

**Oral History Interview of
Steve Gomez**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
April 12, 2013
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Project***

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The Hispanic Interview Project documents the diverse perspectives of the Hispanic people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Steve Gomez, coach of the women's basketball team at Lubbock Christian University. He discusses his transition from coaching high school boys to college women, the evolution of his coaching style, and how the LCU women's basketball team has adjusted to competing in Division Two. A father of two boys, Gomez attributes his success and happiness to his faith in God.

Length of Interview: 00:55:40

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Daniel Sanchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sanchez. Today's date is April the 12th, 2013. I'm at the office of the Southwest Collection with Steve Gomez, and Steve is the coach of the Lubbock Christian University Ladies' Basketball Team. Steve, first of all, thank you for being here.

Steve Gomez (SG):

I appreciate the opportunity to come and talk.

DS:

Okay. And, let's—for the record—get your complete legal name.

SG:

Steven Roger Gomez.

DS:

And your date and place of birth?

SG:

4/21/1967 in Peru, Indiana.

DS:

Okay. How about your parents? Give us their names and places of birth.

SG:

My dad is Roger Gomez. He was born in Puerto Rico. And my mom is Judy Gomez, born in Skokie, Illinois. Chicago, Illinois.

DS:

And so what brought your dad over to the states?

SG:

My dad was born in Puerto Rico, raised through about 18 years of age, and then came to the United States to get with family in Chicago. Ended up joining the military after getting his GED, just looking for a better life, getting out of the sugarcane fields of Puerto Rico. And [he] wanted to come to the mainland—the states—and start a life here, and had some relatives, and met my mom—eventually his wife—working in a candy factory in Chicago. And [then he] joined the military here and spent 23 years in the military, in the United States Air Force.

DS:

Oh, so you grew up around the military?

SG:

I did. It was a great life. I was able to live in many places. [I was] born in Indiana; we moved to Germany for a number of years, and then South Dakota, New Mexico. Lived at a lot of different bases. Just a great life. The military life was great as a child, as a kid growing up. Something I would've done even myself if it had been called to do that. But I ended up getting into coaching and teaching.

DS:

Did you have any siblings?

SG:

Have an older brother who was born in England. He's seven years older than me. And then an older sister also, who lives here in Lubbock, and she was a schoolteacher and teaches piano and does a lot of educational things here in town still.

DS:

And that's kind of an atypical experience that you had, especially, you know, Hispanics, Puerto Rican descent—and being all over the world at that age, what was that like for you?

SG:

It's just so many things you get to see. At times I regret, I was so young through a lot of it. It was through really my sixth grade year, or my fifth grade year, that he was in the military. We ended up in South Dakota for the last year. So a lot of the experiences of travel and seeing the world I can remember, but they weren't such a major part of my formative years as far as, you know, junior high—high school, that I remember too vividly. But just that life, the security of the military, you know, family, traveling, living in different places, learning to adapt to different situations. I think, you know, as an elementary kid, changing schools often—it sort of helps you maybe become not so dependent on one certain setting. So I learned to adapt to different things as a young kid. But it was a great life. I mean, I really enjoyed that military life and the moving around. Would love to go back to some of those places now that we're older, to travel back to Germany, to France, to London, because a lot of those memories are pretty vague for me. But once we settled into the Metroplex in Arlington upon retirement, in my sixth grade year, then we were in that one place the rest of my high school and junior high years.

DS:

Let's talk about your transition to sports. Were you always interested in sports, or how did that come about?

SG:

It's interesting. You know, my father and mother—neither one were very active athletically growing up, and it wasn't something that they instilled in me. My older brother—he's seven years older, and he grew up playing, you know, on those bases. Playing basketball, playing football. And so his love of athletics sort of got me, and then him being older—seven years older—it was sort of a reach to compete with him early in those years, in tennis and basketball and anything. But just that drive and desire to be involved in sports. It may have just been a God-given seed planted in me that didn't really come from parents or really even environment. It was just something that clicked in me at a young age. And I think even maybe I was taller as a young kid, and so a lot of times when you see a tall young kid they think, He needs to play basketball. And so that sort of started me into the arena of basketball some, even in kindergarten, first grade, playing those little boy leagues. And so—but I think my brother really fostered that—my older brother. And then the older I got, my parents always supported it and were encouraging. But I didn't really receive a lot of my either instruction or any abilities from heredity too much.

DS:

Okay. And you said you grew up in Indiana?

SG:

I was born in Indiana. I think lived there maybe two years—

DS:

Okay.

SG:

-then went to New Mexico. And so maybe some of the basketball [and] sports love came from being born in Indiana. (Laughter.) It's just a natural thing.

DS:

Yeah, formative years there. Just—

SG:

Yeah, Peru, Indiana. As a matter of fact—let's see, maybe some people will remember the name: Kyle Macy; he was a great college player at Kentucky and then in the NBA. And he was born in that little town of Peru, Indiana. But that was sort of a few years there, a few years in Indiana. And I just think the military setting sort of fosters physical condition, physical activity. A lot of those people have such great self-discipline, and sports and activity are a mainstay of base life. And so that sort was—maybe even the environment I grew up in—was competitive, athletic and active. And so it helped, and it's just a natural love for me.

