

Rock Voices: The Oral History Project of Slippery Rock University

Brandon Berns

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Bailey Library, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

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LH: Hello, my name is Leah Harris and today we are doing [the] RockVoices Oral History Project. It is March 20th, 3 p.m. and we are in the SRU Archives, and I'm here with Brandon Berns. Hello!

BB: Hi. Afternoon. How are you?

LH: I'm good. How are you?

BB: I cannot complain today. It's a beautiful day outside.

LH: That's great. So, let's start with just some information. Tell me a little bit about yourself. So, your name, your date of birth, and where you're from, and where you received your education from.

BB: Yep. Brandon Berns, I was born on May 18th, 1985. Originally from Eastern Pennsylvania. I grew up in a small coal town called Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania--just outside of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, where they brew Yuengling beer.

LH: Oh, wow. That's impressive! So how did you, like, find out about SRU since you were on the east side?

BB: Well, for me, Slippery Rock was very, very great about sending me mail. Especially around the Sport Management program, which was the program that I ended up doing here at The Rock. But for me, a lot of my friends ended up going to Kutztown, to Bloomsburg, to Penn State Schuylkill, so for me, I kind of wanted to get away a little bit, and Slippery Rock kind of afforded the *I could still stay in state, but I was far enough away from my parents and everybody that I grew up with to kind of forge my own next new path.*

LH: Awesome! So, you were one of the alumni that came back to SRU to work.

BB: Yep. I started about . . . it'll be three years now in May.

LH: Alright. So, what position do you hold at SRU right now?

BB: Currently I am the Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations within the Advancement Office. So, my main role for the university is to go out and solicit corporate funding, as well as

grant funding from different foundations to amplify what we're doing here on campus, whether that be from programmatic pieces, any naming rights here on campus, as well as scholarships.

LH: That's really cool. So, have you worked with that field of work for non-university entities, like corporate?

BB: So, my history kind of post-Slippery Rock: I worked actually for four years of minor league baseball for the Delmarva Shorebirds, which was the Single-A of the Baltimore Orioles in Salisbury, Maryland, just right outside of Ocean City, Maryland. There I did everything from mascotting, to marketing, to ticket sales, ran our box office, you name it I kind of was able to do it in those four years. For me, then, I got tired of driving to Pittsburgh for weddings at that point in my life and moved back to Pittsburgh to work for the American Heart Association for a couple of years doing their Pittsburgh Heart Walk, which was the main fundraiser for the region to help with cardiovascular and stroke-related research. And then I moved over to Highmark Health after that before coming to Slippery Rock and I did a lot of their nonprofit work, especially with their 5K walks around the state and in Delaware, as well as doing a lot of their corporate volunteerism, and running [their] United Way campaign.

LH: That sounds like a lot, and very impressive. So, is the university different from that?

BB: There are little quirks that are different, but obviously, you know, it's kind of the same, perspective of . . . with Highmark, we're helping to give away the money, now here we're looking to bring the money back in to help the students here on the campus.

LH: That makes sense! So even though you've only been here for about three years, has the department you were hired into change at all?

BB: From that perspective, we're growing a little bit, as we look to raise money for the university here. Tomorrow is actually our Giving Day. So, we'll be looking to really engage our alumni and engage our donors to make sure that they are fundraising for their most favorite cause whether that be the department they were in, a sport they might have played, a club they might have been in. So, that'll be a big encouragement for tomorrow's efforts.

LH: Awesome. It's great to hear that it's expanding! So, what building do you work in currently?

BB: Currently, I am on the first floor of Old Main.

LH: That's fun. Do you like working in Old Main?

BB: It's fun to see everybody come in and kind of interact. You know, obviously, with being on the north end of campus, for a lot of our alumni, that's the first building that they recognize. So that's usually where they can come in and we work a lot with our alumni as well. So, we will see a lot of individuals come in, whether they'll be questioning: *Hey, what's a new building on campus*, they're dropping off donations, or they're just looking for general information from us.

LH: All right. So, this can be as a student or as [staff], whichever you prefer. But what was it like at the university when you first arrived? And what changes have you witnessed?

