



Baseball National Champions, Back-to-Back, October 24, 2015

Title

“The View from Second Base”

Date

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Location

The Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In his interview, Kunda comments on his upbringing in Philomath and his earliest involvement with baseball. He then details the process by which he met Pat Casey, walked on to the OSU baseball team, and ultimately became a starter at second base. As with the Kevin Gunderson interview, Kunda shares his memories of his participation on the 2005 and 2006 College World Series teams, responding to questions about team chemistry, fan involvement, critical games during both the regular season and playoffs, and the celebrations that ensued following OSU's triumph in 2006.

From there, Kunda discusses his experiences in minor league baseball, and his more recent activities as a professional-level golfer. The interview concludes with Kunda's memories of Darwin Barney, the struggles that he faced academically, and the pride that he feels for Oregon State baseball today.

Interviewee

Chris Kunda

Interviewers

Greg Garcia, Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/baseball/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Today is October 24th, 2015, and we are speaking with Chris Kunda who is an alumnus of OSU, a student athlete on the Beaver baseball team that won the 2006 College World Series. And we'll be talking to him about his student experience and leading the conversation will be Greg Garcia, so go ahead Greg.

Greg Garcia: How you doing?

Chris Kunda: Good.

GG: My first question for you is, what drew you to baseball?

CK: Man, holy smokes. I mean, my parents say that they couldn't keep a bat or any kind of ball or basketball out of my hands growing up, so I think I was kind of always going to be playing some kind of sport, whether it was basketball, soccer. And I don't know exactly when the moment came that I decided that it was just going to be exclusively baseball, but I suppose it was, if I had to put a year or a time period on my life that I took that path, it would probably be early high school. I kind of realized that I was, out of the sports that I played, I was probably better at baseball than the other ones at that age. And I guess I kind of put the other sports aside, focused solely on baseball, played four years at Philomath High for Coach Terry Stephenson there, and then I was fortunate enough to be asked to walk on at Oregon State. So yeah, from a very early age, it was all about sports. But I think that kind of, maybe freshman, sophomore year of high school, it was exclusively baseball.

GG: You mentioned that you were from Philomath, how would you describe your time playing baseball in Philomath?

CK: A lot of great memories. So many friends that I had growing up, we were all very into sports. I would host and other friends would host baseball games in the driveways of our houses. Random fields that we could kind of sneak out to on the weekends and play. Anywhere really to just get away from household chores and trying to stay out of mom and dad's hair, we would all try to get together and play as much as we could. And I still keep in contact with a lot of my close friends from Philomath High; in fact, a couple of them were just in my wedding a few weeks ago. As people always say, there are just memories and childhood friendships that you'll always remember and cherish, and some of the best people that I've met, and some of the most influential people in my life that I've met, come from that town. And I'm forever grateful for all the support and the care that was shown to me and to all my friends growing up in that town.

GG: Congratulations on your wedding.

CK: Thank you.

GG: Being that you were Philomath and you mentioned that you walked on at Oregon State, how did that happen exactly?

CK: I played three years for the Marketmen, the American Legion baseball team, and I played with Brett Casey, Pat's son, for two of those. And I guess this would have been after my senior year of high school at Philomath, I was playing, and I had a few other offers. I think one was from Linn-Benton Community College and I had been in contact with one of the coaches from Lane Community College. And that summer, I was approached by both Pat Casey and Coach Marty Lees. Coach Lees was the coach for the Eugene Challengers that summer, and I was approached by them – I can't tell you a day – but I was approached by them, asked about my offers and what my future plans were for playing baseball. And I said, "of course I'm looking to play in college, with goals ultimately to play after college." And they said, "well, if you're interested, we would invite you to walk on at Oregon State to play with us throughout the fall – practice season and fall ball here – and we'll see where we think you stack up at the end of fall and kind of make a decision from there. Of course, if you're interested in going to school there." And I said, "well yeah, I'm definitely willing to do that."

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I didn't have any other Division I offers, so getting an opportunity to walk on was, in my mind, probably the greatest offer that I had at the time. And things just happened to work out that fall. I guess I proved – even being a small little kid from Philomath – I proved that I could at least play a little bit there. And lo and behold, four years later, I'm dogpiling on the infield in Omaha. So I was grateful for the opportunity to do that, back in 2003.

GG: Was that the first time you met Coach Casey?

