

Oral History Interview of Chasity Grider

Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez

April 17, 2014

Lubbock, Texas

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Sports History Initiative

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The Sports History interviews encompass interviews conducted by members of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library staff. They hope to document the evolution of sports and the role of sports in the social fabric of this region.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Chasity Grider, who discusses her life and concentrates in her collegiate career at Baylor University. In particular Grider discussed her personal experiences with Robert Griffin III & Brittney Griner.

Length of Interview: 00:32:16

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today is April 17, 2014. I'm in the administration wing of the Southwest Collection, and today we are going to interview Chasity Grider about her academic career and some people she's met along the way. Chasity, first of all thank-you for being here.

Chasity Grinder (CG):

No problem.

DS:

For the record can you state your complete legal name?

CG:

Chasity Cné Grider.

DS:

And where and when you were born?

CG:

I was born January 16, 1993 in Shreveport, Louisiana.

DS:

Could you give us the same information on your parents?

CG:

My mom was born October 10, 1973 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and my dad was born January 11, 1972 in Jackson, Mississippi.

DS:

Do you know the information on your grandparents?

CG:

I don't. I know my grandparents both were born on my mom's side—they were both born in New Orleans. And then both my dad's parents were born in Jackson as well, but I don't know the years on those.

DS:

Could you tell us the careers of your father and then your mother?

CG:

My dad is an accountant for the corporate office of FedEx, and then my mom is international tax specialist for HKS which is an architecture firm in Dallas, Texas. And they both work in Dallas.

DS:

I notice you already said Louisiana. What brought y'all to Dallas?

CG:

We had a few family members that had moved out to Texas. We kind of wanted a new start. All of our family was born, raised, stayed in Louisiana. Everybody across the state knew our family. We had a really big family. Big name. My mom just kind of wanted new fresh start somewhere. And also just like a better education system for me and then my sister that wasn't born yet. But she kind of wanted a different life for us than what they grew up in.

DS:

So where did y'all first settle there?

CG:

Whenever we first came to Texas, we lived in Dallas for a few years, and then we moved to Arlington.

DS:

So I guess academics was always important in your family?

CG:

Yes, it always has been. My dad is very—you know pushed us a lot. He went to college, got his degree and everything, but my mom—she's always been super big on education. She went through, got her masters and everything; so she's always pushed us. Go as far as you can with it. Even now she wants to go back to school again just to get another certification.

DS:

And is that the norm in your families?

CG:

It wasn't. My parents were the first to go to college, and the first to go far and make it out of their home towns. So they were kind of breaking away from the stereotype of their family a little bit.

DS:

When you started preparing to school what were you thinking about where were you going to go?

CG:

I was actually dead set from age twelve until my first semester senior year in high school that I was going to go to UT [University of Texas]. I had been there for football games and just seen a lot of stuff on TV and online about it. Loved everything about UT. Went down there for—I think I had a fall premiere visit. They were showing me around—like showing me the dorms. Where my classrooms would be like—things like that, and I hated everything about it. I don't know. I think I had just gotten so excited about the facilities there that I hadn't actually really looked at like, what does the school have to offer and then just even like the buildings and their labs because I'm a science major. It was just—I hated it. I absolutely hated it—cried. I have no idea where I'm going to go to school now. I got a random letter in the mail saying that Baylor was having a fall premiere. Went the next weekend, and that's where I started out my career in college.

DS:

Do you think it might have also been something about Texas wasn't quite the expectations you'd had since you were little, and Baylor was fresh so you didn't know what to expect?

CG:

I think that's exactly what it was. I think I had built up for years and years if anybody asked me, "Where do you want to go to school?" [I would say,] "Oh UT UT UT". So I think I had just built it up so high in my head that by the time I got there and saw what it really was I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is not what I want at all." I'm from a really small town because after you moved from Arlington, I moved to Melissa, Texas—which has about five, six thousand people now. I graduated with eighty-seven other people. So going from there to biggest campus in the nation; it was too much of a culture shock. There was too much going on. So whenever I would go visit Baylor, I mean it was a pretty nice size school too. A lot small class size and you got more of a personal feel that I was used to.

