

**Oral History Interview of
Burle Pettit**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
March 7, 2018
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Sports Interviews***

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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 Burle Pettit as he discusses reporting on various sporting events. In this interview, Burle reflects on his career as a sports reporter and describes the people he got to meet and became friends with while reporting.

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Burle Pettit (BP):

My memory is starting to—my age is kind of showing up on my memory. Trying to find the name of it. Buster Brannon of course had the first black basketball player. Kind of sort of thing wasn't there. But prior to—integration changed the face of the entire conference. When I was covering Tech—and Tech's history with Southwest Conference in basketball, they were the dominant team when it was all-white basketball. Part of that was well they came into the conference and then Border Conference, which was stronger basketball conference than the Southwest Conference was.

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

And they had a really strong team back then.

BP:

Yeah, they did. And in fact, the SMU team, which arguably is the best team we've had in that era prior to integration, had Max Williams and Cribs and a bunch. They beat Tech in overtime in the sub-regional that year, when Tech was still in Border Conference. So they came in. It was—you know, when you've got a Gerald Myers and Charlie Lynch and Max Ants and guys like that already on. Well you hit the conference running. Just the opposite of what happened in football. Tech had been admitted in '56, but didn't start playing until 1960, which was the first year I came to Lubbock. It was in '60 when Tech went into the Conference. Well, during that time, how do you recruit? You know, you try to sign a kid that's going to be playing for nothing for four years until they start in the Southwest Conference. By then their eligibility is up. Well, in that interim the only two quality players they signed, really, were extremely high quality players. But they Dave Parks and Jay Hallab. They had them on hand when they went into the conference, but no supporting cast. So the first year that they were in conference, De Weaver had agreed to resign if he got to—he wanted to coach one year in the Southwest Conference. And they wanted a different coach for the Conference. Well, this is a kind of story that's going to have a lot of digressions in because of so many parts to the story.

DS:

Okay.

BP:

So bear with me on that. Anyway so De coaches that first year, and then the next year JT King takes over in '61. There was further deterioration. In '62, his second year here, there was nothing but Dave Parks. They went one and nine his first year here. I mean his second year. Well, strangely enough the only game they won that year, Parks—who was, as you know, was later a star NFL receiver and a first round draft choice—I mean the number one draft choice.

DS:

He was number one.

BP:

Yeah. Well anyway, their only win came when Parks intercepted a pass against Colorado and returned it ninety-nine yards for a touchdown, which is still Tech record, I believe. Well, how do you catch that much further?

DS:

Can't go—yeah.

BP:

So Parks scored his first touchdown on defense. Later on, in 1963, Donnie Henderson scored his first touchdown on defense. That's when they played—of course both of those—that '61 and '63 seasons they were still playing single football. Henderson intercepted a pass and opened the game against Washington State and run it back forty-four yards for a touchdown. And so those two All-American offensive stars scored their first touchdowns here from a defensive position. Well I thought that was interesting. But anyway, I think one of the best recruiting jobs—when you factor in circumstance—was what JT and his staff did after that one-nine season. That's when they brought in the guys that were—would be playing for the conference championship the last game of the '65 season.

DS:

Wow.

BP:

Most of them were recruited following a—it's hard to recruit once you've gone one and nine. But they picked up—oh gosh—they had three quarterbacks that were ranked very high in the state. Ben Ellidge [?] [0:06:01.9] from Brownwood, James Ellis from Monterey, and a kid named Danny Scarborough from Quanah. And Scarborough probably was as good athlete as I ever saw. His freshman year he just dazzled everybody. Then that summer he got in an industrial accident. Tore up a leg and was through. Never played. Then they have—this is where the Tom Wilson story—which is one of the factors of the column [?] [0:06:42.4] that we called him after his funeral. Tom, unlike the rise here, he comes—is a sophomore his first year eligibility. He's sitting on a bench behind Ellidge and Ellis. They were battling out for the quarterback job and Tech didn't really—in '63 they won more games than they lost. I think maybe there was—I don't remember why. It was kind of a breakout season. People started kind of having to take them seriously. But the quarterback was the weakest position. Ellidge never developed the way that they had hoped and lived up the expectation he had coming out of Brownwood. Gardenwood's Corral down there. They always have quarterbacks. Quarterback coach who—

what's that guy's name? Anyway, he was the guy that developed all those quarterbacks and Wilson, who lived in Corsicana used to go over in summertime and—when Baylor would be going through their summer drills and everything. This guy named Pervis, Chuck Pervis, worked with Tom a lot and Baylor wanted to sign him. But Tom was married and they couldn't have married freshmen at Baylor. So he wound up getting drafted as an afterthought by Tech, and now would not have got drafted because of the limit on the number of scholarships. If you remember, in those days you sign as many people as you could afford to feed. A lot of people used to accuse Darryl of recruiting guys that—outstanding passers. There's one in Clovis that he signed that never played. Guys he knew wouldn't play with him, he wouldn't play against them. [Laughs] And that was pretty common strategy in those days. Anyway, Tech took Tom, I suspect, because they wanted to get this nose guard that's graduating next year—a guy that running back at SMU [Southern Methodist University] got the following year. But anyway, I suspect that's one of the reasons they took Tom, was just to get the in road to Corsicana. Well he played about three minutes that sophomore season. Enough to ruin his year. He could have shed a redshirt. But why redshirt him? It made him think he's worth a flip anyway. Then that spring, Tom really blossomed. Came out and as a guy said they have of four teams working out, first through fourth, and Tom was on the fourth team and scrimmaging the third team and he beat them. Well, they moved him up to third team and he beat second team. So they put him on the second team and he beat the first team. And so JT told me, says, "You know, by the time when he took the second team and beat the first team we got very brilliant and thought, 'Hey, here's the best quarterback we got.'" So his history is—again, of course he started the next two years. Made All-Conference. Really fired up the way he and Donny Anderson were great two people to build around. Anyway, backing up to the those first years Tech, with having had Parks—I mean, Hallab thought about Parks and Anderson—they started making them a legitimate program. He had to start taking them seriously. Anyway, going on up to get back on the topic of integration, I remember JT didn't want to be the first to integrate. Nobody wanted to be the first. And golly, there was a—Dimmit had kid named Junior Coffey [?] [00:11:51] that—remember Washington made All-American? We had a guy here—James Ray Jackson, at Dunbar that went to Oklahoma and started up there for years. In fact he held a Lubbock city record, I guess. He ran an 9.6 and Dunbar didn't get to run against. And I held Negro Interscholastic League players of Prairie View Interscholastic League—both those names were used. Anyway, James Ray ran a 9.6 up at Spring Lake, because they were competing against the class B teams and everything on this dirt track, with the second place about a 10.4, 10.5. Can you imagine what he would've run if he'd have been running against somebody that was really impressive? But anyway, I was on JT's back. You know, I said, "You know, this would be the time to integrate. If those two guys—they're [clock chimes] both area guys. Who's going to argue with that?" He said, "Everybody. Including my staff." Well, Meryl Greene was totally against integration. As a nice a guy as Meryl was and all there is, he was big bigoted. I don't know if it was a religion thing or he was a—some fundamental religion. But anyway, he was one—he was at Oklahoma and they signed old Prentice Gautt, the first black at Oklahoma. Meryl threatened to leave. He was so upset about

