

**Oral History Interview of
T. Brooks Cowan**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
April 17, 2009
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 T. Brooks Cowan as he discusses Triathlon and being a triathlete.

Length of Interview: 00:12:09

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His thoughts on if triathlon will become a NCA sport	11	00:10:28

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez, today's date is April 17th, 2009. I'm at Buffalo Springs, Texas interviewing Brooks Cowan from the University of Miami at Ohio about his competing in the NCAA collegiate—or is it the NCAA or just collegiate?

Brooks Cowan (BC):

It's just collegiate club, it's not a NCAA varsity sport yet.

DS:

Okay, the collegiate club national championships and so Brooks first of all, thank you for agreeing to do this.

BC:

Well thank you for having me and thank you for hosting all the tri-athletes here.

DS:

And so what do you think so far of Lubbock here in a little short—

BC:

Pretty flat, except for the hills getting out of this canyon, pretty hilly too, but nice place. We drove around a little bit last night.

DS:

Okay, let's get a little background on yourself. Give us your complete legal name.

BC:

Thomas Brooks Cowan.

DS:

Okay, and where and when were you born?

BC:

I was born in Houston, Texas, here. November 19th, 1986.

DS:

And how about giving us some information on your parents? Their names and dates and places of birth.

BC:

Dad is Rick Cowan, he was born in Atlanta, Georgia. And my mom's Nan Cowan, born in Omaha, Nebraska.

DS:

And what is your dad's occupation?

BC:

He works in the steel industry; metal steel.

DS:

Okay, was he an athlete?

BC:

Yeah, he played football in high school and then he played football at Penn, at U Penn. So he did that, but he's got like four knee surgeries from it.

DS:

What time—during what stretch did he play in?

BC:

Sixty nine to seventy three.

DS:

So what did he do after that?

BC:

Played a little rugby. I think he played with like the Baylor team with his friends there a little bit. That's where I was born.

DS:

How about your mother? What's her background?

BC:

Just art, art person. I don't think—she may golf sometimes.

DS:

So does she—a professor somewhere?

BC:

Just teaches.

DS:

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

BC:

Yeah, I got a sister, two sisters. One of them swims at Trinity University in San Antonio and then the other one played soccer at George Mason in Virginia and then she's the assistant coach for Cornell now, but she's moving to Seattle, her fiancé got the assistant coach job at MLS team there.

DS:

So are your sisters older than you?

BC:

Yeah, twenty-six and twenty-eight.

DS:

Okay, I was going to ask when you got involved in athletics so probably very young because—

BC:

Yeah, first grade my parents dropped me off at swimming in Cincinnati for Anderson Barracudas. Started playing soccer, did that. So swimming and soccer growing up with my friends.

DS:

Okay, how about—when did you start competing like in the school system?

BC:

For like—

DS:

For like junior high or high school.

BC:

--Or high school? Oh, okay. I was competing all throughout elementary school with like my swim team in Minnesota once we moved there and soccer. Then I ran track and cross country for my junior high and then in high school too.

DS:

So you already had disciplines from what you're doing now.

BC:

Running and swimming yeah.

DS:

Running and swimming, you just needed to add the biking?

BC:

Yep, well I had a BMX bike in middle school to ride around so it was fun.

DS:

So, when did you decide to try your hand at being a being a tri-athlete?

BC:

Triathlon? Freshman year I was running track for Miami of Ohio and I got injured. I got shin splints. So I hadn't been injured in a while so I decided to join the club swim team for cross training and I would ride the train during afternoon and then swim in the evening. You know I ended up swimming a swim meet with like 51-0 100 free and then 55-5 100 fly. So I still got some speed in the pool. So I got trick fifteen hundred and I did the Ann Arbor triathlon as my first one.

DS:

And how did you train for it? Did you have a good group of people that already knew about it and have trained?

BC:

No, no, I just—I would—I swam with like some high schoolers on their like summer league for a little bit and---I didn't know the thing was draft—wasn't draft legal. I thought you could ride in a pack, until I didn't find this out until the race morning. You know I was just coming off an injury so I hadn't been running too much but my friend had done it before so he told me about it. It was interesting.

DS:

So what was it like switching from like being a sprint swimmer to a distance?

BC:

It was pretty rough. I hadn't swam in like six years because I stopped swimming like seventh grade and picked it back up after freshman year of college and getting back in the yard it was

rough. Doing more than like a hundred was tough to race. You know I had ran cross country and track throughout high school and like up to college and stuff. I could handle the run alright, if I—once I got in shape for biking and had enough endurance to do that.

DS:

So what was that first race like?

BC:

I got annihilated on the bike, because I had just—well I mean I got home from college like the first week of May and this race was like the first week of June. I just knew nothing about biking. I averaged twenty miles an hour, it's like out here, won't get you anywhere. I was like ninth out of the water in my age group and then I think I averaged like 6:20 something, but it was a tough course. I think I had like the eighth overall run, but my bike was like a 170th I think, but I've been working on it.