DS:

And did you compete in junior high and high school?

SG:

I did. Even at a younger age, I remember playing in, you know, some little leagues on the base, even doing boxing. And then in junior high, playing in basketball, football, running track. Baseball was never very much of a skill. I think I did that one or two years of my elementary and it didn't click. But [I played] basketball and football through junior high, and then once I got to high school—Arlington Heights—you know, a big school. 5A high school. You know, 2100—2200 students. Most athletes are gonna find a sport instead of doing multiple sports. And so, [I] ended up, once I got into high school, just taking basketball and going that one way, just because my time's gonna be better spent there, you know, and at the time thinking maybe, over the course of a few years, the improvement, have a chance to play in college. So that's what I ended up doing in high school is just concentrating on basketball.

DS:

And so you started doing that—working toward that college—you already apparently had that in mind?

SC:

Yeah—

DS:

What was that like, getting ready for college?

SC:

You always have, I guess, most kids playing basketball at a young age [who] watch TV and think, Well I can do that. It's so difficult to reach those levels of, you know, varsity high school and then college and even anything beyond that is really difficult. But you know, in high school you always think you can, Man- I wanna play in college, but it's not as easy as it looks. You know, there are some opportunities, you just have to just work hard. Hopefully your team has enough success to find some people that'll notice your team.

DS:

Um-hm.

SC:

And then also maybe notice you individually. And then, for me even, it was a situation, seeking out opportunities. Sometimes they don't come. You know, there's not a lot of coaches just knocking down your door to come, so you have to go out and say, Hey, I'd like to try out here.

You know, I'll do anything. And so I was thankful to get an opportunity to come to Lubbock Christian University to play, basically initially as just a walk-on situation. Just to open a door to try to put my foot in, and thankfully it worked out and over the course of the years it really paid off in the long run.

DS:

And who was coach when you showed up?

SC:

John Copeland, and he just retired a few years ago. He was a coach there a long time. Fortunately, I was able to play for him those four years of college, and then, when I took the job again ten years ago coaching the women, he was still the guys' coach. So I was able to play for him and then to work with him. That's just a neat experience, and you know, he had so many good years of service and competition there at Lubbock Christian University. You know, I owe a lot to him, too. Very good man.

DS:

And how did that job opportunity at LCU come up for you?

SC:

I guess only times in life. I mean, God's providence puts you in connection with people and those connections often are the key, as opposed to your great ability. And so, having gone to school there, I knew a lot of people. And Lubbock Christian University—a lot of people that go to school there end up also working there. And the athletic director and women's coach was Jimmy Moore who was a teammate of mine when I was playing back in the 80's. And so he had been the AD and the women's coach and he had decided to stop coaching. He decided to get out of the coaching part. And obviously we had a relationship. He knew me. He thought, "Well I'm gonna ask if he'd be interested in doing that." Having coached high school boys for 15 years, I'd always been in the boy's side, never considered coaching women's basketball. That wasn't in my long term career plans at all. Never even thought of it. And so he asked me, You know, would you be interested in taking over the women's job here next year? It was in the spring. I thought, I'd never thought of that. I figured, Well, let me go watch some games. So it was—I think it was in January or February. He started this process of realizing he was gonna get out of the coaching, trying to find someone else. And so I took a number of Saturdays and went and watched them play. And after watching those college girls play I realized I could enjoy doing that. I was hesitant to think I'd ever coach high school girls. There was just some—I don't know. I wanted some kids that are committed, and sometimes the social aspect in the high school interferes with the commitment, the playing.

DS:

Um-hm.

SC:

And so—but watching those college kids, you could tell they were—they had great talent. I wasn't gonna have to change much of what I did strategically, or how I handled athletes and the way I coached 'em, 'cause, you know, those girls are so mature and they're so tough. And after a number of weekend watching 'em, I thought, That could be really fun. And I loved to get back to LCU and just the environment there. And so, you know—I'd gone there. My wife had gone there. We were expecting, hopefully, that eventually our kids would go there. So I just said, I can do it. I'd love to have a chance. So that opportunity opened and I went with it.

DS:

And you mention, you know, the transition from boys' basketball in high school to now the college women. What was that difference? You mentioned there wasn't too much difference, but what were some of the differences you had?

SC:

I think, probably, we both know as men, sometimes handling situations with females is not the same as handling it with males. So there's some communication—just the ability to talk with them, encourage them in the right ways [and] challenge them in the right ways. Realize at times, hey they can handle a lot more than we think. You know, those female athletes in college are really, really tough kids, physically. Probably more the communication styles; you just needed a lot more interaction, encouragement, just openness in communication. High school boys a lot of times, they need to be directed, disciplined, prodded, pushed. Almost more—at times, with those guys in high schools—extrinsic motivation or external motivation. And with the college females, the internal motivation is so much stronger. They don't need to be prodded, pushed, yelled at, to perform. If they feel good and they trust you and they feel like they've got a good bond with you, they're gonna do the work. And so there was some change there, strategically. Those college girls can do a lot of things that high school boys can do. The type—the way we played, the way we taught—just offense, defense really did not have to adjust much to that at all. It's almost more learning as all of us do as we get older, you know, how to interact with people in the best way that'll serve 'em. And so, you just can't treat everybody the same. Male athletes and female athletes, they're unique. And so I think that was a learning process. You know, it took a little while, but hopefully as years have gone by [I've] picked up a few pointers. 'Cause those girls can teach a lot. They can teach a lot.