that. But anyway, JT didn't—he wasn't ready to do it. He didn't want to get on that limb. I think back that had he done that in 1965, his back field could have been Tom Wilson quarterback, across the top Donny Anderson, Coffee, James Ray Jackson.

DS:

Wow. Wouldn't have been too bad.

BP:

[Laughs] Wouldn't have been. But anyway, that didn't happen. Then SMU—Hayden Fry was a nonconformist. He was a brilliant football mind, but he did things that—like everybody was basically a running team. Saw a lot of running a lot of people, running split-T, and I formation and JT and them brought in the tandem formation. And heck, you didn't know what he was running. They were throwing that ball every down. He signed Jerry Levias. Levias was a fantastic athlete. A great one to break in with. But Hayden, he didn't mind being first because he told me later—our friendship continues to grow through now—he told me that it was very important to him to be the first one, but it was important also—equally important—that the kid be a star. He hit both of those. Hayden's story was interesting. He was—he didn't cow-tow to any of the elite in Dallas. Did his own thing. He was not political at all. He just wanted to coach football and people leave him the hell alone. Of course, SMU—their alumni base, then as now, are doctors and lawyers and financiers.

DS:

Yeah, they're very affluent.

BP:

Yeah, they are very affluent. But when their affluence couldn't affect Hayden, he lost their favors. I don't know of any particular instances, but I know that he was at outs with the regents and they were looking for an opportunity to fire him, and they finally just fired him. With two years left on his contract and a seven-three record. And he was fired. Anyway, that's when he wound up at North Texas, which was a great move for North Texas and a great move for Hayden. Something he told me that—once North Texas—his contract with SMU had to buy him out those two years or, if he took another job with lesser pay they had to pay him the difference. Well he got the opportunity to go to North Texas. He told me, he said, "I look at the schedule, and we've had SMU on the schedule for three years." Not the first years there, but the second, third, and fourth year. He was at North Texas—they had SMU on schedule. He said he got to thinking, "For how great it would be for them to be paying me to kick their ass." [Laughter] And so he did. Two out of three times.

DS:

Wow, that's not a bad record.

BP:

Yeah, both years they were having to pay him, he beat them. But he enjoyed that tremendously well. He brought North Texas' program up, which is really good for it. But in the meantime built himself a reputation that got him an Iowa job. And he went to Iowa. Hadn't been in a bowl in forty years. And he got a bowl game—he went to a bowl game the first year and went to Rose Bowl the second year. He was just a hell of a coach. A great guy. I really enjoyed Hayden's friendship through the years. But the climate of the Southwest Conference, and all of sports, was so different. I loved my job as being a sports editor. Best job I ever had. Of course you have to in management to make any money, but those years at '60-'73 that covered the conference up, I just loved it. Built some lasting friendships. But man, the coaches and writers, it was just different environment, different dynamics. The writers were all friends with each other, the coaches were all friends with each other, and the writers and coaches were friends. But that has changed so drastically and I know that we used to get—every year—make a press tour. The writers that covered the conference was go to each school, took about nine or ten days' trip. With weekends and everything we'd be gone nearly two weeks. But we'd be at each stop and typically we'd get to school on—service was Wednesday, we'd get there Wednesday night. They'd have a party for us and then Thursday had interviews. It was always the night before. Well one of my boyhood heroes was Doug Walker. When I was in high school he was the three-time All-American SMU. Matty Bell was his coach. Of course I read *The Star Telegram* every day and there was Dutch Myer who was coaching at TCU [Texas Christian University]. And Jess Mealy at Rice. Here were three immortals that guys—that I had just always idolized. Then all of the sudden here I am. Jess was still coaching at that time. He was still coaching Rice. Matty was athletic director at SMU. Dutch hung around the athletic department all the time at TCU. He and Matty were great friends—best of friends. But they still were arguing over some play that turned up in '35 when SMU won the National Championship that TCU was second. They were one and two. TCU was one and SMU two. And SMU beat them, and so SMU won the National Championship. And there was some play—I don't remember now what it was—but Dutch still was arguing it was a lousy call on it. [Laughter] Anyway, they were great friends. Well, when we'd be in Dallas, Daniel, we'd say we went to SMU and then TCU next day—whichever one it was. But we'd be at Dallas with that party on the night before we interviewed SMU, Dutch always drove over from Fort Worth and went to the party because he liked to play poke with Matty and all these sports writers. They'd have a big poker game every night and everything. Well then the next night we'd be in TCU and Matty would drive over there and he—I used to enjoy something. But it was really a thrill to me to get to know and be on a first name basis with two guys that I really admired as a kid, you know, as a kid in high school. Well anyway, the writers—we were all friends. Of course we'd cut each other's throat to beat the other one's story. And the coaches the same way. But anyhow, during this stop—to show you how much things have changed—now, if I'm Don Williams and I want to interview a Tech player, I have to call the sports information office and then they'll set it up the next day or two. Well, used to at every stop the SIDs [Sports Information Director] would give each one of us a sheet of paper that all the phone numbers of