CK: I would say probably not. I'm sure I met him before that, being that he was at many of our games because of his son, and I'm sure I had the chance to talk to him before that. But I don't think until that year – until my senior year, that summer – I don't think I had ever really talked about anything baseball-related as far as playing for him or playing for Oregon State. I think it was more sort of a quick "hi" and "bye" because, at the time, he was just one of my teammate's dads. I mean, even though he was the coach, that's just kind of who he was.

GG: What were your first impressions of him as a coach?

CK: I would say it was an easy transition for me because Terry Stephenson, my coach at Philomath, very intense, very passionate coach when it came to coaching his players but also trying to teach us, as we were growing up, life values and life lessons and how to conduct yourself as we progressed age-wise and maturity level-wise. And so when I came in, like I said, it was a pretty easy fit because there wasn't any kind of intimidation going to a Division I program. Where a smaller town kid like myself, coming in and playing in the fall knowing that I really had nothing to lose as far as my baseball future, because here I am getting a chance to walk on – invited walk on – knowing that I had a pretty good chance with the players that they had left from the year before, looking for a lot of new infield guys. It was a very easy transition for me, especially being so close to home. There wasn't ever a time where I was homesick or felt that the situation was too big for me. It was nice to just have that feeling of, "I'm here at home, I'm playing baseball, which is what I love to do."

Great coach. He's just a phenomenal teacher and he was very clear on what he was always trying to get across to us. I would never say he was overly aggressive as far as his teaching philosophies or his persona. I mean he's, like I said earlier, very intense. But you knew that it was more on your behalf; he was trying to get his point across and he did so in such a manner that, the way I took it was that he was all in it for us as players, not only as a team but as individuals. Yeah, just a coach that I really, really grew to respect throughout the four years that I was here.

GG: How did it feel to take your first at bat for the Beavers?

CK: A little intimidating. I can still remember exactly what happened – I lined out to center field. We were playing down at Riverside, I believe. A lot of emotion the first game; I would definitely say nerves were involved, both good and bad. I think I actually ended up making a couple errors that weekend, but that first weekend was incredible. In fact, I still remember Seth Pietsch pulling me aside before the first game and saying, "hey, I just want to tell you this, when we started fall practice," he said, "I kind of figured you would be one of the first guys that would be out of here. Just cut, wouldn't make it." But he said, "obviously you did a lot, you showed me a lot, you showed our coaching staff a lot, and I believe in you. I know that you can help this team become what we're trying to make it," and that was pretty cool of him to do as an upperclassman, to kind of pull me aside and say that. But man, that was the beginning of a pretty cool journey while here at Oregon State.

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GG: What was it like starting out the 2005 season? Were there any expectations or personal goals?

CK: I think there were – as far as the team goes – I think there were a lot of expectations as far as what our goals were and what we thought we could and were ultimately about to accomplish. The end of the 2004 was really kind of a gateway to that year. We had, of course, that class that came in – that freshman class of 2004 – with Kevin, Dallas, and Jonah; it changed who we became as a program and what we were known for. My first year, even the first year and a half, we were a very strong offense – pitching and defense not so much. And then by the time, kind of the end of 2004, you could kind of see that transforming.

In 2005, really the emphasis became pitching and defense, and we would just try to find out how to score enough runs to win. And throughout that whole year, it just became more of a, "well, let's get back to making sure we don't give up a ton of runs, because we're not going to score like we did" when we had guys like Andy Jarvis, Chris Biles, some of those guys that were here before. We're not going to score ten runs a game. Also with the bat regulations that changed too, we didn't have a whole lot of big offensive power guys. So when those guys came in and our pitching staff really became solidified, it really – that 2005 team, even though getting to the College World Series was awesome, it was a huge accomplishment,

especially for a school from the north, where it's not known as a baseball school. I wouldn't say it was unexpected, not by the players – maybe the community a little bit and maybe the college baseball world – but we had a lot of self-belief, we had a lot of, obviously talent on that team. Several guys still playing in the Major Leagues. And you could just tell there was an identity – we knew who we were, we knew how good we were, and we just needed to find a way to kind of piece all of that together. And we did as the year went on, obviously getting to Omaha. Things didn't go our way there that year, but obviously a lot of those guys came back the next year and things turned out different.

But I would say that '05 team – the end of '04 into '05 – for me that was kind of the turning point of the turning point, so to speak. Now you see it as – what is it? Ten, eleven years later? It is what it is now; it's a national powerhouse. But without bragging, I'd say that 2005 team and some of those players deserve a lot of credit for changing the culture of college baseball around here.