DS:

You know, and you said you had watched them before you took the job. Were there some things that they were doing that you thought maybe you could tweak or change and you wanted to do when you started?

SG:

I guess that any time you watch any sporting event you always have your own opinions of how things might can go. Not necessarily better, just more suited to the way I would teach. And so there were some things offensively. We liked to do a lot of—execute a lot of different things so it takes a lot of mental strength. And those girls, I've found, are very perceptive. They like to do things; they like to be told what to do and then they're gonna do it. And so I just thought, we could run a lot more stuff, if that makes sense in a basketball setting—execute a lot more things, just be a little more physical. You know, 'cause a lot of times people think girls might be soft. They really are pretty rough, and they like to—in competition—play pretty physical, even more so than guys do. So we try to just take some of those things and incorporate a little bit, little bit—just getting them to work hard all the time and have high expectations. I think they had had a number of years, and we were so blessed to have—I came into that job at a great time for success because they'd just moved into that new Rip Griffin Arena. They'd been in the field house, which, if anybody knows, at Lubbock Christian there's a huge airplane hanger that—the facilities were not attractive to a lot of players. It just wasn't a great setting that would draw people. Then to get a new gym, a new arena; the school was in a growth pattern at that point, so it was like the perfect storm of opportunity, to step in with new facilities, a growing school. It wasn't so much [that] we came in and had this great strategy and now we've started doing good. It was a good opportunity—[we] got a few key players those first few years from successful high school programs, which that might've been the biggest thing: to get players who are used to winning, who are used to having success, winning state, winning district championships. They were coming from teams that knew how to win, and not from teams that were used to just sort of being okay. And so to get players with high expectations, that sure makes it easier.

DS:

And also, part of that is when you go in there you need team leaders. You know, a first year coach, not really knowing the kids—how did you pick out who was gonna lead your team?

SG:

Yeah, and that's a huge thing. And for us, the leadership development every year—that'll make or break your team. I mean, you can have great strategy and you can have great athletes. If they don't work together and if there's not unity in a women's basketball team, it'll destroy you. And for us coming in, that was unique also for me, I was coming into a team, that the previous year had no seniors—well, they had one senior—they were only losing one player. And so really the bulk of the team was back. So we weren't having to incorporate a lot of new players. We only

had one new player coming to add to the previous year's team. And so there was some establishment of roles already, and team chemistry was sort of there already. But we sort of took those three seniors that next year and really started early to talking with them, Hey, this is what's expected. This is what we need. And challenging those seniors to be servant leaders on the team—so many times you get kids on teams that, as they get older, they think they deserve something, or they're entitled to have a certain stature on the team. And for the younger kids to look up and serve them and do everything for the older ones—that's just backwards. And so, when you get older players who are more established, who even might need to be the best players—when they learn to be subservient and give up their position of authority and serve kids, serve the freshmen, be seen as the ones that are helping as opposed to the ones wanting to be helped. That just creates a team environment where—that's good leadership. We just have tried to focus, over the years, on servant leadership. So coming in, there wasn't so much retraining, but just sort of a clarification of expectations for these girls of "This is what leadership means. This is what it really is." So many times in the world we think it's bossing people around.

DS:

Um-hm.

SG:

And that never helps. And so, to build those relationships of those older kids investing in the younger kids, it makes everybody want to work harder for each other. And so that has been a key for us. And finding some of those kids, even coming out of high school, that you can see leadership qualities in—you can tell if they're about the team or if they're about themselves. If we can avoid getting players that are focused on themselves, then life becomes easier for a coach.

DS:

Have you seen a change in that? I know we've discussed with other people about, players now—you mentioned the word entitlement. There's a lot of kids that feel entitled nowadays.

SG:

Yes, yes.

DS:

And how do you, as a, you know—how are you able to weed those out if possible?

SG:

Yeah. And that's—for us—instead of trying to reform kids when they get here, it's so much easier for us to choose wisely. And so to get to know those kids in high school as juniors, as seniors—get to know their families, and then really make it clear to them before they make a

choice of where they're wanting to go to play in college, that they understand. I've told so many kids, You're not going to come here to do your thing. You're gonna come here to bring your skills to fit what we do. And so I just think open, clear communication early on just makes it so much easier. When they get around our current players and can see the camaraderie, the chemistry. I mean, the genuine love they have for each other, I think they can see. And just the way we play; we've really been fortunate to have kids that people like to watch and they'll say, Man, those kids—they work—they play so well together. They work together. You can tell they really enjoy each other. You can fake that for a while, but over the course of a long season, it comes out. It's shown to be real or not. And so just to continue to develop mature, spiritual kids, and to try to get 'em that way before they come, and not—we don't want to take risks on a great athlete that might damage the team. And we've said that over and over. You know, we're not gonna salvage what we have for the sake of a talent, or the sake of this great player, and then, well, we'll just put up with it. That ends up just creating a lot of trouble relationally on a team. So it has to be done, and there's gonna be times you sort of think you get to know a kid and then find out, you know—'cause we all have a natural tendency to be selfish. It's just a constant battle. And a coach for me, personally, for assistant coaches, for players—it just has to be constantly addressed. I think if we can just keep that in front of them all the time, to keep our attitude, I mean on our locker room wall and on a lot of our stationery are scriptures. You know, your attitude should be the same as Jesus who didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, he made Himself nothing, became a servant. Just that attitude of servanthood. We just let kids know when they come to our school, and you're gonna do community service—we're gonna do things for other people, and no so he can take pictures and have it in the newspaper. You know, we want to do it 'cause it's the right thing to do. And it's not a good phrase a lot of times, people think, but I'll tell 'em, "You're not that important. You're vital to our success but you're not so important that we can't do it without you."