DS:

So what'd you think after that first race?

BC:

That I need to bike more, it was like—I just waited until my legs healed and then just went for like a sixty five mile bike ride and I was just dead. But you got to get used to being on the bike for a couple of hours to do well at this.

DS:

So besides biking what else did you change in your training? How has it changed from the first day to what you're doing now?

BC:

Hm, I bike a lot more. I swim more now because then I was just kind of getting into it, but now I can handle more yardage. I did anywhere from like sixty thousand yards this winter. I joined the swim team this year, did that for a little bit. Now I just do like fifteen to twenty, but you know it's like you can't do it all. If you're used to running cross country and doing, sixty or seventy miles a week, you've got to back it down just to make room for swimming and running to kind of balance it out. But the aerobic capacity you gain from each week kind of helps out.

DS:

What was that learning curve like for you? To know exactly how far you could push your body and still have something for the discipline.

BC:

It was pretty rough, especially biking because I never had raced that much. They have local group rides all around the country and I would show up. There was one in like outside Detroit and Birmingham and there's like an A, B, and a C group sometimes and I would get dropped by the B's sometimes, and I was trying to keep up with them. You know you show up and then you make it further and further every time. I still struggle because I don't have the leg power but you know, the more you train the more aerobic capacity you get. When you run a lot more, running off the bike is a lot easier, after the initial one hundred meters of triathlon [?] [00:07:23]

DS:

And so how do you feel now that you're into it about your approval?

BC:

I don't know. I focused a lot on the swim this winter and kind of been rushing into bike and running shape. I don't know about it, my quads a little sore that's how it goes. Plus the swim is so cold, the water is freezing it's like fifty degrees.

DS:

So what attracted you to the sport?

BC:

I mean it's fun. I like to do all three. Whenever I'm running a lot, sometimes I want to get in the pool or bike. I like to bike around. Rural Ohio is a pretty good place to ride or to make cars, to be safe. I mean they're all fun, trail running, mountain biking, and stuff. It's all fun.

DS:

Did you ever look at the major athletes on TV and see somebody you liked and said, "I want to do that."

BC:

Yeah, I mean I also see them and be like I wonder if I can like compete with them and try to beat them would be cool, but you know I watch like Amy Potts and Hunter Kemper and a lot of these guys just fly in each one. Watching the Olympics especially, a guy in my cross country team can run like a thirty one minute 10K and he's the fastest guy on the team and it's like these guys do that after swimming a mile and biking twenty five miles and it's pretty crazy.

DS:

So what are your aspirations? What are you going to do in sport, hopefully?

BC:

I'm not too sure. I have to get a job because it's a pretty expensive sport, so I'm just focusing on that for the summer. I don't know, I want to get into some extramural [00:09:05] races and then try and stay healthy and not get injured and then maybe like late twenty's get into Iron Man. The mega Iron Man and travel and stuff.

DS:

Yeah and it seems like with most endurance sports, you know, you hit the peak later in life with those athletes.

BC:

Yeah, right now I've had too many shin injuries. I've had like four to really even think about doing Iron Man.

DS:

You have any thoughts you want to tell us, about the sport or— [motor engine revs]

BC:

It's definitely growing, if you look at the results for collegiate nationals over like the past—I don't even know when it started though. Sixty years. We're getting more and more people and getting a lot more faster—a lot faster. You know you're starting to hear more about—you know people that are Division I athletes or even D II and D III athletes kind of drop a collegiate sport to pick triathlons because they're well rounded athletes that can—they can do all three and stuff. You start to have people kind of dropping maybe a scholarship opportunity or stuff like that to pick up triathlon, competing it because there's—it's not—sports are growing and I think there will be more opportunity for sponsorships and prize money for races.

DS:

Do you think it'll ever become a NCA sport?

BC:

I'm not too sure because of how expensive bikes are and with Title IX stuff, some people say it might be kind of like water polo, where it's like—schools on like the west coast as well as schools with money scatter around. Also like when you're in the Midwest it's tough to train for triathlon because it's like when you race—in the water here and this is in the south and the water last year in Alabama was still pretty cool. I mean it'd be kind of tough to race because you're like in California, plus the southern parts of that, plus travelling. You know Title IX might give like a winning sport and stuff, add a little more something to even it out.

DS:

Yeah that's the one thing about bringing it up to that division, Title IX is a big consideration.

BC:

Yeah, especially for men's, even if they did have a women's team and a men's team, it'd be like down in our budgeting. There's no way you have as many guys in the sport as girls for NCA. What you see in like—especially in the swimming and running, I mean at least in my university the female's—the women's budget is a lot bigger. But I think if they picked up triathlon it would be Pac 10, Big 10, Big East schools with football programs with a lot more money.

DS:

All right, any closing thoughts?

BC:

Nope, just hopefully I race fast tomorrow at Texas Tech.

DS:

All right, we'll wish you well.

BC:

Well, thank you very much.

DS:

Thank you.

[End of Recording]