

**Oral History Interview of
Wes Kittley**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
August 21, 2012
Lubbock, Texas**

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

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Wes Kittley on August 1, 2012. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Kittley, Wes Oral History Interview, August 21, 2012. Interview by Daniel Sanchez, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses over 6,300 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

The transcribers and editors of this document strove to create an accurate and faithful transcription of this oral history interview. However, this document may still contain mistakes. Spellings of proper nouns and places were researched thoroughly, but readers may still find inaccuracies, inaudible passages, homophones, and possible malapropisms. Any words followed by "[?]" notates our staff's best faith efforts. We encourage researchers to compare the transcript to the original recording if there are any questions. Please contact the SWC/SCL Reference department for access information. Any corrections or further clarifications may be sent to the A/V Unit Manager.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/16bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: Daniel Sanchez

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Kaylyn Richards

Editor(s): Kayci Rush

Interview Series Background:

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 Wes Kittley as he describes his career as a track coach for Abilene Christian University, and Texas Tech University. In this interview, Kittley discusses how he got interested in track, being a walk on at Abilene Christian University, and then how he became a track coach at the same University and later moving to Texas Tech.

Length of Interview: 00:57:24

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Family background and interest in track	05	00:00:00
Going to Abilene Christian University	09	00:09:34
His career as a coach at ACU and TTU	13	00:17:32
How the future is looking for Tech's sports	17	00:28:18
What his parents think of his career	21	00:41:28
How the Internet has affected his program	25	00:49:44

Keywords

Coach, Track, Texas Tech University

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is August 1, 2012. I'm at the Southwest Collection on campus at Texas Tech University, and I'm interviewing Wes Kittley as part of our Sports History Program. First of all Wes, thank you for coming in.

Wes Kittley (WK):

You're welcome, glad to be here.

DS:

And, let's talk about— yourself—we do that— speaking with your complete legal name.

WK:

My complete legal name is George Wesley Kittley.

DS:

And where and when were you born?

WK:

I was born November 7, 1958 in Haskell, Texas in Haskell County.

DS:

Wow, that's pretty close.

WK:

It's not far, I've always been in West Texas.

DS:

I did not know that.

WK:

Yes.

DS:

How about your parents, can you give us their background information?

WK:

Yes, my mom is Jerri Kittley, my dad Bobby Kittley, was raised on a farm. My dad's farmed his whole life, my mother's a home maker, always stayed home with the kids. Had three brothers and myself. So, all boys. Raised twelve miles out in the country. My dad farmed a little cotton

farm and— just a sharecropper, never owned the land but we were always just sharecroppers and— but lived out in the country pretty far from town, twelve miles from any town.

DS:

And you mentioned you had some brothers, were you among the older or youngest?

WK:

I'm number two. I have an older brother then I'm number two, then have two younger than me.

DS:

Okay, well tell us about growing up out there in Haskell. What was it like?

WK:

Well, you know, at the time I wanted to get off the farm when I was being raised. But no, it was a great time when I look back, I wouldn't take a million dollars for being raised the way I was raised. We lived way out in the country, just boys, we were all close together, we're two years apart, each one of us, so we were always able to kind of have my siblings where I could play with them, and that type of thing. We— we worked hard on the farm. I was number two, so my older brother and myself we were on the tractor at nine years old, learning how to plow, and get a hoe handle in your hand, and chopping cotton. So, that was just the life but we always— we rode a bus to school, twelve miles in and twelve miles out. Sports were always a big part of it too, my dad was a great football player, got a scholarship at West Texas State University, that time and broke his ankle— tore his ankle up as a freshman so he came back home to farm. But he was a great track person, and a great football player, so a good athlete. My mom's a great basketball player in a little town called Rochester, Texas which is just north of Rule, and Rule, Texas is where I was raised and went to school, but anyway—

DS:

Well you mentioned your dad had gone on a scholarship. How about your mom?

WK:

My mom didn't, no, no. There was no such thing in her day, she played basketball, and that's where you had half court. She as a guard and they made the playoffs and won district every year, and she was a twirler but anyway, she married my dad right out of high school.

DS:

Wow, so are they still alive?

WK:

They are. They're seventy-eight years old, seventy-seven. They still live in Rule, and moved into town.

DS:

I think I may have to go out there are interview them.

WK:

Oh yeah, I'd love for you to.

DS:

So, you know, with their athletic background how soon did they get y'all involved in athletics?

WK:

I can always remember— I've to kind of go back, my granddad was— on my dad's side, Ollie Kittley, he used to drive everyday out to the farm and he would wake us up early. I mean he'd get there very early, I'm sure my mom— it drove my mom nuts at times always him knocking on the door early in the mornings. You know, he would get us up and then— I can remember at about six years of age he would take me into town, and go to the track and when I was very young he would let me watch the high school— he took a great interest in the high school track team there. He would help buy them shoes, they— Rule didn't have much money and some of the kids on the team didn't— couldn't afford shoes and he'd buy them a pair of track spikes. He got me inaugurated real early of being up there around the sports and that types of thing, and so— I always wanted to be in track from a very young age.

DS:

Did you have an affinity for track when you started running?

WK:

I did. I always did. There were a couple of people that were kind of my idols that had won the state championship for Rule. Paul Cornelius was one guy, and won the four hundred, and then **Larry Lefever [00:04:27]**, he went to McMurry University. Those were guys that I looked up to. Then my older brother, when he eventually got to running, he was very good, and so I always wanted to be like him.

DS:

So, some of the sibling rivalry?

WK:

Oh we had sibling rivalry, my younger brother was very good, below me and actually we all

went to state in the eight hundred meters for Rule, Texas, all the brothers, and all of them won state, except me. So you know, but my older brother, Rob, kind of started it off, and he was very good in football and track, so once he went to state well then that got us all excited. When I was a freshman, he was a senior, and I had the opportunity of making the four by four relay team, so I got to run. We won state in 1974, for Rule, Texas. Art Briles who's now is the Baylor track—football coach, he was—the anchor leg on the relay. I handed off to him, I was third leg and Rob, my brother, was second leg, he handed off to me. We won state championship that year, so track's **always**—then my younger brother came, and then my baby brother came, and they all won state in the eight hundred, so—and had a lot of years. I think Rule had a four-by-four relay team, we called a mile relay, fifteen years in a row almost at state track meet.