BB: Well, comparatively from when I was here, there were about five dorms that are no longer standing. When I was here, I lived in Patterson my freshman year. That's now been converted over to classroom space. So, I always joke with the faculty that use the gym there on the first floor that, *Hey, my room used to be right here my freshman year*, which is no longer there. Also, I was an RA in Founders Hall my sophomore year, that building was razed there in 2007. So, from that perspective--now it's a parking lot--I can't really say, *Hey, that's there* anymore.

And then with the new Smith Center being built, gone are Bard, Dodds, Harner Hall used to be there. Krauss used to be across the street. So, all of those dorms that I would have interacted with are no longer here. But then, you know, seeing the new dorms would be built kind of towards the end of my career here at Slippery Rock, as well as the ATS building, and then really kind of looking at the construction that was done, with renovations to Vincent, and different things around campus as well. I 's good to see that students are able to have those new experiences now.

LH: Was it kind of shocking when you came back? It was like, whoa! [Laughs].

BB: I mean, I always came back for Homecoming because I always kind of saw all the different pieces that were kind of in line. But, you know, I think really since I've been back on staff now is just really getting integrated with those different pieces and really seeing how the students are interacting with the new dorms, and a lot of the facilities now, and especially with just opening up Kasnevich Field last night . . . kind of looking at those different--what the facilities could be and what that great possibility is for our current and future students.

LH: Yeah. That's great! So, we can get to the one and only Rocky the Lion [chuckles]. So, tell me about playing Rocky, and how did you get the job?

BB: Oh, boy. So, when I first got the job--I will go back to my freshman year, and obviously I played sports a lot in high school. I was a football and baseball player. I didn't play here. So, I was looking to still kind of be involved if I could in any way possible. And that was when we still had the 'Rock Rowdy' student group, which I don't think is a thing today. But I actually lucked out in living at Patterson. My R.A. was actually one of the male cheerleaders of the team, so I always kind of joked too that there was a flier hanging right outside of our room that said, *Hey, do you want to be the new Rocky?* Tryouts are going to happen in a couple of days, right when we first moved in, my freshman year there in 2003. And it was one of those pieces where Jason grabbed me the one night and said, *Hey, you're coming to practice tonight*. And it was a brief tryout. There were four of us that first night over in East/West Gym, and it was basically, *Jump in the suit for 15 minutes, kind of bounce around, see if you could withstand the heat, see what your interactions would be in it*. And lo and behold, after about an hour, hour and a half, the cheerleading coach at the time said, *Do you want this role?* And then we had a football game

that Saturday, and the individual that was doing it was actually graduating that semester. So, he did that first game and then, I took the reins from there and did that for four years straight.

LH: So, you were like the OG Rocky the Lion? [Laughs].

BB: Yep. I am actually--for the Rocky sitting behind me, Rocky II, I was one of two individuals to wear that. It was a brief run with Rocky because Rocky II was only around from 2000 to 2007 before we debuted the new one that we see today.

LH: And were you the transition between Rocky II and Rocky III? How was that?

BB: It was very interesting. You know, obviously we finished up with the brown lion as we kind of--the brown scary lion. But that was our final football game. We did that at the end of the '06 season, and then we kind of shuttered, him kind of--did a little marketing campaign to say, *Hey, we're going to kind of reestablish Rocky*. We did some silhouette-type pictures of, *If you happen to see Rocky around campus . . . make sure . . . we're on the lookout for him*. And then when we debuted him, at a basketball game in February, I was the first one to be able to wear the new Rocky we see today. So, I made for some fun with my friends obviously who then knew it was me by the time my senior year rolled around. And it was always that concern of, *Hey, what's wrong?* And it's like, *Nothing's wrong, guys, we were just debuting a new mascot*.

LH: [Laughs]. I like that it was like, "What's wrong with Rocky?" [Laughter] So which costume was like, kind of your Rocky, or more comfortable or just the one you preferred wearing?

BB: You know, it varied truthfully. I think with Rocky II, he was a little more cumbersome to move, with it being one large piece for the body. The biggest drawback to him was within the legs, there were just large foam pieces that made it very, very hard to run potentially. But with the head that you were able to wear, there were straps that you'd be able to kind of get in and out with him pretty easily.