the football players—the starters—and coaching staff. Called them when we wanted to. Call and talk to the kids. That was how much—and I don't know whose fault—I don't know where that fell apart. I think that—I don't know if it's a chicken-egg thing. Coaches get paranoid and not trust the writers or did the writers get more interested in digging up dirt than they had covering a team? I don't know where the dynamics changed there. But anyway, it's a different thing now. And people have asked me through the years, "Do I miss sports writing?" I miss it the way it was done when I was a sports writer. I wouldn't do it now for anything. Just because didn't make much money and it was the fun of the chase, it made it worthwhile. You can put a dollar and sense value on being happy with your job. I've said many times that I'm basically a very happy person. The reason is that I picked the right profession, and I picked the right mate. If you're happy at your job and you're happy in your marriage, that's where most happiness breaks down. One of those areas or the other. I had the same wife, and she died last June. We'd been married sixty years and ten days.

DS:

Our condolences. We didn't know about that at the Collections.

BP:

But anyway. Back to the things at Southwest Conference. The changes. Something is kind of interesting to me is, the only coach that I could just flat not get along with was Gene Stallings. He didn't care for me and I didn't care for him and almost every stop on the press tour when the two teams would play or anytime I was around him we'd wind up in an argument. Looking back on it he really wasn't that bad a guy. I don't think I was either. It just was kind of an oil and water thing. I got to—I came to admire Stallings learning about his relationship with his special needs son. Then I'd meet him and after I went on Board of Regents at North Texas, we were talking to him about what to do with their athletic program. I was chair of Athletic Committee of the board. The president mentioned that he'd like to get somebody from outside to come in and do a study on our program. Somebody that was familiar with the—both the management side of it and the coaching side of it and the players' view of it. I suggested, I said, "You know, Gene Stallings has retired in Paris. Contact him. If there's anybody that could do us a great job, it would be him." Well, I still didn't like Gene at that time. I thought he was jerk, but recognized his football genius and his—anyway. President contacted him and he agreed to do it. Then the President Thomas says, "You know, when I called Coach Stallings and asked him if he would consider doing that, his first question was, 'Is Burle Pettit still on your board?'" And he says, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, what's he going to think about it?" He said, "He recommended you." [Laughter] He said that Stallings was quite surprised at that. Well he comes to the—Denton—I don't remember how long he stayed there. He was there several weeks. We gave him an office and secretary. He interviewed coaches and players and former players and former coaches and some faculty people. Everything. He just stayed in Denton. I guess about three weeks of work. He met with us and he had a report that deep with recommendations. I mean just

a fantastic, thrilling job. And then at the meeting, when he was presenting it to us, we joked and cut up. Our relationship changed. I really admire that guy and I really regret that I think we both had our faults. He and some of Tech staff didn't get along. I think he—you know coaches sometimes get to think that the writer works for the other team, which obviously the team you cover you want to win, because a lot more fun to cover to winner than it is to cover a loser. I've done both. [laughter] But anyway. Others that—John Bridgers was a fantastic human being. A guy I really admired. And Hayden, Daryl, Coach Neely. Neely never was—never warmed up much to writers, but he was never rude. Just wasn't one of those good old boy, "Let's get a beer," type guys, you know? And I think part of that was his southern heritage. He was a kind of a diplomat. He has a loyalty in his own way. But he was cards-on helpful. Just kind of distant. Then TCU, my gosh. Abe Martin. He was a [laughs] I loved Old Abe. Most coaches, when you're covering a practice or watching a practice, they'll come on and speak to you and then get back to busy. I went to a TCU workout one year and I was in town to cover Tech in TCU and Oklahoma/Texas. They played the same weekend. Went over their workout. God, it's hot in the stadium. He saw me on the sidelines and he come over there and shook hands. "When you get through I'd like to visit with you a little bit. Burle, it's hot here. Let's go sit down in the shade." So we go sit down on the ground in the shadow of the stage there. He plucked around the grass and talked. His assistants were up there working the team out. He always had time to talk. Well, all of them did. Now I don't know what's happening. Writers don't trust the coaches and coaches don't trust the writers, and I don't blame either one of them. I wouldn't trust either one of them either. Don Williams is a throwback to the old sports writers—

DS:

I was going to ask you. He's more old-school, isn't he?

BP:

He is. Fantastic writer and a great insight. But he was—he definitely is old school.

DS:

You know, you mentioned something interesting and it's you've covered really good teams and really bad teams. What's it like to write, for example, when Tech's going one and nine in the season. What's it—

BP:

Well [laughter] it's—one thing is you don't find any optimism, except among the players. Of course, kids always think they're going to win. Then when they're losing everybody is looking for somebody to blame it on. You know, Polk Robison, who was in my opinion, without any question, is the patriarch of all Tech sports. Those in the past and those to come. Polk was going to do the right thing no matter what the outcome. And he was getting lots of pressure on him that year that JT went one and nine to fire him. Well, he wasn't involved in it—except I'm sure he

had some input. He was still basketball coach. De was—no, I'm sorry. Polk was basketball coach and athletic director when he first came in. He replaced De as athletic director. Well, when Polk was—when they were having that one-nine season, he had a lot of criticism lean back to. There were people that thought—JT and Joe Kerbel both were on the staff at Tech. Both of them wanted his job. Well JT had been hired from Texas as heir apparent to De. He came here with some kind of understanding with the regents or with the president that he would follow De. Well, Kerbel got here and he was very political type guy. So Joe started trying to position himself to follow up when they named JT, he left and he took the West Texas State. And then it didn't help JT's cause any that one of those nine losses that year was to Kerbel and West Texas. They had a guy named Pete Pedro. I don't know where the hell he came from but Joe didn't mind doing what it took to get a football player. I wouldn't say that he—well, his recruiting tactics, let me put it this way, were questionable.