DS:

Do you think it helps you get that message across because you have been successful?

SG:

A lot of times, that sure success is gonna breed success. I think you can have temporary success doing it some other ways, but at the end of the day I think, over the long haul, it'll be a little empty. And so, you know, we've been blessed to have good years, and sometimes you wonder, Well if it's a bad year, are we gonna be able to maintain that same mentality? But I've told a number of coaches this: I don't want just a team that I can win with. I want a team that I can lose with and feel good. And so, if you have quality people, I think they can handle the adversity that comes. But again, it's hard to know. The first few years, we didn't have great success, but we were successful enough and did some things that hadn't been done, and over the course of the years we've been able to continue doing that. So, that's a good question. I would hope the

foundation is strong enough that, no matter what the winds and the storms are, the house will remain.

DS:

And how about for those years where you were extremely successful? Talk about those years and what they meant to the program.

SG:

You know, it's funny. Even—you talk about success and all the outward success, and really inwardly what's really going on. Even what people might consider our best year—this season with the most wins in school history, we had number one ranking a lot of the year. It was very very successful. You know, we went to the national championship game six years ago and played in that, and that was a year I guess if you had looked from the outside you'd think, Man, that was incredible. That was the year on the inside there was a lot of wrestling and wrangling with just roles and attitudes. We had a couple freshmen that were just outstandingly good, and they were just great players, great people, and got a lot of attention. And on that team we had some older kids that had been here from the start and had put in a lot of work and had done well, but they didn't always necessarily get the recognition or maybe the attention that at times they thought they might have been warranted. And so there was a little divide relationally, because the kids didn't see each other and really get to know each other and love each other as much as they probably should've. And so there was some relational friction on that team, and so even that successful year had some heartache in it a little bit. And I wouldn't say it was one of the most frustrating years, but it wasn't the easiest year.

So, we've just been fortunate to have a lot of good years, and I think the relational level over the course of years, where you learn from mistakes—even players on the team learn, Okay, we can fix that. We need not to have to create some of these situations and stresses on our lives that we did last year, so how can we remedy that? If we can just keep learning from our mistakes, you know, that's what sort of—just year by year, learning from our mistakes. So the relational level of the team has been really strong recently. It's really been good. And that year was such a blessing. I think it got a lot of attention for our school and it really elevated our program, even in the eyes of—I guess, nationally and the NAIA and even other divisions. Hey, that's a pretty good team. That sort of set a high standard, and since then people have just—our team, and players have kind of thought, Hey, we can do that. We can get back to that level. And they consistently have done so, so well over the past number of years. Those girls have just—and they've connected with those players from before. There's a good connectivity between those previous years and now. So hopefully that'll just continue to perpetuate itself. Once you get it rolling. Just keep it going. I try to stay out of the way and not mess it up.

DS:

And there's something else that's going on. You know, we were talking about the transition from NAIA to Division Two. And did some of that come about because of the successes your team has had?

SG:

I think, and again our baseball program and our softball program has jumped into the limelight quickly, and, there have been a lot of I guess a lot of factors in this process. Some of it is the fact that the NAIA has been a little on shaky footing the last three or four or five years of-- you see it in the division one, all the conferences—people shifting conferences and power going from this conference to that conference. In a way it's similar: the NAIA is sort of maybe seeing the little cracks in its foundation. And so, we started thinking a few years ago, it might not be a bad idea to consider, you know, what our options are. And then NCAA Division Two—obviously the NCAA brand is so much more widespread. But I think the realization that NAIA competition: hey, we can compete 'cause there's some NAIA competition that's as good—better than Division Two, and even low-level Division One at times. I think we've been able to compete at that level. But I think the success of our program has definitely warranted the—it gave a lot more momentum behind—Hey, we can do this. You know, we can compete at NCAA Division Two levels, all our programs. And I think our program, over the last number of years, in the pre-conference games against D2 schools, have shown that it won't be a change of level of play.

We'll be able to transition pretty simply to it.

One of the biggest things—and we were just talking about it, of quote-unquote success. In the next two years of this transition, we won't have a chance for post-season national tournament, national championship, conference championship. And so these few years will be a good test of our resolve of: just 'cause you can't reach this destination, does that change your journey? Does that change your approach to what you do all the time? Because if it does, well then maybe we have the wrong motivations going.

DS:

Yeah.

SG:

Beforehand, if we think, well, we can't win the National Championships, so what's the point of working hard? You know, to me that's a bad approach, because you're not always gonna win. You're not always gonna have this endpoint that you get to. It still doesn't mean you don't go through the process the best you can.