With Rocky III, one of the big design pieces behind him was that you were able to get in and out with him a little bit easier with the different pieces. There was also a helmet inside the head that you'd be able to chin strap yourself in and not have the head move around as much as Rocky II did. So, I kind of varied back and forth with my love for each one of them.

And then actually, it's funny, I always say I never thought I would get back into Rocky back when I graduated in 2007. But I've actually had the opportunity since I've been back on staff with some graduations. I was able to fill in for about a year and a half then as well at some different university events then as well.

LH: Oh, that's neat! So, do you have any interesting experiences as mascot or like anything cool you got to do?

BB: From the perspective of when I was in school, obviously my biggest thing was always getting out into the community as much as I possibly could. I wanted to be at every sporting event that I could potentially make it to, especially if there were any club events. I wanted Rocky to always kind of be that school spirit piece to where if he was a student, how could I interact on that daily basis with them?

The running joke always with me was if I wasn't in class, I would jump into him and just walk around campus to where it would be a fun little back and forth of . . . you know, *The Rocket* would follow me around. Just, *A Day in the Life of Rocky*. So I'd kind of interact with different students and jumping on the Happy Bus, going down to Rocky's to eat, going to the gym to work out, and just kind of have that interaction to where you never knew where I was going to really pop up during the course of the day. And, even here in the library, I would get dressed up in the suit and go sit downstairs with a book. And it would always be that distraction, but it kind of brought that memory piece to it as well. So, for somebody to be able to say, "Hey, I saw Rocky just kind of interacting."

Even when I was an RA back in Founders, when we would do rounds during the course of the night, there'd be some nights I would just get dressed in the suit and walk around the halls of Founders Hall, just to kind of interact with the kids as well--really kind of make those different memories of course, throughout the times. And I hear that now from a lot of my friends that were there over the course of the years [pause] they might have had a picture with me when I was there, they were freshmen and they didn't happen to know me yet or who was in the suit beforehand. So, a lot of those different mentalities kind of really percolated out through the career of being the mascot.

LH: It sounds really fun that you brought so much life to it and really made it its own character. That's really cool.

BB: Yeah. And actually, it was fun then too, with my major being Sport Management, one of the big things when I was going out for my internship, I had that listed as one of the items that I was really in tune with. And my first interview actually with the [Baltimore] Orioles, in the [Delmarva] Shorebirds was basically, *Hey, you've been a mascot before, would you be able to do that again?* And that was one of the big pieces of why I got my internship. And then, really, my first job was able to go out and do [these] community experiences . . . do that sponsorship activation and being able to really tie in with the community there on the Eastern Shore.

LH: That's cool. So, we have some photos here that I think you donated. Rocky II at the ice rink.

BB: Yep.

LH: Can you tell us about that, the story behind this? Because this looks very fun.

BB: So that was actually from a game out at the Youngstown Steel Hounds. They were a Central Hockey League team that I interned at my junior and senior year. One of the big projects that we had was to invite everybody out for a mascot night. So, what we did was we invited every mascot we could think of for a 45-minute radius and kind of brought them out to a hockey game one night. And one of the big ideas that we had to say, *How do we get all these mascots to interact with one another*, was during the intermission periods, we did a sled race [in the first period], and then we did dodgeball in the second period. So that picture you have there is the dodgeball game that we put on. So, within that photo, it would be like the Youngstown State Penguins; there were a lot of restaurants; we had the Build-A-Bear mascot there. That was kind of just the fun of getting all the mascots out in the ice and kind of interacting. Obviously, the crowd loved it because the mascots were trying to chuck the dodgeball at each other, missing each other, hitting each other. A lot of falls happened. And then, especially in the first period, when we did the sled race, it was interesting because we kind of paired off with different mascots. And I always laugh because I was with the [Pittsburgh] Pirate Parrot and the Build-A-Bear, and we put the Build-A-Bear actually on the sled, and then we pushed the Build-A-Bear across the ice. So that was kind of a neat visual for everybody to see as well.