DS:

Was—because I think that was the time—because I've interviewed Duane Thomas, and he mentioned going over there. Because he was also one of those guys that came in during integration, and I asked him, "Why West Texas?" And he goes, "Well, I knew that wherever I went I'd face opposition, so I had four really good friends that were really great football players, and I said, 'We're a packaged deal.' And that's the only school that took us."

BP:

Yeah. And—we had Duane Thomas and later Mercury Morris [0:38.28.7]. Old Mercury Morris and Duane played together.

DS:

Yeah.

BP:

But this was several years after Pete Pedro—after that year. So Tech wouldn't play. They had one more game to play on the schedule. More contracts. And then they quit play them. They won that second game real easy because Anderson ran for a million yards that night or something. You know, a guy that meant more to Texas Tech—I mentioned Polk and his role. But a guy that really meant so much to Tech from a PR standpoint alone was Burl Huffman. Burl was the funniest human being I ever saw in my life. I used to just follow him around because I knew just listening to him I'd get a column note or something. That guy was so funny. I know that at the old Red Raider clubs we used to have every Monday at lunch after the ballgame—well Huffman was coaching the freshman team so they'd put him on first and he'd get the crowd softened up—loose and laughing so they'd be in a better mood when Jake came on. If he'd have lost, JT's losses were criticized more than any coach ever at Tech, and his wins were given less due than any coach at Tech. Sad thing, because in my estimation he's not only the most underrated coach

ever at Tech, he's the most underrated coach I ever was around. Fantastic coach. But anyhow, Huffman had no—he had freshman team, and I mean it was—had all those at first recruiting bunch. Scarborough was playing then. That was before he got hurt. Well anyway, they was blowing everybody up freshman season because freshman were ineligible back in those days. They went down and A&M got beat. And Hayden didn't have anybody had ever heard of. That was when they were at the bottom. Well, anyway that at Monday at Red Raider Club, people would pass notes up. Bob Nash emceed it. He'd hand the notes to Huffman to read. Somebody won't know how nor or they lost Aggie fish. And Huffman said, "Well, I don't criticize. I'm not supposed to criticize and I don't criticize." He said, "We got off to a bad start because in the on-side kick to start the game the ball went about five yards and a Tech kid covered it. Didn't go near ten yards and Tech kid covered. The head linesman said, 'Tech's ball.' And the referee came over and said, 'No, no, no, it's our ball.'" [laughter] Tom Wilson, who was the only quarterback on the roster—he sat six-five years—got some of the things they pulled out of that to get those eight wins. With old Tom, an SMU game he got smashed. Was on a third down play and Billy Bob Stewart says to him, "You linebacker blitz." And hit him. I mean, he was lying there. I thought he was dead. Wasn't a hair twitching even. So they had him off sideline. Well Tech didn't have another quarterback. Some guy was kind of trained to be the backup, but he wasn't any good. Anyway [clock chimes] Tech punted, in time SMU gave the ball up or sport or whatever they did. I looked up and there's Tom. What a ball game. Well he pulled it out. Now that team had more luck that play that they beat the Aggies on. It's been a celebration much but the play that people forgot about was that SMU game. Tech had to score a touchdown in about, oh, thirty or forty seconds left to play. Wilson had a play where Anderson had cut underneath and Shipley, who was slower than Donny, so they walked—that deep safety. Everybody ran a three deep back in those days. That deep safety was so conscious of Anderson that figured one of the two would open. Shipley was underrated receiver. But anyway, as Tom threw the ball he got hit. The ball came right down on Papel, Bob Papel who's SMU All-American safety caught the ball, so it was over. About that time Shipley hit him in the back, the ball came out, Anderson caught it and went to the two yard line. [laughter] Tech scored on the next play and won a ball game. But anyhow and I was talking to Broyce—another great guy. We were shooting the breeze. I don't remember where it was. Talking about how lucky Tech was. They fumbled that year fourteen times and lost two. And that's talking about lucky, you know. Frank told me, said, "Well, Tech wasn't lucky because luck follow speed, and they had a lot of speed." Which was true, too. But I've thought of that a lot of times. Luck following speed. Anyway, Tom, at the next Monday's Red Raider Club, somebody sent a question up to Huffman. "Wasn't risky for King to put Wilson back in that ball game after he'd been knocked cold like that?" He said, "This really gripes me that somebody would even ask that. Coach King would never put one of our young men at risk." I stood there and personally watched him ask Tom, "How many fingers have I got up?" And Tom said, "Two." And he said, "Close enough. Get your ass in there." [laughter] I mean that was typical Huffman humor. That didn't really happen, but that was—

DS:

You know, and that brings up an interesting thing because now we're all so aware about concussions. Back then it was just a part of the game. It was just—

BP:

That's true, but then of course Donny played ten years in pro. But he's—he's telling me the other day he's having some memory problems. He qualified for that bonus, you know, they gave out—the NFL.

DS:

Yeah. They've got that some sort of fund for people with concussion syndrome?

BP:

Yeah. And Donny said he didn't—that he really didn't feel good about taking it because a lot of the guys that really really needed the money bad that—he said—well I told him if he didn't take it wouldn't affect what the others got anymore. But he is concerned about what's going on with him. Here's Parks and EJ Wilks having—you know, they've got bad dementia problems. So it's—there's something to that.

DS:

Well, when did EJ start changing? Because he used to come by the Collection all the time. He was a—

BP:

Well, I don't know. I haven't seen him since then. At Tom's funeral somebody was telling me that he was getting in bad shape. And that was last—last year about this time, I guess. But his whole body was mangled. His knees and everything else is.

DS:

Kind of like Bobby Cavazos. His body took a big toll also.

BP:

Yeah. Yeah. You know I didn't cover that era.

DS:

No. Yeah, that was before your time.

BP:

Had guys but I really had a lot of admiration. I know Bobby later and Jack Kirkpatrick. Of course Gerald Myers was—I mean, Gerald Price was a very close friend of mine. His wife is

over in Memory Care Unit where my wife was. She's one that's still here. They were friends of ours for—

DS:

You know you mentioned Frank Broyles. What was he like?