DS:

That's consistency.

WK:

It was, yes.

DS:

What was it about that area that brought out great four hundred runners?

WK:

You know I think—well honestly our coach and the tradition that was built, you know, Art Briles' daddy was the head football coach in Jasper, his name was Dennis Briles, and Art Briles' mom was also the teacher there. Jasper Wilson was the assistant football coach and the head track coach, and he was tough. He was just an unbelievable tough, hardworking man and he demanded a big product. Hard workouts, and he just kind of set the tone, and he built everything around a four by four, a mile relay. So, you were going to come to Rule, Texas and you were going to run, everybody's going to run the quarter, and the quarter kind of got you in shape for all the other events, and like I say, fifteen years in a row while we were there, won state '71, '73, and '74. Just always had great teams at the state track meet.

DS:

I guess the quarter is a great distance to do that because it's right at the edge of being a sprint and getting into the middle distance stuff.

WK:

It is and we didn't have a track, and so we just kind of ran around the football field most of the time, but they kind of road graded a circle around this old dirt area that we worked out on. We would go to Aspermont, which was a little town close, or Haskell, ten miles, fifteen and go once a week to work on hand offs, because they had an actual track. But we just worked hard and we

were all more— mostly farm community type kids, and I think we're raised a little bit tougher. He put a lot of hard work on us, I think we just worked hard and got better.

DS:

Well yeah, yourself and Briles you went on to college and had success. Was that something that was typical of y'all's athletes?

WK:

Well my brother was, you know, phenomenal, and he got a track scholarship to Abilene Christian, tore his knees up, and didn't get to finish. But there were a lot of good athletes in that era. A lot of good athletes. Jimmy Lyles went to West Texas State and played football, I think had a four year career there. But there were a lot of good athletes for a little, small community of one thousand population. You know, my graduating class was twenty-two so everybody had around twenty in their graduating class. For that many people to go on, and to have careers in college and that type of thing, I think it's pretty neat.

DS:

How about yourself? When was it you were thinking about going beyond high school?

WK:

Well, I always wanted to go to college. I always wanted to run track. I always wanted to be a coach. I've never had a doubt— probably sixth or seventh grade I started thinking about that. One of my brothers said, "Man I'm mad at you all the time because you always have known what you wanted to do with your life, and I still don't know." I'm forty, you know, so they kid me about that, but I don't know, I never had a doubt of what I wanted to do. I think my granddad started me off that young, getting me so interested, and even back tracking, we used to have these county little track meets for third grades, fourth grades, fifth graders and you would swap off going to Paint Creek, Texas or Rochester, Texas and Rule. The whole first grade through sixth grade would come, and you'd run in age groups. That got me started, then my granddad showing so much interest, just encouraging us. My dad being a really good athlete, I think always wanted to do good, then you follow your older brother. It's just a tradition that started, and everybody in the Kittley family wound up going to state, and being a state champion, and then everybody wound up running the eight hundred meters. So, it was kind of a tradition built on a tradition. Not only for the team, but also even our specific individual races.

DS:

And so coming out of high school, where did you go to—?

WK:

Came out of high school, Abilene Christian offered me— actually they didn't offer me, I walked

on at Abilene Christian. I got a few little offers from some schools, but I wanted to stay close, I'd never left home and Abilene's is like a big city, like New York, to us. We're about sixty miles north of Abilene and so— but I had been there, I felt comfortable there. If we ever went to town to really go buy something big or whatever, sometimes we'd go to Abilene. My mom went a semester there before she married my dad and so I think— and went to the Church of Christ church, so that was a— Abilene Christian sports church, Christ church. So we sort of got— I think got interested in there. I was always watching, they had great teams in the seventies and when I was a kid growing up, I'd be an eighth grader, ninth grader, Abilene Christian was running great relays and they were having great individuals. Roger Coblazer [?] [00:10:33], or people like that, that I would see for four hundred meter runners. So, I was always interested in that, by watching them. They were the closest college that had a great track team. I think that's what kind of got me going. I went there in the eighth grade for a sports camp, and just fell in love with it.

DS:

Well, tell us about your first year there. Experience of going in there, walking on and—

WK:

Well, I was home sick, believe it or sixty miles from home, but I was so homesick because we'd never gone anywhere. No, I just— I really loved Abilene Christian. Freshman year was tough getting in there and having to run with those juniors and seniors, but I had some great friends. Randy Baker who was a great quarter miler, and they took me under their wing and just kind of made me feel at home. Had a good roommate named John Michaels, he's from Rochester where my mom was from, so we had competed against each other in high school. He was a huddler but we'd still competed on relays against each other. So, he was my roommate so I felt very comfortable, you know, being there. Small town kid, raised on a farm and Abilene was five thousand population, the school— ACU was, so I just felt real comfortable.

DS:

And how about the community at large? How did they respond to athletes from the campus?

WK:

Well, Abilene Christian has tremendous heritage with track and field. They had the Bobby Moore era where he'd won three gold medals, and they had great track tradition. We won forty or fifty national championships there. So, they always— track was a big thing there. Being a very small school it's the—was the best sport they had. So, it kind of put them on the map. Like I say, there's just a lot of tradition from coaches— great coaches being there to the tradition of being big time in track and field.

DS:

And when did you finish your career there?