LH: That sounds fun. So, bringing up another memory, you were homecoming king, correct?

BB: Correct. In 2005. Yep.

LH: So how was that experience?

BB: It was very interesting because, as I always joke with the crew that was doing homecoming that year, part of the process was to write an essay to what Slippery Rock meant to you. And I jokingly kind of put in my essay was like, *If you find anybody that Slippery Rock means more to, I'd like to meet them because I am the lion*. So, at that point, my identity was really kind of secret outside of my roommate at the time, and the cheerleading team, and a couple of people on campus. But then I think when that kind of finally got out, and then I had to go for the interview, it was, *Can you confirm you're the mascot?* And it's like, *Well, I have the head in my dorm room*. [Laughter] *I can bring it to you guys if you guys truly want to see it*. But, from that perspective, it was kind of the back and forth of, *Well, you obviously can't be the mascot and run for Homecoming*, so we had to find a fill in then to be the mascot. And I was actually in a fraternity at the time then as well. So, we took that back to my fraternity, and I said to my brothers, *I need somebody to fill in for homecoming festivities for the weekend*. And you would have sworn that I was giving them Christmas morning the way that everybody interacted. And I actually had two brothers fill in for those events during the course of the weekend then as well.

LH: Oh, that's fun. So going on to whenever you came back and some accomplishments you had here, what was your involvement in bringing Rocky the Rock back for Homecoming in--I think it was 20--

BB: Yep, in 2022. So [pause] obviously we all love Rocky to Rock. And he's always a hot button issue, with a lot of our alums: you either love Rocky or you hate Rocky. You know, we have the Rocky the Rock crowd, we have the Rocky the Lion crowd. But that was always kind of one of the ideas that the Advancement team had always kind of percolated of *How could we ever bring Rocky the Rock back?*

And one of the big things then, at the time, in talking with the president (Behre), was *How can we look at doing this, but then also have that student activation piece behind it as well.* So, kind of funny part, when we kind of did it was--and it was about three or four weeks before Homecoming--*If we think we can raise some money for the SRU scholarship funds, let's do it.* And so, our team went into full scale both fundraising mode as well as then, you know, *How do we recreate this mascot then as well?*

So, I actually came down and watched a couple videos, seeing Rocky behind the glass as well. My task, in addition to helping to fundraise for it was then, really tying into *How do we recreate this suit?* So, you know, the big thing, then with that was we interviewed Bob Jones, who was the original Rocky the Rock. And then we kind of looked to bringing the mascot then into our 2022 thought process on how we can do it with the materials we have then today but not going out and fully fulfilling a full suit. So, we were able to redesign them pretty easily with a lot of stuff we were able to find on Amazon. And then I was then able to jump into Rocky I for Homecoming weekend. So I got to do the parade, the game, I wandered through the tailgate section and took, I would say thousands of pictures that weekend. And the best part about that, beyond bringing him back that day, is that we were able to raise about \$22,000 for the SRU scholarship fund, which obviously helps you in the future here at The Rock.

LH: That's a great goal to achieve. I was one of the pictures. That was my first semester here. [Laughter]. It was a very fun experience. So, you're the only person that's played all three mascots.

BB: Correct.

LH: How does that feel being the only one?

BB: It's one of those historical facts that I think, for me, it's one of those things that I can always [hang] my hat on. Seeing, as you know, I'm sitting here in the Archives and seeing my friend behind me under glass, and then Rocky I's under glass as well. And knowing where our recreated suit--he actually sits now in my office and Rocky's head sits on my shelf. So, it's always a great talking point where, especially when you're on a Zoom call with somebody and they say, *Hey, is that Rocky sitting behind you?* And, then I have to go into the story, *For those that don't know, I'm Rocky.* And it's been a nice talking point for a lot of our corporate partners as well, who might be alums from that time frame, because then it always comes up in conversation

of, *Hey, the mascot*. And it's one of those, *Well I have the head in my office*. And we've actually had CEOs of companies actually want to put on the Rocky head themselves.