DS:

So talk about that first day on campus. What was that like?

CG:

It was definitely still a big shock just because like I said, I was used to knowing every single person that walked by me, and their whole families and everything in high school. And now it's just like a completely different place. I didn't know anybody that had ever gone to Baylor. None of my friends had come to Baylor with me; so it was literally like a completely new experience

for me. Didn't know anyone, but it was just that people were really nice. It was a really nice environment. I'm glad that's where I started out at.

DS:

And you happened to get on the topic today will be sports. You happened to arrive at Baylor right as they were trying to hit the cusp in football and women's basketball. Can you talk about that, and how you met a couple—Heisman Trophy and a women's player of the year?

CG:

That was definitely really exciting because my freshman year is the year when RG3 [Robert Griffin III] really just took off completely. He was a really nice guy. You saw him around campus all the time. He was a goofy nice guy; so he didn't act like he was above anybody else even as the success continued. And you know, as soon as the seasons start people knew, "Okay this guy's going somewhere." He was just doing really well, and he was still acting the same way, dressing just like everybody else. Always laughing. Very nice guy. Always helping out; leading people. Even doing things for the community outside of the stuff that the team did. So he was a really nice guy. I met him a few times. I think the first time I met him, we were in line in the mail room in Baylor—because there, all the mail just comes straight to the campus. So we were there just waiting to get mail, and he walked up. I can actually still hear—he was blasting Spice Girls in his headphones, and he was there in line dancing around, and we were like laughing. I just remember him like taking off his headphones and he was like, "I didn't know what anybody had issues with Spice Girls." And we're all laughing, like "Oh no you're fine, go ahead." And he just asked me something about the Spice Girls, and we talked about that for a minute and then every time I'd see him on campus after then, we'd speak or things like that. And then one of my other friends is really close to him as well. And I mean, he's just a really down to earth guy. He was never really trying to impress anybody. Always remained humble, and he was just genuinely nice.

DS:

What was it like on campus at a school that had some success at football, but nothing quite to equate this level of national interest?

CG:

It was completely wild. I remember whenever I was going to visit, my senior year in high school, there weren't that many people really touring. It was just kind of like, "Okay." And people were just kind of like—and then as the success picked up, you could almost see the correlation. As the better we were doing, the more people we saw like recruits coming into town, the more people that were like really excited to come on campus and come on tours. And it was a crazy year just because like you said, Baylor—they had had a little bit of success, but they weren't used to winning and doing so well. So more and more people were coming out to the games. We were

packing out the stadium; things that had never been done before. We had sold out games when they played UT and everything. Even when the game was away, the students section there was packed out. We had students that were actually traveling around the state to go see and then people that were going to Stillwater when they're playing OSU. I think that was the year that we really came together. Everybody was excited all the time. Every football game, you were excited to go. Everyone was tailgating if it was away. And then I don't know—I will never forget, they had the Heisman Watch at the SUB there at Baylor. Outside the SUB there, there's like this big—like a really big open field. They call it Fountain Mall; so they had a projector screen that they set up in Fountain Mall so that way all the students could just sit there, and there was hundreds, hundreds, I want to say almost thousands of people that were out there just in the grass area, just cluttered; everyone was just there, sitting, waiting, watching to see what happen. And as soon as they announced his name, it was like—I can't even describe to you. You were just jumping up and down, screaming, like going crazy. It's like the whole place—like the entire school just erupted, and we were all right there watching, cheering, like "Oh my gosh." We could not believe that it happened. The excitement at that time—unparalleled unparalleled. I'm really excited that I was there to watch that because I don't think any other school experienced anything like what Baylor experienced that year.

DS:

And then right after that semester, the next year's semester, was the basketball. And I think you had a class with Brittney Griner?

