, and he did the same kind of thing. It was amazing. He won the same award. They're the two guys I know that have won the MVP's in Canadian football at the time that _____ in Bridgeport. George Dickson broke some of Pat Abruzzi's records. Those are the only two guys that were extraordinary beyond. I'd loved to have played in pro football, but I was too small. In those days you played both ways, and you just played 60 minutes. Interesting.

R: Did Factor ever play?

D: Factor was a linebacker. A real good one.

R: I know.

D: But whenever...