DS:

Right.

SG:

And so, I think that this is gonna be a good testing—you know, a good fire for us to go through to test our resolve.

DS:

And then that can be bittersweet if you have a real successful season and then know that's the end of the season.

SG:

And that's—you know, I guess for us next year—and we always set preseason goals and those players get together and set goals for what they want to accomplish. And I would hope they would set a goal next year to win every—to be *the best* team in the NCAA Division Two—to be the best team that doesn't have a chance to win at all. And for people to realize wow—[it's] almost a good thing they weren't allowed to move on. But I sure expect those kids to have great focus and have a great year and just enjoy playing together because, again, when you're enjoying what you're doing and who you're doing it with, you know, whatever happens is fine.

DS:

And you've been there now ten years?

SG:

Yes, sir.

DS:

And so how—what's the change for you, as far as your role in the university? Are you taking on more responsibilities other than coaching?

SG:

Well, you know, it's a small university—a little over 2,000 people, you really can't hide much. And especially in our programs the coaches need to be involved in what's going on on campus. We want our players—I've always said we don't want our players just to be athletes. We want them to be involved in the students; we want the students to know them. We're not in our separate little thing. And even as coaches, you know, I've always tried to get involved in what's going on, on campus, you know, whether it's leading singing in chapel or whether it's helping on these different committees that are formed to look at different issues on campus. You always think—I think it's natural that, when you have success or when you're sort of put on a platform, you know, you need to use it to the best of your ability. And so—at the same time you don't wanna think, Well I'm—after these ten years now I'm so important that I need to be in these positions. No, as opportunities come, I wanna help with what I can on the campus and just enjoy that environment. It's just a really unique place. I just think coaches have a responsibility to be

out there and doing what they can. Not necessarily that it's some great gift that we have. It's just a position that you're in that you need to take responsibility for.

DS:

And you mentioned earlier about your children. And so do you have children?

SG:

Yeah, I have two boys—just an absolute joy. I have a 16-year-old—he just turned 16 about two weeks ago, got his driver's license—Hayden, my older boy. And then Landon's an eighth-grader. So I have a sophomore and an eighth-grader. They've just been all boy from the start, involved in sports and just all kinds of activities that just really keep life in perspective and in balance, just to know, hey, they're looking up, trying to follow in what I'm doing. Even in an environment like LCU, being able to—as four-five-six-year-olds, taking them on the bus on road trips and they've been so involved in everything we've done there. You know, just being able to grow up in the gym. They just come [and] it's like a playground for them. Just that connectedness of my kids, my wife, our family, to the university, to basketball, to the team—it just makes things really function at a good level. Rarely do people—I hate to say that, rarely, it's sad if it's true—but so many people seem to be in jobs or positions or situations professionally that they don't all work together or they sort of have some frustrations. But to be in a job, in a school, in a family, in a church that everything just fits—it's really fortunate. It really is, to be—to feel like this is where I'm supposed to be, doing what I'm supposed to do. And the family part of it—my boys are a major part of that. 'Cause those girls—[my boys] are at the point now where they're like younger brothers to some of those players. And so the environment's really good for them. Just—it's fun to see them play. This year, in these unique times in life, my older son—he played Lubbock Christian High School on the varsity basketball team. They won state—the State Championship this year. It was on the same day that we won our first Conference Tournament Championship. I didn't get to see his game. I got to go the night before, but—you know, just those unique days where that's a pretty neat day for family.

DS:

Um-hm.

SG:

Both of us did something that had never been done, and so those moments are good.

DS:

You mentioned that he's 16, right? Is he already thinking about college?

SG:

He is, and that's one of the—if he's thinking about anything besides LCU then he may have to start raising money because we're fortunate [enough that] LCU—after you've taught—after you've been a fulltime employer for ten years, then your children get free tuition to go to LCU. So that's been the plan all along for them. I don't know if they thought any different but they, right now, are planning on being at LCU. I know my younger boy's a pretty talented basketball player and he might have a chance to play college basketball, and if it's not LCU then hopefully it'll be somewhere that'll give him scholarship money to play. But they've sort of grown up in that—in that Lubbock Christian School, elementary, and you know junior high, high school. For them it's just a natural progression of life to go to LCU. But you hate to force it on your kids. I mean, they're gonna be able to make their own choices but the wise one seemed to be to stay around here (DS laughs), at least financially. Right now it would be the wisest thing for them.

DS:

You know, you brought up the scholarships. How's that changing when you go from NAIA to NCAA 2?

SG:

In NAIA we had—we had eleven full scholarships in NAIA. In NCAA Division 2, teams get ten full scholarships. But really for our case—it's really—I think in D1, one scholarship is one scholarship and you either give it or you don't. We had a pool of money that the ten scholarships add up to, so really we're working with a big bucket of money as opposed to eleven or ten different pieces. And so our total scholarship money is really gonna be the same as it has been with eleven. So there's not—there's really not much change at all in the scholarship situation.

DS:

So you give out partial scholarships?

SG:

Yes, we—

DS:

'Cause I know Tech used to do that in baseball.