LH: Oh, that's fun. That's a very unique bragging right [laughs]. So, you very obviously really like mascots and that's super cool. So, how important is the culture of mascots here at Slippery Rock? And do you think that the three mascots, like, play off of each other in a way?

BB: Yeah, I think it's a great branding opportunity for a lot of marketing. I can always attest to, even going back to my minor league baseball days is that the players might change from that year-to-year perspective. But your mascot's one of those big pieces that are always going to be a constant.

So as we look here, Rocky now has been around since 2007, the current iteration that we have with them. I would say from that perspective, there are a lot of graduates, a lot of alumni that that was their main mascot for their entire time here. So, it's a big piece that, you know, as we look to get Rocky out in the community more, whether it be going down to Pittsburgh, any event here in town, it's one of those big pieces that really everybody can really identify with Rocky then as well. And like I mentioned, you know, there are many, many pictures with alumni that that's their mascot and they really identify with them as well.

From my perspective with the mascots is that I would love to see all three of them run around if we ever could. You know, that's one of those big pieces . . . I will always ask that question. But I think from the support perspective, one of the things that I did, even before coming back to work here is I actually started a mascot scholarship for the individual that is inside the suit then. So, each year they get \$1,000 towards their education for fulfilling the role of Rocky as it is a big, important role here at the university.

LH: Oh. That's great! So, who were the leaders when you first came to campus and what were your impressions of them?

BB: Yeah, so when I was here, Paul Lueken was our Athletic Director, and Robertha Abney was the Assistant Athletic Director at the time. So, from the athletics point of view, I would always kind of go to them looking at what the different perspective was, if they had me going out to any community events, as well as going out to any golf events. President [Robert M.] Smith was the president when I was here. We always jokingly had some fun interactions back and forth over the course of my four years from different community events that we might have interacted, Weekend of Welcome. We always had those nice interactions then as well.

And, like I mentioned earlier, just kind of moseying around campus. I'd wander into the ARC when Greg Sferra and Karen Perry were running it; take pictures with everybody. And, you know, the biggest thing for me was always to make sure we had those moments, whether it be if

I was interacting with a student, an alum, even the small children as well. I just wanted to make sure that they had the best time if they were interacting with the mascot at that point.

LH: That's awesome. It's really awesome hearing how involved you are with the community in every role you've been in. And so, in your position now, do you still try to work with the mascots and kind of make them more a part of SRU's community?

BB: We've tried to. As I approach 40, I have officially retired myself from getting back into the suit. My last appearance, we actually did a curve baseball game, and it was about 102 [degrees] at first pitch. So, I think for myself, that was kind of my last foray to say, *Hey, my body might not be able to take this anymore*. So, I'll leave it to the younger students to do so from now on.

But the biggest thing since we've been back--we've always tried to tie Rocky into a lot of our Giving Day stuff. For instance, like last year, we had Rocky go on a training montage. Really kind of going around campus, having them interact with different pieces of, whether it was athletic training; he got checked out. We really kind of looked at *How do we interact with Rocky in the different aspects of campus?* Whether it be the different programming. . . .

We had him go out with ROTC and we did the Ranger training with him one morning at 6 a.m. down at the Field House. We had him go down to the ARC and play pickleball. We had him shooting hoops. We had him lifting with the students. We had him running on the track. So I think as we've kind of progressed with him, just coming up with those different ideas and really making sure that we're able to bring Rocky kind of into that piece to say, *We want Rocky to be that really forefront outside of faculty and the staff here*. But be that big piece as we kind of look to continue to raise funds for the school.

LH: Yeah. Rocky sounds like a very busy lion.

BB: He is a very, very busy lion.

LH: So, have you tried to kind of set up a personality or vibe that each Rocky gets? I mean, his bio is very forefront [laughs]. So, do you try to create a personality for him?

BB: I think that depends on the individual in the suit. For me, I would say for my personality, it was--I always wanted to be on the move. I think if you would watch me at a football game, a basketball game, I never really stood in one spot for more than 30 seconds. And I would always kind of meander around the crowd, especially in the stands, and make sure that I was able to interact with the kids especially. Anybody that was in that ten and under, I made a beeline to make sure that I was interacting with them. A lot of times you have those kids that are definitely scared of mascots. So how do you play up that piece to say they might be scared of me, but over the course of time that hopefully they're able to say, *I want to go up and give Rocky a hug, give Rocky a high five, get his autograph*.