WK:

Well, I walked on and then I became three time All-American, and I finished in 1981. I went ahead and got my masters, and it took me until '83. I volunteered coaching there, right after I graduated. The men's coach, Don Hewitt, had asked me to hang around to help him, and I was doing my masters so I said okay. I thought it would be a great experience and right at the time I finished my masters, in the fall of '83 well, the athletic director, Wally Bullington, walked down and said, "Hey would you like to be the head women's track coach?" So, I'd never coached a day, but I'd been there helping for two years, and they liked me, and Burl McCoy [?] was the women's basketball coach and track coach, and he wanted to just do one, and they let him pick, he picked basketball. So, that's how what opened up for me, and it's the greatest thing that ever happened to me because Wally Bullington came down and asked me, and I decided. I was scared to leave, I really was, I was so rural Texas and country bumpkin that I had a head track job at Killeen Ellison for about twenty thousand, which I thought was just an enormous amount of money. But they asked me to stay there and run the athletic dorm, and be the dorm daddy of the athletic dorm and live free for— my salary was ten thousand dollars for head track coach. But I thought, That's still more money than I'd ever had in my life, so I was just thrilled to death to be able to stay at my alma mater, and be a head coach at such a young age— twenty-three to start off. So, that's how it all started.

DS:

Yeah, that's— not very many people can do that. Start off as a head coach at a— at any college level.

WK:

No, it won't happen nowadays. In that day in time, women's athletics was getting started really good. They were just going to go into the NCAA because they had been in the AIW— they weren't even accepted in the NCAA. But my first year was going to be their second year, so they'd just gone the year before. It was just an exciting time for track and field period, but especially for the girls. That's where my roots started, was coaching the woman.

DS:

Yeah, because that was just a couple years after the Title IX, right?

WK:

It was. Right after Title IX, and I'm just so fortunate that people knew me, and they liked me, and trusted me there at Abilene. I had been the team captain, and had been All-American three years. It was just timing, there was a lot of good timing there, a lot of good people taking care of

me there. So, it was a lot of fun to be able to stay there, and ten thousand dollars was like a million to me at that time so, you know, I never had any money so that was not an issue.

DS:

So, what were you able to use from your own experience, from those All-American years, when you started coaching these young athletes?

WK:

I think what I started there, as far as with the girls, I just tried to change the mind set. I didn't think that maybe some of them had worked very hard, the girls hadn't. It was like, You're a girl and if you run a sixty second quarter, well that's accepted. But our men's team, Coach Don Hood was coaching the men's team, and they were winning national championships, and the women weren't. So, I tried to just create what I had been a part of that national championship team, and raising the bar of my expectations of— remembering my old high school coach, Jasper Wilson, and what he demanded in practice. The work ethic that he demanded really every day, and I think that's what I changed. Coach McCoy was spread so thin. He was coaching women's basketball, women's cross country, and then track, and so he was spread so thin it was hard for him to—coaching everything by himself. I think that's what helped me, then I just centered on coaching track, and really expecting those girls to give me more in practice, and that type of thing. I just raise the bar of my expectations.

DS:

And so, what was some of the reaction to the raising of the bar?

WK:

Some loved it and moved their selves up, and some didn't. I probably had a few quit on me, but I got my own people in there— I started recruited my own people and telling them the dreams and aspirations that I had for the program. I said our men are winning national championships, and we need to be doing that. So, my first year we went, we got third— the very first recruiting class I had, we got third place at nationals. Then, there after we won four national championships in a row, and we got it going. So, once we started winning, the kids, they wanted to be a part of it, and so they were recruiting for me, the kids on the team. When you win a national championship you got a ring, well those kids loved that.

DS:

So, you know, y'all's success was rather immediate. What was the competition like, you know, nationwide?

WK:

You know, we were in Division II, but University of Texas and A&M were the Division I

schools, Texas Tech— there weren't many people that were really getting after it, and I think that was one thing. Texas was probably the best program when I got the head job, but then Title IX took off, and so everyone started putting more money into it, everyone started pushing their programs more. But we kind of had— I think had a head start jumping on them, and I think me being a men's track athlete, and demanding for the women, just changing that mind set of what's good. I think I probably did that a little bit quicker than some people.

DS:

Well, talk more about that career, you know, how long it lasted there, and then your next move.

WK:

Well, it was a great run. I was there for eighteen years as an athlete, or coaching and— actually twenty-one years because I coached eighteen. Had twenty-nine national championships, those first four started it off, and I coached until 1993, they asked me to come in— I had twenty national championships in the women— they asked me to take the men and the women, so we combined the programs. And just had a tremendous run with the women, and then we started winning national championships. We got second the first year in the men, and then we won a string of national championships after that. I stayed there nine years coaching the men and the women more to get to the end of my career there. Then Gerald Meyers contacted me one day, and it was late August, I'd just won four national championships at Abilene Christian— the best year I'd ever had in 1999. We won men and women's indoors, and men and women's outdoors, only team in the country ever in the NCAA history. I did it twice, '96 and '99, we won all the four national championships. So, I had everybody coming back, I was ready to just keep it going there and— probably I told them, "A lot of people just die and to go to heaven right there at Abilene Christian." But I'd always loved Texas Tech, and I always thought that they were under achieving, and I always thought when I'd come to meets here, why should I be beating out Texas Tech or why should we do as well against them, they're a big major Division I school. And I didn't want to leave far, I love west Texas, I love the people here, I love the people at Abilene so—Texas Tech— I always told people, if I was ever going to leave Abilene, then I would be interested in Texas Tech. Then low and behold had the opportunity. So late August I came up here, I stayed two days with Coach Meyers, and I was about to walk out and not take the job, then he just called me back in there and said, "I want to give you the men's job." And then I think— "Think about it and we'll combine the programs and give you the women too." That's, I think, kind of what enticed me to just say, "You know I could stay here forever and win a bunch more national championships in Division II, or I can step out in a little bit of faith, and try this Division I thing," which I'd always kind of had a itch to do.

DS:

And what were the expectations Gerald gave you?