SG:

Right. Yeah, baseball has to, and it's one of those—they feel handicapped—I think they're handicapped at times 'cause they're only given, like nine or—they're given fewer [scholarships] with more players. But yeah, we can give partial scholarships, we can have walk-ons, we can give full scholarships, we can divide that money up however we want amongst however many

players we want. So it gives us some good flexibility, and it won't change much in what we've been doing.

DS:

And how 'bout your recruiting area? Will that change, now that you're gonna change divisions?

SG:

Well yeah. That's really perceptive. I mean, that's a good question because in the past we've played—all our conferences have been either two Texas teams or all Oklahoma schools, and now we're gonna be going into a conference with Austin and San Antonio and Laredo and Abilene and Odessa and—we've always recruited west Texas and the Metroplex—the Dallas-Fort Worth area. And then there are so many good players out here, from the Panhandle down to the Midland area that we haven't really had a need to go all over the state or even outside of the state. You know, with conference teams in San Antonio and Austin and more southern Texas—central-southern-Texas—it makes more sense, then, to maybe get more players from there. In the past, it didn't make sense to try to go get kids from Houston when we never even were gonna be playing in that area.

DS:

Um-hm.

SG:

And so we're just trying to think of what makes sense. And even if there's a great player down there in San Antonio, to bring him up to Lubbock and play all the games in the Panhandle and Oklahoma puts the family in a bind a little bit. And unless they have reasons to be in Lubbock or this part of the state besides just school, it didn't make sense to invest a lot of resources doing that.

DS:

So—

SG:

Now, with the conference teams down there, yeah, it opens up those areas to—okay, it makes sense for you to come here 'cause you're still gonna be able to play around your home, we'll be involved in a conference, so—I think we're sort of looking forward to seeing some new terrain and different teams, different players and different parts of the state.

DS:

Yeah, and for what you just said I guess you think it's important for the student athletes to be seen by their family and for their families to be involved during their career?

SG:

Oh, definitely. That's been the biggest—I mean there are so many things that are the most important thing. (DS laughs.) But for us—I mean, the whole mature, unselfish, spiritual development, quality kid really starts with the families they're coming from. I mean that's so important. And so here we've had families very involved. You know, we'll travel. Even into Oklahoma, we'll have more fans in the stands at some games than the home teams do, just because our families are close-knit and they want to follow and go. So it helps to keep 'em at least regional, or close enough to do that. But that is a big part of it. We want our families to be able to be involved, and not just cheering in the stands but in the program, at our banquets, fundraising golf tournaments. It's not a high school environment, but we don't want it to be such a detached collegiate environment that, "Hey, they're at college. You just need to stay out of this." So the family dynamic is—and I think players, when they come and visit, they even sense that amongst our players. It's just tight-knit, a little more family-friendly.

DS:

You know, and when you're talking about people being involved and supportive, how 'bout your boosters? You know, you have the Rip Griffin Center so that's a major booster right there.

SG:

Um-hm.

DS:

What's the relationship between athletics and the people that help the programs?

SG:

Well, and that's a—for a private institution just to function at a good level—budgets don't always meet those needs and so there has to be some other resources. We have had some consistent friendships with some people over the years, even parents of players that play here that are successful doctors—I mean, there's a doctor in town [named] Jonny Qubty who every year has just—he just continues to help support us financially and it's incredibly helpful. Now we do some fundraising golf tournaments—or a fundraising gold tournament—that people every year sort of will support and donate with. Obviously you see Rip Griffin helping to build that arena. We haven't had a T. Boone Pickens or someone that just [says], "Hey what do you need and here it is." And boy, that would be so incredibly helpful. I mean, if there is a major obstacle or strain to this position, it's probably, "All right. How are we financially gonna stay above board every year?"

DS:

Um-hm.

SG:

And so finding those people—I think it's a great investment. I think our program's a great investment. Those kids—everybody's graduating and they're high-level students. They're the type that, in the community, you would love to have 'em out in public. You would love to have 'em babysit your kids. They're—I think the players and the program's a great investment. I'm not much of a salesman, just trying to go out and ask. And so, at times, the booster situation—it's been fine and great. It'd be nice to get a few more major donations that could just fund it, drive it, as opposed to, every year, "All right, we gotta raise some more money. We gotta raise some more money." But we have a good relationship with businesses and the people that are out there supporting [us]. We just haven't hit those two or three major year-to-year donors that we're trying to figure out, "Hey, what can we do for them? What can we do for them?" But I think people feel good about what we're doing and I know—again, like Doctor Qubti and some other people—they just consistently keep us going. They keep us going.

DS:

And let me ask, how difficult is it to carve out your own identity as a coach and as a team and a university when we have Tech and the Lady Raiders here? What's that like for you?