And then really, I always enjoyed that as well, just interacting with the students and especially those individuals that I had in class. Especially in my freshman and sophomore year of *We don't know who exactly is in Rocky*. You know, I would go up and just mess with them to interact with them. And then it would always be fun just to hear them complain the next day in class to say, *Hey, the lion wouldn't leave me alone at the basketball game*, and I'm just sitting two rows away from them just kind of chuckling to myself, knowing that was me. And I always used to just pick on my friends then as well. But then as I approached my junior and senior year, it was kind of--I picked up the nickname 'Rocky' outside of everybody calling me 'Brandon'. I jokingly said, *I'm either going to answer to Rocky or Berns*, and nine times out of ten if somebody called me 'Brandon' I was probably really in trouble [laughs].

LH: [Laughs]. So, you had the Rocky kind of persona follow you around while you were a student here?

BB: Yep.

LH: That's very interesting. How was it being a student having that reputation on your shoulders?

BB: I think for the most part it was kind of that fun piece, but I think it also got me involved in a lot more things as well. Whether it was a group would come and say, *Hey, we're doing a fundraiser, can you come out and support us that night?* Especially I know when I was Greek, we would say *We're going to have a Greek Week event, could Rocky make an appearance at that?* Just take pictures of everybody, or even looking at the community events, saying they might have something at the high school, or we go out to elementary schools and do different things like that, that's part of that volunteerism as well.

LH: That's cool! So, for all of the years you've been here, who has been a notable inspiration or influence for you?

BB: I always harken back to the Sport Management professors. You know, obviously I had the biggest interaction with them over the course of time. I know Dr. Crow's still teaching here, Dr. Higgs had just retired, and then Dr. Abney's still here as well. So, those were the individuals that I really interacted with from the Sport Management side of things.

And then really, I think [in] the administration, obviously Paul Lueken, the AD [Athletic Director], until he retired, and now working with Roberta Page, the new AD. Having those interactions and see really how we're able to get the mascot out in the community. But then also in my new role then how do we actively look at diving into what are those opportunities and for the students abroad then as well? You know, programing, scholarships, whatever the case may be.

LH: Was it nice coming back and knowing you'd be working with familiar faces?

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BB: It was. It was a very interesting piece of the puzzle. My first couple weeks on campus, for those familiar faces of *Hey, what are you doing back on campus?* It was . . . everybody thought I'm either guest lecturing at a class or I'm up for something for my previous job. And it kind of was, *I'm working here now*. And it was like, *All right, well, we'll see where this goes* [laughs].

LH: [Laughs]. So, were there--whenever you were here, either as a student or now as [staff]--were there any major events that you were here for: academic, cultural, or national events?

BB: The biggest thing, I think, from my time here, I remember some of the big events, you know, with the concerts. I was here when Ludacris came in, we had down at the ARC. Yep. So that's one of the big things that I always remember.

Some of the bigger football games we had versus IUP over the years, especially home games. I always remember the Homecoming events, just with the parade and especially winning Homecoming. For me, that was a big marker.

And I think then, at that point, it was just kind of the construction piece on campus that was the biggest excitement. I always joke that I watched dirt be pushed around for the ATS building for a couple of years and then just watching the new dorms spawn, as they kind of did, and then when they tore down Founders as well.

LH: All right. And so how were those events, the concerts?

BB: Oh, I mean, they were a blast.

LH: They were a blast? That's awesome. So, are there any memorable events for you other than the super major ones?

BB: I would say for me it's just the camaraderie of a lot of my friends I still do talk to, especially my fraternity brothers. We joke—I actually just got married two years ago. And it was kind of one of those that looked like a Slippery Rock reunion in the parking lot. You know, one of the members that was at the hotel kind of said, *I see a lot of Slippery Rock stickers, is there a reunion going on?* [Laughter]. And I was like, *No, just a big wedding*.