WK:

Gerald told me—I'll never forget it, I met him at Patterson Oil the first time, where we met for the first time to have a semi little interview before he brought me in and just met in an office there. And he said, "Look, we've had one good athlete or we've had one good this, but I want to have a team." Well, that's right up my alley because I'd been winning national championships, we'd never lost a conference championship at Abilene Christian, ever, when I was there in men or women at Lone Star Conference. So, I was really interested in wanting to have a team. They did not have but two or three coaches, and they were wanting to go to a full allotment of coaches which the NCAA allowed and so everything—I just felt like he had a commitment he had a vision for the track program and he sold me. I love my athletic director at Abilene Christian, and he reminded me a lot of Wally Bullington, Gerald did, and you know, he was real easy to talk to, he just seemed to be a guy that's very approachable, gave me an opportunity, made me feel like he really wanted me. I think they were looking for a West Texas guy, they were looking for a married guy, they were looking for a guy that was stable, I had three kids. I don't know, I think I sold him that I wanted to bring that passion and that—you know, try to have some championships here.

DS:

What did you see at Tech that you thought might—you might be able to translate into success in the Big 12?

WK:

Well, at the time, the—you're going to laugh, but the ATC—we were one of the few people—places that had an indoor track and I felt like, wow, and West Texas you got the wind blowing and a little bit of this. You've got a place that you can always go in when this bad weather—you had a great facility outside. So, I felt like it was just an improvement, and of course I had no budget at Abilene Christian, we had great teams but we didn't have a lot of money, and the budget was better here and Division I of course. They were moving to the Big 12, they had been in there a few years, and the commitment was getting more and more, and the money was getting better. So, they were starting to put more money into track and field, and all of our sports. That's what enticed me is I just felt like, "Wow if I can have a little bit more budget and I can have a little bit more stuff I wanted at Abilene, if I can have those things here." The work ethic doesn't change, and my vision for the program doesn't change. I did it exactly like I did at Abilene and low and behold, got in here and we didn't have anything. They had been dead last in the conference out of twelve teams that had been there. I think Gerald told me if there had been twenty teams, we would've been twentieth. But we just weren't very good when I got here and—so that's the mindset that I brought with me and to try and change that.

DS:

Yeah, and you talked about how quickly you were able to turn the women's program at— around at Abilene. How long did it take for you to see results here at Tech?

WK:

You know, this is the hardest job I've ever had. I've told people that— it's also one of the most rewarding that I've ever had. I took it and thought that I could probably do it like I did at Abilene and— you know, at Abilene Christian in Division II there are about ten teams getting after it. Really getting after it, what I call working hard. Well here there's three hundred track teams, there's probably fifty getting after it. So, it was a little bit of a surprise, recruiting was tough the first year in 2000 and 2001, but then I got a break in there about 2003, I started getting some really good kids. I happened to get Matt Stewart out of Odessa Permian, and Jonathan Johnson out of Abilene High, and Tyree Gales out of Abilene High, and it was shocking that the West Texas kids that all of a sudden were attracted to coming here, and all I was selling was my record at Abilene Christian. I was saying, "Look we're fixing to change this here, it's become important here." Coach Meyers has a new vision for our program and Tech is behind it now, and I just kept selling that, and then they could see my passion, I think. We got some really good recruits and then boy here we started coming. In '03 we finished fourth, in '04 we finished second, and I think then the kids were like, "Man we've got a lot of kids back and we can go win this Big 12 championship." Then in '05 we went K State and won it. I think— but that was five years, it was five hard years to get there, and that took about three to kind of get over the hump from being last. Then we jumped to fourth, and then people started noticing us, and they started respecting us. We started bringing in the top kids in the country, we weren't getting them, but we were ringing them in on visits and people started looking at us differently. I think that was the mindset that we changed by— even though you didn't get the top blue chippers, they were coming to our campus, and people— they only allowed five visits, so if you were on of the five schools getting those blue chippers, everybody in the country was looking at you differently. They were seeing me working hard and our staff working hard, and I think that's what turned it around.

DS:

When you were looking at these blue chippers, what was it that you were looking for in an athlete, and what were y'all trying to sell the program as?

WK:

Well, I knew at this level and with the LSU's of the world and Arkansas' winning all kinds of national championships at the time, the great track and field power, UCLA, UFC, we had to get a better kid. We had to do a better job of developing kids than anybody in the country, but we also had to go get some really good people. So, we really were just working off of a performance list. If they had run the best four hundred of the top ten kids, we made a top ten list of the best ten in every event and we started going after those kids. That's where we started getting some of those

kids that would show up on our campus and say, well I'm going to come to Lubbock, and then once one would come, he would tell somebody else, another blue chipper, and I'd say talk to him about his visit, and that's how our momentum started.

DS:

You know, you said five years was quite a while but I think some coaches would take that— some sports that make that turn around because, I mean, once you made it there you've been able to maintain that level.

WK:

Yeah, I think once we started getting the Jonathan Johnson's, and Tyree Gales, and then of course Sally Kipyego, and Jason Young, and the people that are in the Olympics now. We were able to get some of those really good people but we also did a fabulous job of developing those kids, and them staying happy here, and making them feel like Texas Tech is big time. You know, that's what I think we had the problem with, we were just this windblown, sand blown little school out in West Texas with a bunch of hicks. I think once they get to our campus, they see how modern our campus was. Us being a 1933 instead of an 1800— Baylor, or Texas or A&M. They were seeing older buildings at these places, and they were coming here and seeing Texas Tech's nice. It's two hundred some odd thousand people, it's not a little bitty, bitty town. I started selling that we were the second largest school in the Big 12. Norman wasn't Oklahoma City, and Austin was the biggest so we were number two. So we really, when you started comparing it to the Big 12, we were one of the bigger cities, and kids started looking at us and believing that.

DS:

You know and another thing is right about that time you mentioned, you know, '99 was when you'd come in, Tech was experiencing a rather— a building boom on campus. There were a lot of new buildings going up, I guess, during that time too.