SG:

Yeah. I mean, it's so great to have them here. I mean, I think their success over the years, and their environment, and those coaches—Coach Sharp, Coach Curry—are just great people. I mean, they just draw attention and they draw respect, and I'm thankful for that environment here 'cause it creates a collegiate, sports, exciting environment. So I mean I think their success has been—and their attention—is helpful. I don't see it as an adversarial, Oh man, if they weren't here we could do this or that. I think it enhances what we're doing. You know, again, it's a different—just a whole different ballgame, not in terms of strategically but just that D1, Big-12—I wouldn't say it's a different mentality but it's just a different set-up than what we're doing. And we're maybe looking to meet needs or find a niche that's a little different than what they're doing. But I think it's good. I think it's been very helpful. And there's times, obviously, that parents or community people think, Well they need to get more attention to—all the attention goes to Tech. Well, and that's fine. Texas Tech is the—I mean, it's the bell cow of the city, really. It's a huge part of the publicity nationally for this city. And so that's not an issue at all. I think it's a benefit for LCU that Texas Tech is so well-known.

DS:

Yeah. In fact I even, like—there's been some crossover with Coach Larry Hayes when he was there, then he came to be the head coach at Tech.

SG:

Yes. Yeah.

DS:

And then his sons have followed exactly the same path.

SG:

Yeah, that's exactly right. And I just appreciate the camaraderie of it. I mean, our coaches and Coach Curry—we dial-up, we send each other messages. Congratulations. Good luck with this. Their success is helpful. It's not [that], well, if we're successful we want them not to be. I think everybody can be successful, and they've got good people over there. I was over at the Tech Tennis Center watching Tim Segal and their team play this Sunday, and there's just so many good people over there. I think if you ever get to that point where you're wishing ill will on someone else to benefit yourself, that's a dangerous position to be in.

DS:

Is there anything I haven't covered that you'd like to get on the record?

SG:

(Laughs.) Well, yeah, that's a good question. A lot of the success—I mean, it's just the older you get—the older I get, the more I realize that really, we can't control a lot of what happens. You just can't create a situation that everything works out on the basketball court. We can have the best play design on that chalkboard or on that whiteboard in the locker room, but when you get out there it just may not happen that way, because you don't know what that person's gonna do and how that person's feeling and what the ref might do. So all the success that comes—you want to do your best. We want to do our best to give ourselves a chance. But when it comes down to it, a lot of it is, I wouldn't say, fate, but we're just not in control. The more we think that I did this, and then even in our western culture we're so- rugged individualism and pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. And these concepts of "I can do it." You know, really? We need to be thankful for God's grace and that—when good things happen, be thankful, and when they don't, just accept the fact that that's just life. Life is not always gonna work the way you think it is, and you can't—I just don't think you can create—whatever success happens is not the result of one person or one thing. It's just a lot of things happen to fall right. And I just think a lot of life is a mystery, but we just need to enjoy the journey. And even in our basketball program, these ten years have been outstandingly good, and it's been fun. I by no means think, Oh yeah, if someone else had been there that wouldn't have happened. It may have been better. Who knows? But I just know—I mean, I appreciate you asking to come talk. I was thinking, What in the world would they want to talk to me about? (Laughter.)

DS:

Well, as you noticed, we didn't talk about the specific records and titles because you can find that on the internet. It's more [that] we want to know, you know, about you, your mindset. And that's what you've been sharing with us, you know?

SG:

Well, I just—we just want to have a philosophy there of—it's founded on faith and family. And when you have those things in perspective, you're gonna want to help others. You're gonna want to serve others. I just think if our basketball program can be built on serving other people, doing your best, but realizing really what's important at the end of the day, we can handle what comes. We can handle whatever good or bad comes. And we've had a lot of good come. And we've also been through a lot of ups and downs there. We've had years where—last year, we had three kids tear their ACL before the season started. Two starters. And we were in a situation of, oh wow, we just lost two of our best players. And we ended up having the most wins up to that point in school history that year. It's just—it didn't make sense. You know, it really didn't. The year—the success we had, and the condition that team was in to start the year—it didn't make logical sense, but that's what's sort of fun about it. Things don't always work the way you expect them to, and some years, you think, Oh, we're better this year physically. If last year we went to the final four and we're better this year, shouldn't we make the two? But it doesn't work that way. You see it—all the time in athletics—you see it all the time. Things don't work the way you expect, but it's okay. It's okay. So just try to enjoy every day.

DS:

Well, let me ask you, since you mentioned the injuries, how do you deal with those adversities when they happen to your athletes?

SG:

Yeah, we had—that was a really—and over the course of the years we've had a number of those. Obviously, every team's gonna have that. I think, again, if you have the mentality—and this in a way can sound mean or coldhearted—but I think if you can have the mentality on a team and among players and coaches that 'You are not so important that we cannot function without you'—that may sound mean, like, Well, you don't care about me? Well no, that means I care about you so much that I don't want you to think you're so important. And I think when a team can realize than any one piece, even if it's removed—something can fill that gap.

And so last year, with that situation, when we lost two starters on the same day in a scrimmage within about ten minutes of each other, that were expected to obviously have great years for us; when we got the news that next week, we just got in the locker room, I remember, and we read through a Psalm of, even though the earth shakes and the mountains tremble, it's okay. God can handle whatever adversity comes. We just talked about that. We said, Who knows what's gonna happen this year? But we're not gonna sit around and mope and complain and make excuses.

You know, this is our situation, we're gonna handle it and deal with it and move forward. And those kids were—the big thing about that, last year—those kids that were injured were such a huge part of our success. They never played a minute but their attitudes, their encouragement—a lot of times, a player might get hurt and think, Oh, well they're not gonna do as good without me, and if they do then I'm sort of gonna feel bad. But they wanted the success for their teammates as bad as anybody.