BP:

Real nice. A real gentleman. I liked Frank a lot. Got to know him and I did a couple of magazine pieces on Darrell. We hit it off good because we liked country music. But Frank was a great storyteller and a excellent football coach. He was also friendly with—you could always get him on the phone just like that and talk to him. He's got Alzheimer's. Saw him at a Southwest Conference deal in Dallas a couple years ago and—God, he didn't even recognize me. He was in really sad shape. But I liked Frank a lot. He did a good job. I got to know him I started to say as every year they had a football writers—a football coaches' and writers' golf tournament in Arkansas. Writers and coaches from all over the nation come here and play golf and they'd always pair—we had a couple writers and a couple of coaches on the same flights and things like that. But JT, he and Darrell and Frank took that thing very seriously. The winning of it. And so we used to go with—my wife and I would go—coaches and writers both would bring their wives to the tournament. Wives did things while the guys played golf and everything. Frances got really close to—of course, she and Beth King were already close, but she got close to Edith Royal and Bob Bryant's wife, because they all liked to antique. They'd go over across the line into Missouri and go antiques. Anyway, we'd go in a day early and Darrell and Frank would come in a day early. JT and Darrell and Frank would play golf and I'd play with them, but I couldn't play. I wasn't the golfer they were, so we'd play six hole catch. They'd play six holes with each one of them—partners with each one of them. I mean, they bet some pretty good money. Well, I say good money. It wasn't thousands, but they took it so serious it sounded like big money. [DS laughs] Anyhow, playing golf wasn't everything in the—I went to the—I guess I did two magazine pieces on Darrell and one year I did Texas for *Texas Football*. I was never doing the magazine thing. I was there four days and we'd go out every night. His spring training was going on at that time so he was busy in the daytime. They would go to—sit around and listen to some C&W music. In mornings we'd sit around and talk about everything in the world. Finally, at fourth day I said, "Darrell, we've got to talk some football. I've got to write this win." So I got all my interviewing done that last day. But he was a fun guy to be around. And Edith was a great lady, too. But then I got to know Hayden even better because I did SMU every year for *Texas Football* edition and Tech every year.

DS:

Yeah, you said you're still close with Hayden, right? Y'all still communicate?

BP:

Yeah. Yeah. Hayden's not doing too good. He's got some health issues. So mentally—age is—Hayden is ninety—ninety-one—I guess. Hard to imagine. Of course, it's hard to imagine I'm eight-four. What else do you want to talk about?

DS:

Well, let's go back to—you started—there was a reporter in 1960—what was it like coming in as the new guy and hitting the beat there?

BP:

Oh, it was fantastic, because—well, in '60 I wasn't—I did sidebars. Joe Kelly was still sports editor at that time. He covered Tech, but I did sidebars to games and practices and things like that. I took over the beat in '62, and the first press tour I was almost awe-stricken by—here I was, we had this guy, no, Martin's Food out of Dallas. He later sold General Foods. But anyway, Morton's Potato Chips and all that. He provided his luxury bus to Will [inaudible] [00:55:41] the conference. Well, whoever it was every year—one year—that Al Martin was—but, anyway, you just turn the bus and driver over and we'd go to every town. That bus was loaded down with beer and chips. So first thing I know I'm getting on a bus with Blackie Sherrod, Dan Jenkins, Bill Vanpleat [?] and Dan Cooke[?]. I mean, Jim Trinkle [?] [00:56:08], Dan Cooke wasn't coming there yet. He came on later. All these guys that I'd been reading forever, you know. All of the sudden I thought, My God, they're treating me just like they treat each other. It wasn't any of this, "Who the hell is this guy from Borden, Texas?" You know? "Sitting in here with us." It was a special fraternity and I've—God, I've outlived all of them but Jenkins. I talked to Dan every now and then, and he just made that one tour—a bus trek also—but Dan, that was his last year to—with *Times Herald* he left the next year and went *Sports Illustrated*. Written a zillion books. Fantastic writer. But it was a "pinch me I'm dreaming" feeling for much of that first year that I covered beat, because here I was being called by my first name by Darrell Royals. But they—I got lots of compliments from them, and that was—you know when Dan Jenkins tells you, "Hey, you wrote a hell of a piece on that SMU game the other [clock chimes] day." That's the kind of compliment that really sticks out. But it was a—it was kind of a dream come true. I was telling somebody the other day jokingly—well half-jokingly—that the best job I ever had was sports editor, because as sports editor, the bosses not only didn't know where I was, they didn't even know where I was supposed to be. [laughter] So I played golf, I took flying lessons, I did all kinds of things during that. But it was a fun life. And I always joke that they moved me into management just so they could keep up with me. With my whereabouts.

DS:

Yeah. And this kind of ties to that. You mentioned how you had the—you had done the right job?

BP:

Yeah. Profession.

DS:

How did you get into that profession? How did you select that as where you were going?

BP:

I don't know. It was so long ago. Way back when I was a kid. I used to read *Star Telegram* sports every day. And gosh Old Bill [inaudible] [00:59:38] was writing when I was in grade school, really. I loved to write. That's what I was built to—I remember twelve years, of six grade, I'd wrote a book review, book report on a book I'd read. The teacher accused me of plagiarizing because she didn't—she said it sounds too bookish. And I'd written it and that really pissed me off. Anyhow so she found out that I had a knack for writing. I loved to write and I loved newspapers. I knew if I ever went to college that's what I'd do. Then I started college right after I graduated. It was—I had a scholarship. All my buddies weren't going to school. They were getting rough necking jobs, they were driving cars and figure out what was broke. My parents couldn't afford to send me to—so I had to work and everything. I had that scholarship, so anyhow I quit with rough necking and had me a car and all that. About the time, the Korean War was going on and I got drafted. Army. I'd just given up on it. I thought, Well, that's just a fantasy. I'd been a writer to start with. Well, I got out of the Army and met this little North Texas co-ed and we were dating and we eloped. Everybody in that small town figured two things; one was she was either pregnant or the marriage wasn't going to work out anyhow. Our first kid was born three years later and we were still married when she died. Anyway, she insisted that I enroll in North Texas. Well by then I had GI Bill and a couple of jobs, so anyway that—where I—it so happened that North Texas was where I wanted to go, because they had the best journalism school in the country. Anyway, so then I knew if I got a degree from there I'd have all the job offers. You know back then, Dan, something that my grandkids won't ever benefit from is in those days whatever you majored in, the chances were almost a sure thing that you would get a job in that profession. Now that's not the case. But anyway, with a North Texas degree in journalism I had offers from all over the state. I came to Lubbock because it was a sports writing job. I had interned with *The Star Telegram* my last summer there in school. I came to Lubbock for two reasons: Tech was about to start playing the Southwest Conference that same year, and also they offered me five dollars a week more than some of the other offers. I told my wife, I said, "You know, I think we ought to take that Lubbock thing." And she says, "Move out to West Texas?" And I says, "Yeah. Tell you what, if you'll go along with it we'll go out there and stay one year." So I was still here. She kidded me about that all the time. I had—the closest I ever came to leaving was in 1970. I was offered a sports editor job at the *Houston Post*, which I'm sure as hell glad I didn't take, because there is no *Houston Post* anymore. But I really kind of wanted that job, but I could tell Frances—we had three little boys then. I think she didn't like the idea of raising them in Houston. Anyhow, about that time I had two great supporters at the

Avalanche. That was Charlie Guy and Parker Prouty. They were the big guys. I came back from that interview and they changed my situation considerably. So we stayed. I've interviewed—gosh, I went to Chicago one time. I mean, Detroit. They offered me a job at *The Free Press* covering baseball. I thought, Well that'd be worth looking in. I landed in Detroit. It was snowy and town was gray, the sky was gray, the buildings were all gray. I got there and *The Free Press* had a union pay for me up front. Even had a guild and stuff. I don't like unions then, don't like them now. I knew that just—In fact, I told the publisher that he just wasted an airfare. Then I interviewed in San Diego to be—I liked that one—with, again, I got my situation improved here. I then talked to them and I kind of liked that paper, but I almost took the Houston job. Because that was—what a staff. Had Mickey Hurst which—who was another guy I always admired. And Jack Gallagher. Another writer and guys like that on his staff, they could sure make you look good. You know, a funny thing how the newspaper networking works; Ed Hunter was the editor of the *Post* and he came out here and talked to me. Told me that he wanted to hire me as sports editor. Well he said—then I told him, “Well, I might be interested for that.” Well he got back to—he was at Tech speaking or something—I don't remember what it was. Anyhow, we had dinner and a couple of drinks and visited that night. And that night he called me when he got back to Houston. Said, “I'm sending airplane tickets for you and Frances.” We stayed in the hotel right across the freeway from the paper. Said, “I want to come over there and interview you because—“ come to find out his sports editor didn't know that he was being replaced at that time. So that kind of bothered me too. Anyhow, he said, “I'd rather we talk here and my wife will carry Frances around and look at some houses and show her some things about the city and all that.” Well, I got to the hotel and checked in and that blinking light on my phone was messaging. And so I called out the desk, she says, “Yeah, you have a call from a Mickey Hurst and a Jack Gallagher.” Oh gosh, what's the other guy's name? Anyhow, three of those sports writers left a—that's how fast things move. Well, I called Ed right then. Called him at home and said, “Look, I've got to return these calls, because these are friends of mine and guys I've been with.” He said, “Yeah, you don't have a choice about it. So that being the case, just come over to the paper in the morning.” And he said, “Do you know how they knew?” I said, “I have no idea.” Well, come to find out—is that on?

DS:

Yes, it is.

BP:

I'll watch how I word this then.

DS:

Okay.

BP:

One of the sports writers was very close to Ed's secretary, and she had made the flight arrangements for Frances and me.

DS:

Okay.

BP:

So it was out. I went over and talked to those guys and they tell me—says, “You’ve got to take this job.” And I said, “Well, why? Aren’t one of you guys interested in it?” Neither one of them wanted to be the boss. They just wanted to do their thing. But anyway, that was close as I ever came to leaving. And this paper has been good to me. It hurts me the shape that newspapers in general—and this one in particular—are now.

DS:

Yeah, well the profession has changed so much.

BP:

It's dead. It's just dead in the water. It just hasn't turned over. Because you know when last year I ran the news operation. Last year I was editor we were still the primary source for news and advertising. We made big money. We had big staffs, had good circulation. Had public trust. Had a stay in the public. But several things have happened to change a whole—I keep using the word “dynamics” because it all applies to so many things that we’ve talked about. All of the sudden there's an explosion of information. So many outlets. For advertising as well. You look on the—my gosh, you call up—you can't work your PC without popup ads every time you turn around and things. But you add that on top of the fact that we're now in the third generation of people that just don't read. Kids that—they're so visual and they don't read books, they don't read magazines, they don't read newspapers. They just don't read. Two of my three sons still takes the newspaper. I guess they just don't know any better because they always had one. One lives in Waco and one lives in San Antonio. They both take the paper. It's sad. I wrote a column to them. Several weeks ago [clock chimes] the guy that was publisher then—he's been replaced since—called and told me that they no longer could afford to pay me what I was getting to write the column. I understand it, because I don't think the column was worth what they were paying me to write it. I wouldn't write it for any less than that, because it is a pain in the butt to have to sit down and write a column when I'm supposed to be retired. I didn't realize I'd miss it this much. But I do miss writing. I don't know. But the paper has changed. The copy desk, the copy editing, and the layout is now done in San Antonio. I mean, in Austin. These electronic times, this company that bought the paper has a common desk in there. They do the layouts for everybody and then just text them or whatever the process is of—emailing or texting or what. They get right here as soon as—as quick as you could have done it in the office. Do it down there, hit the send

button. But they don't know a damn thing about layouts. I spent, on three different occasions, hired professionals to come in to redesign our paper. To get it looking like we wanted it to look. Well, we could afford to do that then. Now the damn thing is just thrown together. Fortunately we've still got some pros on that, but they lost a bunch of good copy editors on that when they did them. You've got Don Williams, Bill Kerns, and May Westbrook. Still have some talented people, but they lost very talented people. Guy named Roydststrong [?] [01:15:38] has won all kinds of awards on headline writing, layouts. Dave Daniel, Crash real pro, and all this, they just got cut loose. Sad.