CG:

Yes I actually did. But this was just—I had a class with Brittney just last spring. My final semester there at Baylor, my sophomore year, I had a class with her. Got to meet with her. So it was interesting going through that time, seeing her in and out of class. She would just casually—she would hardly ever bring up basketball. She was just a down to earth person as well. She never really brought it up unless our teacher would ask her about it or anything. She was really nice. She was always participating, always wanting to put her two cents in. We had to do a lot of group projects in that class, and she was always like "Okay, what can I do? You know you guys know I'm going to be gone a little bit. But what can I do when I'm away? Something I can do from the computer; I can just email my parts to you guys." She was always really big on still being involved and doing what she could in class as well, despite all the success she was having with the team and then even when she got drafted. That was really cool as well.

DS:

If you had maybe talked with her during that time about the thrown elbow? Did you know anything about that?

CG:

Yeah, our teacher actually asked her about that. "What was going through your mind whenever you did that?" Because I saw it happen. The whole game she had been kind of been getting beat on and beat on. She's usually like really good. She's used to that—every time she's going to go to the basket, they're going to knock on her. They're going to do what they can, because she's so tall. She's six eight. Most girls aren't on that same level; so it's like, do what you can to try and stop her. So she was like, "I was taken; I was taking. I'm usually pretty level headed, and I'm usually able to play through it." But she said, at the end of the day she's still human. And every now and then you reach your breaking point. It was one of those moments where she was like, "I probably could have handled it a little bit differently." But that was the final straw that she'd had with that her because she said the girl was really battling with her, saying all these things, cursing at her, all these things. It was just a final snap; it was just kind of like, "Let me show you who's boss" kind of thing. And again, like she said, "I probably could've handled it a little bit different, but it's just seasons and game after game after game." It was just kind of like this was where her breaking point was. She was basically fed up.

DS:

Did she talk anything about the negative responses she received afterwards?

CG:

She didn't really say much. Just you know, "Yeah, I could've probably handled it," but at the same time it was one of those things where she was like, "You don't understand the pressure and all the things that people put on me and say on me." She had a lot of allegations coming against her because of her size and things like that. And people questioning her gender or making comments about her sexuality. I think it was, she was kind of fed up, she realized it could've been handled differently but at this point she's like, "People are going to find something to talk about anyways; I really don't think that if it had been any other player that it had of gotten this much attention but just for the simple fact that it's me, and I'm already under the spotlight for people are questioning this, questioning this, questioning that, I don't think it would've been that big of a deal." I mean basketball is still a physical game; so she really was like, "It's just because it was me and that's the only reason it's that big of a deal."

DS:

I think you and I talked about that. Anyone's played the game knows; it is physical.

CG:

Exactly, so I mean and that kind of thing too, she's got to remember. It's not going to be always clean-cut. It's a passionate sport. She's very passionate about it. So sometimes things are going to get—you know you're going to get caught up in the game and that's just how it is.

DS:

So wasn't that a weird dichotomy? You had RG3, who you know was very charismatic and everybody had nothing but glowing things to say about him. There's Chasity—same year, another superstar—I mean not Chasity. Britney. And people are questioning her gender. I mean, that's getting downright—

CG:

Yeah, that's very personal.

DS:

That's very personal; very deep.

CG:

I felt bad for her. Just because, like I said she was a very nice person. Like you talk to her—she could have—even conversations people have like outside the class when you're just waiting for class to start and you're just talking. She was always just jumping in and talking to somebody. She was just a regular person. Like she was there just like we were; just trying to get an education, make a future for herself and yet all these people were saying all these negative things about her. And it's one of those things where it's like, it just wasn't fair for her to have to go through that because I'm sure it hasn't been easy her whole life—being that tall, going through all this and just constantly being under the spotlight. Whereas you have somebody like RG3 who's just getting praise constantly like, "Oh my gosh, he's such this great guy." But I think she was really strong. She handled it really well, I think, for the most part, because I can't say that I would've handled it better if I was having to constantly deal with that. But she was a very strong person. And I think a lot of it came from—she knows who she is, and she's proud of who she is. It was easy for her to take that because at the end of the day she's doing a sport that she loves.

DS:

Did you ever have the chance to talk with her about winning the player of the year?