WK:

They were and, I mean, we were talking about spending for athletics only, 250 million were on the pages of, you know— with the spirit arena just being completed when I got here, then all the west side of the football stadium, of Jones Stadium. Then we got AT&T big twenty something million dollar donation there came in. There was an air of wow, Texas Tech is changing, it's committed itself to being good and spending money and hiring Bob Knight. Just everything helped, whether you liked Bob Knight or you didn't like Bob Knight. It was big time that Texas Tech, was bringing a Bob Knight to the campus, and having the guts to go out and do something like that. Marsha had won national championship here in women's basketball. I just think people were seeing that there was commitment here to really getting after it, and of course Larry hazed me, legendary coach that there were good people here, but there were also opportunities for

growth that we were about to just—I told people this is—it was a hot school. From '99 to those 2000s, it was a hot school because everything was happening. Building, to getting good coaches, commitment to the program, all types of things were—for the positive were really happening. So I felt like I came here at a perfect time.

DS:

How about now? I know you just—you've been doing some recruiting, how's the future looking for Tech?

WK:

Well—I'm as excited about it as I've ever been. I get up every day, I love going to work, I love being here, I'm in my thirteenth season, just completed it, starting number fourteen and, you know, I feel like this is the best coaching staff we've had as a group from all Olympic sports to whatever, we're the closest group we've ever had. We're starting to see our soccer program—our women's tennis just won a Big 12 championship. We're just seeing all types of growth, I think, in our programs, and I know football and basketball were—had a little off years, but I feel like we're at a time you're about to see us make that resurgence again because we have been committed to doing things. We're getting more budget, Scurvy has come in and trying to give us more money to go and compete with the Texas' and the A&Ms, and people like that who have had bigger budgets than us for years, and now—and our facilities are good. When you look around, and we're continuing to do more for track, they're trying to do more for me. They just completed—of course soccer, softball, wow you look up—tennis got a little revamp, baseball got revamped. I just think people are finally realizing we've been in this league a while, it's a great place, it's a great place to come get an education, there's not as much meanness here. I tell parents that all the time, this is not New York City or Austin, Texas. Nothing good happens on sixth street in Austin, so I do think it's a great place. And if you're looking to get a great education, and to be under great coaches, and to have a little better atmosphere where you're not having so many distractions, then I think this is where you ought to be, and I sell that. You'd be surprised how many people, especially parents, who've got a daughter that's important to you. If you've a son, you don't want them to just go be a wild partier, and no coach cares, doesn't have that emphasis. So, I think Texas Tech's future is very bright there. I think my program—I wanted to be a top ten program every year, we've been top fifteen. We were sixteenth last year, but we've been a top twenty every year, so I think that's what I want everybody to be, of course I want to maintain that myself.

DS:

You know, and one thing you kind of hinted at is also—it's like the relationship between a coach and his athletes. Because you're bringing on these young women, and you're unique because you're bring in both men and women. What is it you try to do with your young athletes when you bring them here as far as with your wisdom and your knowledge?

WK:

You know, I— I try to sell the university, number one and I try to hook them up, you know, if it's academic support or if it's a counselor that they feel they need. Boy, this is a diverse group that you bring in because I've got minorities, I've got Caucasian, I have all types of kids, from international to every kind of background. My program is very unique there, and so, you have to acclimate a kid from international, he's going to have some home sickness, you're going to have it even from the American kid. I try to have a team meeting every Monday, I try to touch each kid every week to where we're talking every week, I try to keep them knowing everything of my expectations of the program. I try to make sure we're all on page every week and kind of give them— on Monday here's the whole plan for the week. Here's from work outs to us going to do social work, from us doing anything we do as a program, I try to get organized with them. Mainly, that's what I think kids want— they want you to get them organized, they want to have some structure, and you can't be their buddy. They've got to know that I'm the boss, but I'm also there for them, but I'm not their buddy. So, I tried to create that atmosphere with our coaching staff, we have a lot of academic support, a lot of support from—anything on campus that they need, we have, and hook them up, I try to get them hooked up very quick. Orientation does a great job of that, but me as a head coach, I've to try to make sure that I sit down with them on one more. I think one on one management is the best style. I don't care, I know I have ninety to a hundred kids, but I have to touch those kids and try to talk to them every week.

DS:

Have you ever had one kid where it's taken that extra effort to get them to turn around or stay at Tech?

WK:

No doubt. I've had a bunch of knuckleheads. I think everybody does but— you know, when Jonathan Johnson was a kid, one of the great super stars we've ever had here, and a fabulous kid from Abilene, where I came from, but he came here, and shoot, he was a knucklehead. He didn't want to go to class, he didn't want to do things exactly right. He was a great athlete but, you know, you had to guide him, and I just kind of took him under my wing. Never had a dad, so I just kind of became his dad. I don't cookie cutter anything, you have team policies, but I think you have to treat each kid differently. A lot of people don't like that and I understand why, but it just doesn't work. You know, I have a good mother and daddy and you don't, or somebody else has a tough situation, everything's different. I don't cookie cutter my workouts, and I don't cookie cutter how I treat everybody, I do try to treat everybody the same as far as respecting them but I have to deal with kids differently, and get to know them. You have to get—know them, and know what button to mash. I think that's hopefully something that works well for me.

DS:

You know, you've been pretty good at mashing those buttons. We were talking before we started

taping about the number of athletes that have gone onto success. For example, at the Olympics, how many athletes do you have current and past?

WK:

Well, this Olympiad we've got seven kids that have either graduated, and most of them have graduated. We have one, Shane Brathwaite, that just finished this year, he graduates in the fall. All the others are graduates. Just unbelievably proud, it showed— these are the kids that built this program. My thirteen years here, this group of seven Olympians are the ones that have been— along with Jonathan Johnson and a couple of kids that are not competing now, they're the ones that just laid— they're the forerunners. So, to see them go do well and to represent their countries, most of them are for other countries, as you know Jason Young is our home grown kid from Lubbock here that's the lone American but, I'm just really proud of them.

DS:

Let's get their names on the record.