Really over the course of time, one of the things I've kind of prided myself on, especially from the alumni side, is just being able to share what's going on on campus, whether it be on social media, any of the professional sites, just telling our alumni, *Hey this is what's going on* and hopefully encouraging them to come back. And kind of selling that piece as well.

And then as I filled in with Rocky over the last couple of years, it was kind of the *We can't believe they allowed you to get back into that suit*. And I was up to my old shenanigans again as I kind of looked at re-performing that character as well.

LH: It seems like community and pride are really big values to you. So how do you carry that with your career? Especially with the culture of Slippery Rock?

BB: I think the biggest thing with that is, as we look at this university, it's a big place to where people have very, very strong feelings and it's just making sure that we reignite them to say, *It's that magic place that you might have spent four years here; and you have that degree from here.* So how do we reignite that passion for Slippery Rock and making sure we're able to get people back here on campus? But then also in that same breath, how are you supporting those students as they go out into their careers? I think especially from my perspective in the Sport Management side is: how do we help them to get those experiences, how do we help them to get those internships, that first job? And the biggest thing for me always is looking back to say: if I'm a Sport Management major and I keep that on my resume, I want to make sure that that reputation is still stellar as I progress in my career then as well.

LH: So, are you excited for the future of SRU?

BB: One hundred percent.

LH: That's great to hear. So, going back to the mascot for one last question, how did the legacy of Rocky follow you throughout your SRU career and kind of motivate those feelings of pride towards the campus?

BB: Well, I think the biggest thing, like I mentioned earlier, I think creating the scholarship was the biggest thing for me. When I came through school, there wasn't a scholarship for the mascot. So, knowing how much, especially sweat equity and time goes into that position, I think I always wanted to make sure that we had a carrot out there for a student to want to do that. You know, obviously, with that being a big piece in the university perspective, knowing that someone was going to be rewarded as part of that, especially for their education, was a big piece for me then in creating that scholarship. And then really, since I've started that scholarship, we've had a couple individuals that have done it for a four-year period.

Looking at that and kind of looking at my career, how they progressed as well, and looking to say, *We know that they were able to be supported for four years.* And then they've taken that as well and kind of looked at--Austin's [Schoppe] the big example of it, he's actually done some mascotting then in the professional side of things as well for the Wild Things and actually came back to do a couple appearances for us, at the Penguins games and different things like that.

LH: That's cool! So, do you see yourself in any of the mascots that have come through here since? Kind of just like seeing the same path [laughs].

BB: [Laughs]. I can see some traits that I can definitely say, there was a big mirror back and forth, and it's always fun as well, just interacting with the new students when they come up and

ask for different tips and say, *How would you navigate this situation?* Or looking at, *Should I do this compared to should I not do this?* Looking at that side of things.

LH: That's such a cool legacy to have. So, one more question. Do you have any words of wisdom for current or future Rock community members? And also, how would you like to be remembered?

BB: Yeah, I think, for the biggest thing, I would always say for our Rock community members, please feel free to come back and join us on campus. There's always new things going on, especially with the new community events schedule. There's always an event going on, there's always a sporting event going on, so we'd love to have you back on campus and support . . . as well as we look at the different programs--we always have those different opportunities to get involved.

I would say for my legacy, it's one of those big pieces to where looking back now to say I'm the only one to ever wear Rocky I, Rocky II, and Rocky III. I always kind of joke if there's a Rocky IV, I'll have to figure out a way to get into that just to keep that record going. But I think to be the only one to be able to do that, I think it is a big thing that I'll be able to hold my hat on for the rest of my life.

LH: You want to be remembered as like the number one Rock Pride person [laughs]?

BB: [Laughs]. I always joke with Dr. Page that I'm always banking for a Hall of Fame spot in the Athletics Hall of Fame, but I know it's more geared towards the individuals that were competing on the field.

LH: All right, so is there anything else you'd like to add? Anything we didn't touch on that you want to talk about?

BB: No, I think, we've kind of hit the big. . . .

LH: All right. It was great to talk to you today. Thank you so much!

BB: Thank you for having me.