DS:

Yeah, I got to meet Crash because I got to do some music reviews for them of Latino groups and stuff.

BP:

Yeah.

DS:

And so Crash is a great guy. Just come in—he'd take care of you.

BP:

I hired Crash when—as soon as he got out of Tech. Don hired Kerns. Bill's in a league of his own as far as knowledge of movies and he knows too much about them. I always kid him, "I'm so stupid, I judge a movie by whether I like to watch it or not." [laughter] That was directing, or how the lighting was. Anyway.

DS:

Well, you know since you've been here Tech has—the athletic program—undergone the shift. I mean you were out of the sports area already when they went to the Big 12, right?

BP:

Yeah.

DS:

So, as someone that had been connected with it, what did you think of everything when that was going? The demise of the Southwest Conference and the coming together of the Big 12?

BP:

Well, I guess it was kind of like my family was being torn apart. I don't know what it would be like for you to become estranged with your kids and all that stuff. But I felt like that all of us had grown up in Texas and the Southwest Conference fans had been betrayed. That's kind of strong,

but that's how I felt. I guess us old guys like to live in the past, because there's a hell of a lot more of past back of it, then there is future ahead when you're eighty-four years old. [Laughter] But at the time, I didn't like it when it was done. It was—bothered my bad enough when Houston came in, because of their questionable recruiting tactics before they came to the conference. But then they turned out to be a good member—productive member. I hated it for SMU and TCU and Rice. They were totally cut out when it was changed. Baylor was able to hang in there strictly because the Baptists had a lot of clout. Tech was able to stay in there simply because West Texas had so much political clout at that time. The John Montfords and the Pete Laney and all these people out here that—but it—and you know I still enjoy watching and following Tech sports. I was glad at TCU when they left them back in. They've been a factor since they got here. I don't think SMU had ever—was ever going to reach the level. Of course that death penalty set them so far back that—

DS:

I was going to ask you about that.

BP:

Yeah. That thing was—I hope they never ever do the death penalty to any other school. That's just too drastic.

DS:

Well, you know one of the people that was around when that happened was Grant Teaff and he had the same take. He'd wished that that would never happen again.

BP:

He was another very close friend of mine, was Grant. I forgot about him. He went to Baylor and they were so down. First year he was coach I was on a—got to Waco and I got sick as a horse. Chest cold and flu. He got me and took me out to his house. Fixed me some chicken soup and all that stuff. I stayed with them for two days while I was there. But I was kidding him about taking that job. I said, "You know, why didn't you just go shoot yourself? That way you'd die suddenly that way. This is going to kill you in good time." Then doggone if it doesn't turn him into a winner.

DS:

Yeah.

BP:

Which shouldn't have surprised me, because he was a great assistant coach when he was at Tech.

DS:

I think there were a lot of people that wanted him to move up to the head coach at Tech, weren't there?

BP:

Well, you know, he wanted the job. He couldn't find anybody that wanted the job. Then Tech hired Steve Small and Grant didn't want to openly apply for the job, but he was mister-go-between between JT and him. That was when—you know, Jim Carlen. Talk about him a little bit. He was a guy that—of course a great coach, but he couldn't stay out of politics. It destroyed him. Destroyed his coaching career. He was at Tech. He decided that he wanted to be athletic director and head football coach. He didn't want to answer to JT anymore. So he made a—look at the—[shuffling] Excuse me.

DS:

All right. Okay.

BP:

Grab up some documentation to bring you. [Long pause] There are no cheaters out here. You going run this tape there. I'm going to be looking for something here.

DS:

Okay. I'll pause it for a second. [Pause in recording]

BP:

Three. Carlen had a great team. Went ten and one. [Daniel adjusts recorder] It was during that time that he decided that he should be—should have both jobs. Then it was along—in '74. Okay, they beat Texas. Beat them bad out here, 26-3. He wanted to use that Texas preseason—previous season's record—and that Texas win. He thought he had the clout, and he started making a move then. Started focusing on trying to get the athletic director's job. Well, what they'd taken off then—his focus stopped from football and shifted to politics. Well, he lost to A&M, lost to Rice—I mean Rice beat him bad—lost to Baylor, and lost to Arkansas. With the better material than he had the year before when he won ten games. Well, what he didn't realize was that JT had a lot more clout than he had thought. He had underestimated him. So there was a guy named Bob Fuller who was a big Tech supporter—financial and otherwise. One of those guys that he thought would support him fell off of him in a hurry. He was—really made some people mad at him that had always been his backers. Well about that time the South Carolina job opened up. He was offered it, so he took it. Okay, goes to South Carolina. He gets cross-wise with the administration there [clock chimes] and he winds up suing them. And he got fired. You know, he never did get back in good with the fans after that blow up to Red Raider Club, when he made the remark—this is in 1970, right after the tornado. Barnes kid was sophomore and Charlie Napper [?]