WK:

Yeah, well we start off— I want to bring Jason first because Jason was from Dallas, Texas but came here, became a NCAA runner up force [?], then he stayed on and helped us coach, and became a strength coach, and was there for five to seven years as a strength coach, and then— just kept— able to train and had an opportunity to do that. So he's throwing the discus for us and he's the American. Then you have Shane Brathwaite from Barbados who just finished the NCAA with us and was an All-American for us this year, in one tens, he will run—he's run thirteen three, and he'll be running the one tens. Jamele Mason just finished runner up at the NCAA in the four hundred hurdles— we're kind of a hurdle school here too, and he's running for Puerto Rico. His mom's full blood Puerto Rican and his dad's— he's from Houston, Texas but he get to— got to pick, he has dual citizenship. So, he's going to run for Puerto Rico in the four hurdles. Then you have two Bahamians, Andrae Williams on the four by four relay, and this is the second Olympian that he's had for Bahamas. Then you had Michael Mathieu, his teammate who was here with me, both were my great All-Americans here. Michael's running the two hundred and the four by four for the Bahamas. Then Shereefa Lloyd is in her second Olympic, four by four relay for Jamaica. I hope I didn't miss anybody. Sally Kipyego, how could I miss her, she runs Friday night in the ten thousand and five thousand. She'll get— probably the greatest runner, I believe, in NCAA history is Sally Kipyego. She won nine NCAA championships for us. Came out of South Plains, graduated in a year and a half, and at two and a half years for us, won nine NCAA championships. Which is tied with Suzy Favor from Wisconsin, but Suzy went four years to Wisconsin and Sally went two and a half to Texas Tech, won the same amount of national championships. So, she is going to have a great opportunity, I think, to— representing Kenya, to medal and I'm sure hoping she has that chance Friday night in the ten thousand.

DS:

What was it about Sally that made her—I mean she was like extra special. What was her work ethic like while she was here?

WK:

Well, Sally, you know, she's once in a lifetime. Those come along once in a lifetime. Her and Jonathan Johnson same way. Jonathan was that on the men's side, and Sally's just been so phenomenal on the women. You know, she's just a wonderful person, she had a great work ethic, she is very smart, she is—pays tremendous amount of attention to detail, little bit on the worrier side, but I'd rather have that than just somebody that just kind of free and easy and doesn't really care. So, she's just always—to finish at South Plains in a year and a half, that tells you a lot about her. Came from very poor—had to run to school every day, and run back for lunch, and then run back to school. That's—in Kenya she was raised very poor. Never had anything, appreciates everything she's got, loves Texas Tech and appreciates the people that have given her opportunities, and so, to me she's just the role model of what a person should be period, in track and field and outside track and field.

DS:

Yeah and I think that that culture that you develop kind of shows itself. Anyone that's from Lubbock knows that we are always seeing your runners everywhere.

WK:

Yeah.

DS:

Just running down Fourth Street, down Quaker and—

WK:

Well, we get them up in the mornings, and our distance runners run in the mornings, our sprinters run in the mornings, everybody's on a little bit different schedule, but I hear this all the time everywhere I—I'll go to a restaurant and somebody will say, "Coach I saw your runners this morning." Tell them to put—quit wearing black so I can see them or whatever. So, no it is. It's a—we've created that, I think, and hopefully we can continue it.

DS:

And, you know, given the success in the minds that you've got your kids go under, what's the mean to you, personally?

WK:

I just take tremendous pride. I get to do every day what I want to do. I get to do it at a place that I

love. I had a great run at Abilene Christian, and I love Texas Tech, and the people here. I always look at it as an opportunity that I was afforded. I keep telling people I never got paid at Abilene Christian, and I'm getting rewarded here for some of what I did there, and you never know that when you're young, but it's just— it's tremendous pride and it's something that I enjoy doing every day. I get the opportunity to come to work and, you know— I hoe— having that hoe handling chopping cotton was work, to me this is not work. Even though I do work very hard at it, it's just a different feeling, and it's the opportunity to try to do something, and see kids grow and mature, and then come back someday and think something of you, you know, I'm now coaching kids on my team that I coached their momma at Abilene Christian. So, when you see two generations of coaches— coaching coming through you, you know you're getting older, but you also know that it's awful fun to see them think something of you that they'd send their child back to you again.

DS:

And I've talked with coaches in the past and they'll talk about running into somebody, for example, out at the mall they'll run into former student athlete, and they'll talk about the past and the impact it had on them.

WK:

Oh yeah. You hope you're making an impact. Later down the road too, you want to do great for Texas Tech and you want to run as fast as you can and have a great career. I was a walk on, I'm a made good person, I had to go work for everything I've got. I was raised on a farm, my parents, they didn't send me to McDonald's, they taught me how to work, I got alongside them on a cotton row. Those are things that have just always been with me, and with my grandparents, to my parents. I've had a tremendous blessing there. So to me, I'm just trying to carry that on and to teach this generation. It's tougher now, I think, with how the world and society see's things.

DS:

You know you mentioned that walk on aspect, have you yourself had a walk on athlete?

WK:

I always have walk on's, I love walk on's. I guess they remind me of me. I've always— I cannot tell you hardly one year of coaching out of 30 almost that I haven't picked a walk on kid that then the next year, it might only be books but they worked themselves up to get some form of scholarship. I'm always looking for one of those types of kids that has that great work ethic, that really wants to be a part of your program. So, to answer your question, yeah, I love having them. I'm going to have more every year, and I love seeing those make good.

DS:

And, you know, speaking of making good. What do your parents think of what you've been able to do, starting off?

WK:

Well, they're the most common people. They're just solid as a rock, they're always there for me, I think they're very proud of Wes Kittley. I think they live a little— few of their dreams through me, and through the program, and they're proud to see their kid go get a degree. I was the first one in my family to graduate from college, and to get my masters, and then all my brothers below me and their children, they're all getting educations. So, I think they see— the neat thing for me is they feel like I started that off for the Kittley family, and now it became a— kind of a tradition now and an expectation, hey go to college, let's go get a degree and let's make something of ourselves. My dad always told me, you know, the work ethic, it's just a cliché but it's hard to find. When I find kids today that don't want to work hard, you say— well you're coming to college track you think everybody does but they don't. Working hard, being prepared, it's kind of second to none. I mean you— it's the given, but it's the hardest thing to get out of kids every day. Day in, day out is to work hard every day because I don't think they're used to it like maybe my generation was.