CG:

I didn't. She didn't really say much about it. Even when you would congratulate her on stuff, it was just like, "Oh thanks," and then move it along. She didn't really like to talk about herself in that way that much. It was not something she really brought up. Even on her social media like Twitter and Instagram and stuff, she would just be like, "Oh I just want to thank you guys for this award, and I'm really proud of my team and all the success that we've had." She was always really big on like including others and focusing more on the team success as opposed to her personal success.

DS:

And you know, that was your last semester there. Why did you decide to leave Baylor, and why did you choose Tech?

CG:

Well, I loved Baylor. At the same time I did kind of feel like I was playing it safe almost. Because it was pretty close to home. It was a small school. I kind of did want something different. Also Baylor is very expensive, very very expensive. Even though I had a really good scholarship, as tuition was increasing, which they say it wasn't, but I'm pretty positive it was for the new stadium, they don't equalize their tuition and their financial aid. So if this is the amount that you were given, then this is where it's basically going to stay. So as the tuition was increasing, it just got to the point where every semester, every year it was like kind of struggle—like coming up with the extra money just because my parents didn't really help me with school so it was kind of one of those things where you get the scholarships that you can, the financial aid you can get on your own, and your education was your responsibility type thing. So it just got to the point where it was too stressful. I just couldn't figure out how I was going to make this all add up. So one of my friends whose sister had gone through the nursing program here at Tech and really loved it—has been really successful throughout. At the time, I had no other options, and I looking around like, Okay where can I find the next best nursing program. And everywhere I asked—I had some family friends that are nurses; they were all like, "Tech, Tech, Tech. It's a really great program." I was like, "Okay, well let me do some looking into it." I looked into it, really liked everything—talked to the admissions staff here, the financial aid staff here. They were very very nice about understanding what I'm doing. This was kind of all last minute, but they really helped me get together, get everything going. I actually didn't end up coming to visit the campus until after I had already been accepted, already done all my things. So it's kind of one of those things like, Okay hopefully I like it when I get there because it's already set in stone. Because there was absolutely no way I could've gone back to Baylor. Just financially, it just wasn't possible. So I got here. I actually down here three weeks before school was supposed to start to try to find an apartment last minute. Found an apartment then we came to campus and spend all day on campus, and I mean I really loved it. The atmosphere is nice; we even talked to a few students, just asking them, Where's this; where's that? And everybody we talked to—really eager to help us, really nice. You know, it is a lot bigger than Baylor, but it has still more of a personal feel I feel like than UT did. It's a really big campus, like a lot bigger than Baylor, but it still has that small town feel to it that I like. And I've been really comfortable here. I've met a lot of really great people. I definitely feel like it was a really good experience for me.

DS:

And you kind of touched on what I was going to ask. What was that like, the transition from Baylor to Tech and not so much on the athletic side but just as a normal student adjusting?

CG:

Yeah. One thing that's definitely a huge thing is going from private to public education. Just for the simple fact that at Baylor, as soon as you get on campus, you know that you are at a Christian school. Automatically there's chapel that's required your freshman year. There's religious courses that are required. Teachers pray with you before tests and things like that. It's very faith centered. Not to say that I haven't met people that are like that here, but it's just different going from a place where it's super encouraged and everything is kind of faith centered to where it's a little bit more open, and so that's definitely been a shock because Tech is definitely a little bit—a lot less conservative than Baylor because Baylor like I said, everything is Christian principles. Here it's kind of more free, more do what you want, do what makes you happy type of thing. Even the professors are a little bit more relaxed when it comes to certain things, and it's definitely been a big shock. As far as students and everything go, I feel like students here are a lot more welcoming, a lot more nice, just because the caliber of students that go to Baylor. These are people whose—like for instance, the girl that lived next to me my freshman year at Baylor, her dad was the CEO of Big Red. These are the people, you know—most people driving Range Rovers and Porsches and things like that freshman year, at Baylor. And so they weren't exactly the most down to earth or open people I guess to say. But I feel like here people are a lot more laid back. Even though there's a lot of people that do come from wealthy families here. I just feel like it's a lot more relaxed environment, open environment. People are nicer here I've noticed. But overall I really liked the feel here. I think the biggest thing for me is going from a place where it was super religious and Christ centered to where it's more free; okay find things out your own way.