[1:26:39.7] was senior. He pulled Barnes and put Napper back in the ball game, and people booed. A few who were here during that time were not over at the Red Raider Club. But Sunday he lambasted everybody. Accused—said, “Booing my players. Anybody doesn’t like what I’m about to say and wants to get physical, I’ll meet you anywhere.” Oh God, then he said, “What this town needs is another tornado. Here were people still smarting from that. Twenty six people had died. Whoo.” That put a lot of people against him that never got back. He never won back. I know I wrote a column that they weren’t booing—and y’all’ve got that somewhere up there. In stuff you—those columns that you have of mine. But anyway, Fort Worth Cats had a colorful baseball manager named Bobby Bragan. He was really something. Funny and everything. He was telling a story on himself that he went out. They were getting beat and he brought in this kid from the bullpen that had given up—I forget how many runs in the last three games—well, when he pulled him in from the bullpen he said people started booing. And said, “I was out there at the mound with him to hand him a ball, and I told him, ‘Son, I am so sorry that these people are booing you.’ He says, ‘They ain’t booing me. They booing you for bringing me in here.’” [Laughter] So I like to think that they weren’t really booing Napper they were booing Carlen. But anyway, he was a guy that—if he had just focused on football instead of politics, he’d been one of the all-time greats, I’m sure. Anywhere to coach. Because he was a great organizer and was able to put together a fantastic staff. He always had great coaches to help wherever he coached. I was really disappointed in him and the way he turned out. Then he was followed by Steve Sloan, who was I believe the best sideline football coach Tech ever had. He was able to make adjustments from a—if somebody started—if they started hurting him in one area, that stopped in a hurry. He was a hands-on coach. Very likeable. Public loved him. Players loved him. But his wife didn’t like West Texas. So when that Ole Miss job opened up he took it and that was a bad career move for him and it was bad for Tech. [Pause] Anyway, what else you need?

DS:

A million bucks?

BP:

I can’t quite rate—

DS:

I remember you’re profession now, sorry about that. [Laughter] Well, you know, let’s talk about in the profession. Because, you know, it changed for sports writers. How difficult is it for a sports writer nowadays to do what you would do as far as getting to know the athletes?

BP:

Can’t do it. You don’t have access. You don’t have—now, and even at Tech, which this is partially on Kliff. He doesn’t let anybody talk to any of his assistant coaches. If you want to talk

to an assistant you get permission from him and you tell him exactly what you want to talk about, and he'll tell you what you can't talk about. Players, you don't have any direct access at all. If Don wants to talk to any player out there, just pick one, he has to call the SID's office, and the SID then has to call the coach and then the coach will say whether they can or not. Then the SID will, I suspect—and it's been—it does happen here but I know it happened at UT. Recently the SID then tells the player, "Here's questions you don't answer." He coaches him up before he goes to the interview. A guy used to sit there and—stand there—on the sidelines and hear those coaches—those kids—bitching about this coach or that coach. I got all kinds of tips. Players would call me and tell me so and so, this is happening or is going to happen. That group at Tom Wilson's funeral—the best, most fun year I ever had as a sports writer was that '65 team and all those guys, they always treat me like I was one of the team members. Invited to all their get-together's and all that. Tom and I were very close friends those years too. Last time I got to see Tom was he called me one day and said, "I'm coming to Lubbock." He has a daughter that lives here. This was after he was bad sick. Asked to have lunch. Well, we've done that several times. My God, he always liked to go out to—what's that Blue Sky or Sky Blue or whatever that is on 98th. Anyway, next day called me and said, "Donny called and he wants to go with us." I said, "God, that'd be great." We set out there for two hours after we got through eating. Recalling funny stories and things like it. Never happened again. Donny was—he was a superhuman being along with a super football player. He was a great friend.

DS:

Well, Burle, we've been going for almost two hours. You're probably getting a little tired of me. Is there anything you would like to leave us with for the day, and maybe—

BP:

Oh it's not for this, but what has become and what will become of the stuff of mine you have out there? Are you going to do something with my columns and all that?

DS:

Well, I'm sure that they're processing that and hopefully that's still that at some point they'll do an exhibit or something like that with that.

BP:

Because it's been three years now.

DS:

Yeah. Monte's out for the next week or so, but when he gets back to the office I'll ask, "Hey, how's that coming along?"

BP:

Yeah.

DS:

What we do with this now—we do a full transcript.

BP:

And see if that—I hate it so much to miss Dirk [West]—my wife was in very, very bad shape when—did the Dirk's thing.

DS:

Reception?

BP:

Yeah. And I didn't get to write anything about it. I've got—

DS:

Oh man, and it was—

BP:

I wanted to write a lot of stuff about Dirk. We were very close friends. In fact, I was the first person that Mary Ruth had called when he died, right after she called her son's doctor. She called him and she called me.

DS:

Wow. Yeah, I never met Dirk, but Mary Ruth is a great lady.

BP:

She is, and Dirk—he was cantankerous, but in a great sort of way. We were friends, but we argued all the time. We ate breakfast together every day for over twenty years at AJ's Coffee Shop. Used to give him hell, but he was in city council. Then when he was mayor—I never could get old Dirk to stop this—started this thing called the STEP Program when he was mayor, which was—STEP was acronym for Selective Traffic Enforcement Program, S-T-E-P. Well, anyhow, what they did is they set up where you least expect to see them as active. Well they got me going down Avenue K. Got a ticket. So I wrote a column and I gave Dirk—you know, at breakfast the next day—that I wrote a column and said that the STEP Program—that S-T-E-P—actually was an acronym for “Screw The Entire Population.” [Laughter]

DS:

You were a little sore?

BP:

Anyhow, Dirk took exception to that. Then he told me one day—he said, “I’ve got an idea out of Albuquerque. I want to start this—“oh hell, what is that? You call in if you know a crime, you get—

DS:

The Crime Line something?

BP:

Yeah, Crime Line. Said he’s starting Crime Line. I said, “Dirk, that’s the stupidest thing I ever heard of in my life. First place, how are you going to fund people with donations? They’re never going to give you donations. That’s a dumb idea.” He said, “Well, I’m going to start it.” Guess who was the first one he put on the damn Crime Line board? Me. [laughter] [phone ringing] Excuse me.

DS:

Sure. [Pause in recording]

BP:

I want to call her back.

DS:

All right. Here you go.

BP:

But anyway.

DS:

And then that turned out to be a very successful program.

BP:

Oh gosh, yeah. And I told him it succeeded because he picked a good board. It wasn’t because it was a good idea. [Laughs]

DS:

Wasn’t Charlie Pope on the board also?

BP:

Yeah.

DS:

Or one of the directors or something like that?

BP:

Yeah, Charlie Pope. Anyhow. I don't want to get into him. [Laughter]

DS:

Okay. All right. Well, you know, I guess we can leave it at that for right now.

BP:

All righty.

DS:

Let me get this.

End of Recording

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