DS:

Then there's been changes also in the training aspect. How's that affected you and your philosophy on training?

WK:

You know, I hope every year— I mean I'm fifty-three years old, and I started as a head coach at twenty-three, so I've seen a lot of changes and mostly for the good because we didn't always know what we were doing. I didn't know what I was doing my first year, but I think I do now. You know, from equipment to learning techniques, and just the internet has changed everything. You can sit at home and you can learn to be a decent coach by reading articles and learning, and then you— your practical hand to hand you wouldn't have, but you would be able to do a lot of that. I think those are what have changed. Kids are smarter now, they know more than we did when we came out of college. They understand their events better because they're being coached better in high school and especially when we get them, I think they're a little bit ahead of the curve, but then learning— my sport's a training sport. Basketball, you play basketball, pickup games to learn. Softball you play, but track you have to train. We go to a track meet every so often but were training all the time. Swimming is a training event, but a lot of sports aren't, they're playing events. So, what I mean by that is you're getting out there, you learn to be a good basketball player by playing pickup games, and so you learn to be good at track by getting in the weight room, by getting stronger, by doing hard workouts, that's how you get good. Of course you have to go compete, but if you're not prepared for it, you're not going to be able to do it.

Training has been a tremendous amount of my time and effort as a coach, trying to learn to be the best at training. I don't think we always get the blue chipper at Texas Tech, I've always—and that's not saying I'm not trying to. We've had our share, I just named a bunch of Olympians but—but my team's mostly made up of the B plus type student. Now, I want to get them to an A minus or to an A plus, and that's through training, and so I think that's been the biggest thing that we have—that I'm proud of is that I think at Texas Tech we do a better job. We squeeze more out of that dollar bill, per se maybe as a university, and I think as a track and field program.

DS:

Can you name a student that maybe was one of those B student athletes when you got—that really developed for you while they were here?

WK:

Yeah, I'm going to name a West Texas kid from Odessa named Matt Stewart. He walked on, he was a forty-eight flat four hundred meter runner, which is good. Never went to the state track meet in high school, but long story short, he led off my four by four for three years in a row after his freshman year. All American four by fours. He was an All American every year leading off at about forty-six flat, he improved two seconds just because he was a tenacious worker, most respectful kid, had wonderful parents that taught him the right way, and he just came in here and went to work. Said, "I want to be a part of your program," and he worked so hard the kids started respecting him because of his work ethic, and man he just started refusing to not be good. I mean, he said, "I'm going to work out with the best guys, I'm going to push the best guys, I'm going to push myself," and he's now coaching at West Texas A&M as track coach—assistant coach. Matt's one of those kids that I'm just so proud of because he was just a walk on. He's kind of like me, he came in—he's three time All-American, I was three time All-American. He's coaching now, he loves Texas Tech, he's a West Texas kid. What better story can you ask, and he's a great citizen. So, real proud of him. I could name you fifty but he's probably the—one of the dearest in my heart.

DS:

Well, I know we're pretty close to an hour, I think.

WK:

Okay.

DS:

Oh actually we're about forty-seven minutes. So, let me ask, is there anything you'd like to talk about that I haven't touched base on?

WK:

Wow. I don't know, I— you know, I'm just— I'm really proud to be here, like I say. I think in this day of sports, everybody's looking for the best deal, and I think one of the neatest things Texas Tech has going right now is finding the right coaches that want to be here at Texas Tech. And, of course, you can never say you're never going to leave, but I've never had the thought of leaving or wanting to leave since I've been here, and I want— I think you have to be at a place you can be there long enough you can build something. I told you five years was a long time to get that first championship but then it's probably not, you know, it really is about— if you're doing it right, you're not cheating, you're getting the right kids, it takes about that long to build something real good. That's why I hope people are patient with our basketball and football coaches because it just doesn't happen overnight. Especially if you get down a little bit, and like I took the program, they were twelfth in conference the year before I got here. So, it's— I think you have to get your coaching staff and you have to try to keep them. I think the more turn over you have, the harder it is to do that. The less turn over you have, the easier it is. So, that's the thing that I'm most proud of, I have been able to keep my coaches pretty much intact. Want to be here a long time, want to coach a long time here, be a Red Raider as long as I can, and I'm productive, and see all programs do really well.

DS:

You know and I think you brought up a subject that we really rarely talk about. How hard is it for you to get the other coaches to buy into it? You know, your assistants, and to stick it out with you?

WK:

You know, I think that's probably the greatest task because you're getting all different personalities, you're getting all different type people from all different backgrounds, and you're trying to mold them in what I want. I'm pretty particular about my weight program. I'm real particular on what days I do what, what days are endurance days, what days are speed days. Every coach I have has to do that program, and I let them coach, but I say, "On Monday's endurance day, Tuesday's speed day, Wednesday's is off day, Thursday's back to endurance day, and then Friday is speed day." So, we do two days of endurance and two days of speed and you center— your weight program is around that, upper body goes with endurance, and leg day goes with speed. Everybody, whether you're a pole vaulter, you're a thrower, you're on that system. So to get that going and to have your strength coaches and everybody on page with you, it's always a challenge. I also think that its why were successful and it's why we have kind of a model plan of what we're doing. We know from day one where we're going, and what we're going to do, and we know it— the last day at the national championship what we're going to do. From the weight room, to the track, to everything we do, and so we have a system in place that I think it is working well. I'd like it to get better but, you know, you have to constantly— and

when you're hiring new coaches you've got to constantly break them in to what you're doing and make sure in the interview process that they are on page with you.

DS:

Okay and another thing that you mentioned earlier, you were talking about the internet, you know, being used to learn things, but also, a lot of coaches nowadays are having problems with their athletes because everything is so rapid on the internet. Maybe they'll tweet somebody something that you'd rather not get out.

WK:

No doubt.

DS:

How has it affected your program?