DS:

How about the cities? This is Lubbock. You had Waco and before that Melissa.

CG:

Yeah. There are some big changes. I think one thing that's a lot similar between Waco and Lubbock, though, is noticing the financial and economic status of the students and the people that are around Tech as opposed to people that just live here. It's kind of the same—I feel like there's kind of like a big disparity sometimes, depending on what part of Lubbock that you're in. And I think at Baylor it was even more noticeable because Waco—I took a class there, a sociology class and found out that Waco, I think it's in the top ten poorest cities in Texas. But then you have Baylor, which is the most expensive school in Texas. People paying fifty-six, sixty thousand dollars a year to go here. They have Porsches, Lamborghinis, all of these things and then you have the poorest town, one of the poorest cities in Texas, and you have Baylor smack in the middle of that. The disparity going off campus to get food or anything to being on campus; you feel like you're in two different countries whenever you're dealing with Baylor in Waco. They actually call it—it's something even like professors and things—they call it the Baylor bubble. You have Baylor, and you have the space that's around it, and then once you get out of

that, it's like you're in a whole different place—just because the economic. I mean, you can just—I worked at a daycare there for a while, and the way the kids lived and the things like that—it was just like, you would have no idea that a school like Baylor existed in Waco, just because of how—I don't know to say this in the most politically correct way. But just, some of these kids had it so rough. Then you have kids at Baylor who have it the best. There's people who are fifty years older than them that have not seen the amount of money that some of these Baylor students have. And I think in Lubbock it's a little bit different. It's not such a huge area and plus I feel like people here are a lot more involved with the community, there's a lot more mixing of the areas. Whereas Baylor, like I said, there's literally a bubble. You have the school, and you have things that are around it. And it's almost as if they make it to where students don't have to go into Waco into like the poor areas if you don't need to. Whereas here things are kind of everywhere around. There's people that don't go here that can still go around these same areas. So it's a little bit more integrated here. The disparity there is huge. Absolutely huge. There's people there I know that graduated, went all four years, and have never seen the real Waco. They've been staying in that Baylor bubble and don't even know what's going on in the city.

DS:

What was that like the first time you stepped off campus and saw the reality?

CG:

I was just shocked because especially, you know, going on the tours and being on campus and seeing all the nice things. Campus there is very nice and you know, you can see everything around you and everything is so nice. And the people have so much money. Everybody there is somehow is able to afford this fifty-six thousand dollar tuition, and then you step off campus and once you veer off, whether it's on accident or on purpose, and you're just like, "Wow." Like it's a big shock. I hadn't seen anything probably like that since I had lived in Dallas when I was much much younger. I was from a really small town, and a lot of people there in the town were pretty well off. So it was a small country town, but none of the people were like really struggling financially. It had been a really long time since I had seen struggle like that I guess. And seeing where I was on campus where everyone in my dorm has—you know, the majority of them have some type of luxury vehicle or at least 2010 or newer vehicle to seeing how hurting people were in the community. It was crazy.

DS:

Did you get any feel about how the community felt about Baylor students and vice-versa?

CG:

I did. Baylor does do this thing once a year, and it's called Stepping Out. And it's—you volunteer in the community and they take you to the parts where a lot of Baylor people haven't

seen. And you can either help people clean up their house, clean up the areas, or help clean up the environment kind of thing. And you get to talk to some people, especially the people if you are working on their home and things like that. It's kind of like they team up with like Habitat for Humanity; so you help them repaint and things like that. They're really appreciative of the people that come that are there and helping but they also make it known, they just don't understand. It's wild to them driving by Baylor and seeing all the nice cars and people in all the fancy clothes, and they said they can immediately recognize Baylor students because you can see, first off the way they'll walk in and they'll just be looking around—almost like they're really nervous. And then it's always name brand clothes, you know nice cars, things like that. So it's kind of like, they just look at them like outsiders. They know exactly who the Baylor students are—just as soon as—just how they are when they walk in. They're like, We really appreciate you guys but. It's hard for them just seeing, they've been here in this struggle, and then driving past and seeing how there's all these younger people that are living so much better off I guess.