So again, probably dealing with that has to do more with individual maturity of the ones that got hurt, and also perseverance of the kids that remain, and them just being determined enough to say, Hey, that's all right. We can make this work. We can handle it. And, hopefully, from the coaches, not a panic situation of—just remaining confident that this will be okay. And that's a lot of—in athletics, we try to avoid the spikes of high highs and low lows and, the roller coaster of emotion of, You know, just do your best and we'll handle it. So that's probably some of it, 'cause every team's gonna go through that at some point.

DS:

You know, and you're on year ten. What do you see as the future for you? What do you think that the future's gonna be?

SG:

For me?

DS:

For you. Are you gonna keep coaching a few more years or--?

SG:

Yeah, that's a—I've coached 25 years, 15 in high school and 10 in college and it just seems like it's not been very long.

DS:

Wow.

SG:

I'm one of those—I don't know how good of a job I do at what I do, but I can't imagine trying to do something else.

DS:

Um-hm.

SG:

You know, it's hard to imagine. Yeah. I never imagine, you know, I'm sort of tired of coaching. I'm gonna try something else. I don't know that I could do anything else. I mean, this is just—sometimes—like I said earlier you get in a position where you feel like “This is what I'm supposed to be doing.”

DS:

And it's something not uncommon for—especially in basketball—for a coach to have, you know, a few decades of longevity somewhere.

SG:

Right. And thankfully, at LCU, it's a place that if we had a couple of years where we don't meet expectations of our team, I don't believe it's an environment that, ‘Oh, I might have to look for a different job’ if we have a year or two that doesn't work well. As long as we're doing things the right way. It'll—that position hopefully will not be taken away from me. But I just enjoy it and I don't see much of a change. Who knows how many years down the road if retirement will even be there, but right now being 45 years old it's hard to think (DS laughs)—it's hard to think of not doing something or retiring and finding something else to do. So I don't know what the future holds. A lot of times people ask me, Do you think you'll go somewhere else eventually? I just—I'm not a person who likes a lot of change. I mean, I enjoy versatility, I enjoy living off the cuff and I'm not a huge long-term planner.

DS:

Yeah. Well I guess also thinking about the future would mean you're not really happy with the present.

SG:

Sure. Exactly. And that's—

DS:

I don't think you have that motivation yet.

SG:

No, not at all. That is—and I sort of feel sad when some people have that discontent with where they are. And I don't want to be complacent and just spinning my wheels and not ever advancing, but I don't think it means I have to go somewhere else to do it. I've just been pretty at peace with where I am.

DS:

Well that's fine. Just give me one more question. Let's kinda wrap this up so you can get on to your coaching this morning.

SG:

I'm good.

DS:

Well, you know. Tell us about what you're expecting this coming year—this first year in the NCAA.

SG:

Yeah. I'm really looking forward to it for a number of reasons. Number one, just the players we have coming back—and this is almost more coach talk—but these past few years we've had—we're graduating four seniors and three of them are post players—inside players—and all three of them have just [been] vital to our success the past two years. I mean, they have been tremendous, and we're not wishing them to move on. But we haven't been as mobile as transitional—I really enjoy guard play. The last few years we've sort of brought it down going to the posts, and it had a little more just post up-play. Next year's team's gonna be faster, more mobile, so we can do some different things strategically, defensively, offensively, even running faster and getting up the court more, even though—I think we're second in the nation in scoring this year. So we were scoring the ball a lot, but I just think the pace of the game at times can even be faster next year. So I'm looking forward to that.

I am looking forward to some new road trip experiences—going to San Antonio, going to new—it's gonna be neat to play different venues, different gyms, different teams. And after ten years in the same conference, it's not like you get in a rut but you sort of know your routine. I'm going to this town. I'm staying at this hotel. We're eating at this restaurant. We're playing this team. This is what they do. There'll be some neat—that'll maybe spark a little more of that rejuvenation of excitement even in coaching 'cause we're gonna have to figure out a new conference, new teams. What do we need to do to beat this team? So that's gonna be fun, that transition of newness. It's always—change is good, and in a way that'll provide some change without having to really transform our team or my job. So that'll be good. I just—the type of kids we have, they're just so fun to be with. I mean, the more we do it, the more I—I guess the older you get the more you observe and want to invest in relationships. We just have some fun kids. Mature, fun girls to be around that'll be here a number of years still and the ones that are coming. So I guess I'm excited about that too, just those relationships continuing and deepening. And it's always fun to see the kids that are moving on. What are they gonna be doing in a few years? That's always fun to see them as we continue to play but also looking back to see what they're doing. So there's a lot ahead for us.

DS:

That's good.

SG:

Yeah. It really is.

DS:

All right. Well, I think it's probably a good spot to end on this morning.

SG:

I appreciate it.

DS:

Yeah, thank you so much, Steve. Thank you for coming.

SG:

You bet.

DS:

I mean this—we talked for the first time—what, two weeks ago?

SG:

Yes, sir.

DS:

(Laughs.) Thank you so much.

SG:

I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

DS:

Thank you.

SG:

Is there anything else I need to do?

[End of Recording]