GG: Definitely. Did Coach Casey have anything to say at the beginning of the season?

CK: I'm sure he did, I can't think of anything specific that he may have said. I don't really remember a team meeting, so to speak, about "here's what I have planned." At the beginning of every year, we would always have a team meeting about what our team goals were and I think, obviously, our main focus was to contend in the Pac-10, make it to a regional. I believe that year we had "host a regional" on there as well, which obviously ended up happening, which was great. But I can't recall anything specific that he may have said in a meeting. I wish I did, I wish I had a great quote or a great story from that.

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The one thing I do remember, at the end of the year, is that he brought Harold Reynolds in, at the end of that 2005 season, right before the regional. And he had Harold come in and talk about what it means for the community, because Harold is from here, played baseball at Corvallis High. It was pretty neat seeing somebody who had a very successful baseball career, very successful Major League career, come in and talk about what Coach Casey meant to him as their friendship grew and, like I said, what it meant to the community as far as how much they supported us. And by the end of the 2005 season, you could really see how Corvallis – really Oregon, as a whole state – jumped on our bandwagon and really showed a lot of support for us and really kind of carried us through into Omaha, and then the next year was incredible too.

But getting back to Coach Casey, I would say that was probably the only one thing he did, I guess, extraordinary, was he had Harold come in and talk to us and tell us what it means to this community. It was a pretty cool day to have him come in at the end of practice and talk to us like that.

GG: The first game of the 2005 season was against New Mexico State. In that game, the Beavers beat New Mexico State by a score of 19-0. Do you have any memories of that particular game?

CK: Boy, no. I couldn't even have told you who we played the first game that year. Was that down in Surprise, by any chance? The Surprise Tournament down in Arizona, is that where it was?

GG: I believe so.

CK: I don't remember that game in particular. I remember that tournament, because we used to go down there to play, usually one of the first two weekends of the year, every year, while I was here. But yeah, I can't really recall anything from that game specifically.

GG: You had mentioned this earlier, but in my research of the 110-years of the team's history, I've noticed that there has been an historic bias in Pac-12 teams, like you mentioned, where the north doesn't really get considered as a baseball division, but the south is. During the 2005 season, did you feel like you were fighting that bias and favoritism?

CK: I don't think so, I don't think we felt any pressure or any bias from anybody outside the university, or even within the university. Once we got going and once we put our name out there on the national stage, I think it just kind of opened the eyes of a lot of people throughout the country, especially some of the schools here in the Pac-10 – what was then the Pac-10. I think it just kind of surprised people that a school from the north could turn into a national championship contender, which we did. I can't say that we really held a grudge against those schools or felt second fiddle to anybody,

because by that time, we kind of ran through the Pac-10 and did pretty well. I think we just let our play speak for itself. I don't think there was ever really a discussion about, "well, we're going to go out there and prove everybody wrong, that we can't play." I think it was just, "well, let's go out there and we'll just show them what Oregon State is turning into in terms of a baseball school."

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GG: Let's talk a little bit about your teammates. When did you think the team finally got its chemistry going?

CK: Again, I think that was kind of at the of 2004 into 2005, with the freshmen of that class. And then in my class, guys like Tyler Graham, Cole Gillespie, myself, Jacoby, all in that class. I think what was really neat and I think what makes Oregon State kind of unique in that time, is the fact that you had a lot of local kids playing together. We all played against each other, in some form, growing up; whether it be high school baseball, American Legion baseball, summer leagues, whatever, a lot of us played against each other. And it was more of a respect for each other as far as skill level. And then once we all came together, you had a lot of these local guys who could see, "man, I played against Cole in high school, he's a great player, now he's coming here." Jacoby the same thing – Kevin, Jonah, Dallas – I think there was a certain unspoken bond with all these kids from Oregon that came together and turned what was an average baseball team into what it is now.

It's tough to describe in the sense that, unless you're hanging out with these guys every day at school and the practice field, there's just a certain comfort level. And you hear it in sports, they kind of become like a brotherhood. And the guys that, like I said, played in Oregon and grew up playing against each other now playing together, there was a feeling of, "well, let's go show everybody else what baseball players from Oregon can do." It wasn't a team of different cliques throughout the team, it was just kind of one big unit that always seemed to be hanging out, always seemed to see each other around town, around campus. And it was just comfortable and it was great seeing these guys every single day for two, three, four years. And as I said earlier with some of the friendships I've made, obviously a lot of these guys I still keep in contact with. Even last night, we were still back in old times; it was like we hadn't missed a beat. It was just a great group of guys that I'll always remember and am very honored to play with a lot of these guys.