DS:

Did you help any students try to maybe think they could do what you were doing?

CG:

I was in a lot of service organizations there. And so we were really big on trying to get people—you're going to be here however long—however many years as well. This is part of your community. This is more of your home now than your hometown is. Like get out, get involved and see that there are people here that need your help and things like that. And I think a lot of students there were kind of receptive to, but then there's a lot that were comfortable and didn't want to have to deal with and look at the fact that there are people that are living so much lower economic status or economic level than they were. So it was kind of one of those things where, whenever I would go and do things I'd be like, "Ok, I'm going here. Anybody want to come?" And people would come, and you would have people who were like, "Eh"—who weren't really comfortable with the idea. It kind of made them uncomfortable to venture out in those areas. I think coming from it, just because I had been there once my life, I think it's really important for me to kind of give back and to go back and do that, because I know where these people are coming from. And it just so happened that, with my mom getting the education that she did and us being blessed financially, that we're able to live the life that we are now. So I think that kind of helped a lot of people who wanted to volunteer because it's kind of like they understood, even if it wasn't that bad, they understood, "Ok some people start here; so let me try and give back".

DS:

Was this big of a gulf for some of y'all? Not every student there has a father who was a CEO.

CG:

Exactly. So not everybody but...

DS:

How about now that you're here in Lubbock, have you had a chance to do anything like that here?

CG:

Yeah, I volunteered a few times with the boys and girls club. One of my friend's organizations, they sponsor a youth basketball team. So I'll go with them sometimes to help out with them. There are a lot more—I think they're a lot more use to students helping out. I know actually Bree's organization—they go and they mentor girls throughout the school district in Lubbock as well. I feel like there's a lot of groups that I know of. There's so many programs that Tech has that reaches out to the community, which I think is great. So I feel like when they see Tech students out in a community, it doesn't surprise them as much or they're not as standoffish because they're used to the students interacting, and that's really good. And that's definitely something I think that was kind of a shock to me cause while there outreach at Baylor, it was not nearly as much as there is here. So I feel like the perception is a lot different.

DS:

How does the community see y'all in Lubbock?

CG:

Like I said, I think they're really used to us reaching out and helping; so I think they have a more positive, less intimidation factor, because they're used to use being there, they're used to us helping. They can see that we're down to earth even though I do have things that are a little bit nicer, they don't look at it in the same way. They don't see, "Oh these people are too above us" or things like that, which is kind of the stigma there when it comes to Waco locals in Baylor.

DS:

Also you have that other point, where you're a female—a minority female in the science field. Have you had a chance to get other girls thinking about that as a career?

CG:

That's actually another thing, too, that's been really exciting about here, because at Baylor I would say that I was there for that purpose. People are really surprised because the majority of minorities there at Baylor are there on some type of sports scholarship just because, again, financial reasons which I completely understand and it's a shame that it is that way. But the majority of the people I feel like were surprised that I wasn't there for that, but here I've encountered so many minorities that are here doing nursing or pre-law or pre-med or something

like that, and I don't know if it's because the community is bigger here but it seems like there's a lot more flowing here. Minorities across the board, and I think that's really exciting. I've seen a lot of—I've met more female minority candidates that are applying to med school, trying to get in the nursing field now than I ever knew at Baylor, which is great. I feel like they've already got this started here. Of course I would love to continue that and spread that to people who are think but aren't sure but that's definitely that has been started and been going here. Like I said, I've met so many people just in these few months that I've been here at Tech alone who are already on their way; have their acceptances to med school. They are already very empowered.

DS:

We've gone through lots of areas. Is there anything that I haven't covered that you'd like to get on the record?

CG:

We talked about everything that I would really want to talk about. I feel like I pretty much summed up both experiences at both schools.

DS:

Thank you so much.

CG:

No problem.

End of recording

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