WK:

Well, social networking is—I hate it to be honest with you, and I use it, but I think kids are so distracted now. And you know nothing—you have a workout, somebody will go tweet something or you're going somewhere—everybody knows everything about everybody, and so it just creates this busy body type of mentality. You're trying to have a team meeting and everybody's got to turn their cell phone off. Everybody has a cell phone now, everyone has got their email, their tweet, their Facebook, everything's all on one unit, so it never leaves them. So, what I see—I call it a microwave society, you know, everybody wants to go to McDonald's and grab their—get their food real fast and eat and move on with life. Multitask all the time, those are the problems that I see we have with this generation, is their used to doing something—you know, we might go—on Sunday, get up and go to church, come home and relax and whatever in my day in time, maybe play a little ball or something. Well now they're doing ten things on Sunday. It's just the nature of how we as human beings have become because of the culture, and you want information, [snaps] it's at your—you know, immediately you get it. To keep them focused, because of that microwave society attitude, to keep them focused long, to sit in an hour and a half class, to sit in a meeting, to have patience when you're failing time and time again to stick with it. I think that's the hardest thing for this generation.

DS:

You know—and I think a part of that also is developing that sense of team. Because I mean, nowadays, three kids can be sitting next to each other and not talking to each other because they're texting or whatever.

WK:

Oh, exactly. You get on the bus everyone puts on a headphone, you're not talking to me, I'm not

talking to you. I— you know, this generation might not even know you have brothers or sisters, they might not know a whole lot about you. Which in my day in time, our teammates were close. People ask me, what sorority were you in, and I said hey I was in track sorority. My best friends, my best man in my wedding, my— they're my track teammates. So, I didn't have time for sororities, I didn't have time to work out— get up in the morning, work out, do those things. My group and my club was my track team. I knew everything about their mom, their dad, their— what they did for a living, to you name it. And I think we don't know each other as well now because of social networking. There's too much busyness out there that can take kid and be distracted.

DS:

What do you try to do to curve that as much as you can as a coach?

WK:

We turn the cell phones off in a meeting, and you tell them, You don't tweet anything about Texas Tech track and field unless it's a positive like hey great job. But I mean you don't talk about a teammate, you don't talk about anything going on that makes you become a busy body in somebody else's business, which is so easy to do. You don't take a picture of something and put it out there. We've got to be a family. We try to be a family, what we do stays here and you try not to embarrass anything especially the university and your teammate, and you respect those people who are closest to you. That's what we're trying to do but it's a constant battle.

DS:

Yeah, given the way our society is nowadays—

WK:

No doubt.

DS:

I could see that.

WK:

Yeah, I hate tweeting. The tweeting is just you know— I mean, I don't know— I'm not that interesting for someone to know every minute of the day that— “Okay I'm leaving my office, I'm coming over here, I'm going there, I'm going there.” I don't see how you get any work done if you do that.

DS:

I think, you know, we were talking about the Olympics earlier and we've seen it— the Olympics are what, three or four days old?

WK:

Yeah.

DS:

And numerous individuals have already been kicked off their squad because of things they've tweeted or said over the—

WK:

I think it creates in people— you know, I'm not face to face with you, and if I'm going to say something bad about you, it's hard to do face to face. But boy, not when I don't have to see you, when I don't have to face you, I can act brave and I think it just— it creates an atmosphere where kids don't use good judgement because they know there's not a whole lot of repercussions from it. Especially immediately, and so— but it's also why we don't communicate—well as we should. People want to communicate by text or by email, well I'm not seeing your face, I'm not realizing whether you're angry or you're happy or you're sad, I'm not getting a feel for your body posture, I don't have a way of knowing. So I think we get fooled a lot of times by it.

DS:

Yeah, I think that's been one of the things that've been proven out on. So easy to misread an email.

WK:

It is.

DS:

Because you don't know—

WK:

Yes.

DS:

What that person was thinking when they wrote it down.

WK:

Well they can make a comment that you might think is a little smart aleck comment or is it— or not but it really may not be.

DS:

But they might have been winking at you while they said it, right?

WK:

That's right. Yeah, it's— so I think if we step away a little bit, maybe not be quite as much— so much social networking, and try to get face to face. As I said, the greatest management tool I know is one-on-one and that's how you coach better, that's how you deal with people better, that's how you get things accomplished. That's how you create relationships.

DS:

Well as you go forward with Tech, how are you going to use all of your— I guess, thirty years of experience?

WK:

Well, I hope— I'm a spiritual person and I hope that I'm mostly— before I ever get started I ask God to guide me and to put me in the right direction. I think that's one thing I have to try to do first and then let Him guide me instead—me stay out of it as much as I can and put that first, and then just do what I've done. I'm trying to create a model here that has been successful. I don't think I know it all, I want to continue to learn and to tweak it and to get better, but to mainly have some stability like we have. That's the greatest thing I think I've brought to the program is probably just stability. They know I try to be the same every day, I don't— I'm not real high, I'm not real low. Whether I deal with you on day to day, whether you do a great practice or you do a terrible practice, I try to stay kind of in the middle, and that way— that's the way life is. It's not always on a high and you're not always on a low. I think I try to create that atmosphere and keep that going.

DS:

And at what point do you think you'll reach what you've been aspiring for?

WK:

Well, I want to win a national championship here, on an athletic side, and I want to continue to develop our program to where we're a top ten program. I feel like we've gotten to the top fifteen, top twenty, now I want it to be where every year we're top ten, and then that national championship come along. Then just continue, I love working with the young people. As I told you, social networking, there's a lot of challenges out there, but I think— I feel I'm needed, I feel like this is what God told me I need to do. I hope as long as I'm productive they'll have me here. I want to be here a long time and continue to do a good job for Texas Tech, and honor the people and the school.

DS:

Okay, I think that's a good point to stop on.

WK:

Okay

DS:

Thank you so much.

WK:

Hey, appreciate it.

DS:

Thank you.

WK:

Uh-huh.

[End of Recording]

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library