GG: Do you have a particular memory with your teammates, either on the field or off?

CK: The 2005 team?

GG: Yes.

CK: The dogpile to win against USC is the first thing that comes to mind, to go to Omaha. I can't think of anything in particular; there's not really one instance with that team, off the field. Like I say, we all kind of got together and hung out on the weekends, watched football during the fall. There were, I'm sure, just a lot of individual moments throughout the year. It wasn't, like I say, up until we got to the end of the year and it was coming time for the regionals and the super regionals, where we started realizing, "man, we have a pretty special opportunity here."

Now 2006, I remember there were probably five or six stories, individual moments, throughout the year that were kind of impressive. That 2005 team though, when we got through our regional and got the opportunity to host USC and finally be, basically, one step away, I think that was the one week where it was – we finally had got through, we had proven to everyone we could play. Now this was our chance to kind of parlay that into a bigger opportunity to show, not only are we in the regionals and hosting, now we have a chance to show that it's not just a fluke or a flash in the pan team. We're one step away from proving that we can play on the biggest stage of all. And we were fortunate enough to make it happen and get through USC in a pretty tough three-game series. But yeah, man, that dogpile will always be, probably, the one memory from that year.

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GG: How would you describe the personality of Jacoby Ellsbury?

CK: He was a typical college kid, just like the rest of us. Obviously his talent level was a little above most of us, but he was just another one of the guys while we were here. He wanted to win just as bad as everybody else on the team. 2005,

I would say, was the year where you could tell he was trying to become that leader. Aaron Matthews was still there and, up until then, Aaron was still a pretty vocal leader in that clubhouse on that team. But in 2005, it's hard to say without kind of, not really blasting him, but he really tried to become a leader. I don't think being a vocal leader was his strong suit; he was one of those guys that kind of led through example as far as, he was extraordinary defensively, his effort was unbelievable. And his offense, his skills speak for themselves. But that 2005 year, he really wanted to be that guy that led.

Now Andy Jenkins came in and he kind of took over as the vocal leader on the team. But Jacoby, you could tell that he, like I said, he being from Oregon, he was definitely one of those guys that wanted to prove a point. Not only for himself individually – great player and we all knew what was in store for him in the years to come – but he really, I think, tried to lead and carry the team as the year went on. And obviously he did and he's had a tremendous career since then.

GG: Was there a particular point in the season when you realized that the team had national potential?

CK: I think, quietly, we all knew fairly early on. I mean, we got off to a red hot start that year and I can't recall when or if we cracked into the national polls, but I think there was a feeling, even from the start of fall practice, that there was something special that could happen with this team. Like I said, there was a lot of camaraderie. We had ended 2004 taking a step in the right direction and it was just something that we decided, "we're going to go out there and we're going to play and we're just going to try to show the rest of the country what we can do." And as we got through the Pac-10 play and it started looking like we had a really good chance to host a regional, super-regional, but to become a national seed – which was a little bit of a big deal for us to be seen up there with Texas and Tulane that year, Nebraska, kind of throw our name in there as one of the top teams in the nation. But as far as a definitive time, no, like I said, I just think there was kind of an understanding throughout the team and the coaching staff that "we've got what it takes, now let's go out there and prove to everybody that we're here."

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GG: How did Beaver Nation rally behind you as the season progressed?

CK: Oh man, it was incredible. I can remember we had great fan support even the first two years I was here. As 2005 went on, you saw more faces in the stands. Obviously, at the end of the year, we had to bring in even more stands so that people could come and watch, and it was fantastic. Really by mid-way through the year, you had people on campus talking to you and expressing their support, which was great. Classmates, faculty kind of showing, "hey, we're pulling for you." The town obviously showed up there in full force once we got through and into the regionals. But it was incredible.

Gosh, looking at the stadium now, you'd never believe what it used to look like before all the renovations. Like I said, we went from a pretty full stadium to standing room only; we had people backing their trucks up to the left field fence to catch a glimpse. It was what you kind of dream of as a kid. You want to play in front of as many people as you can imagine, and to have that support – especially at a school that, up until that point, was more known for basketball and football, as far as men's sports go – to have that support finally be shown and right there at Goss Stadium, it was incredible. The electricity of that field compared to anything I ever played in after college; it was crazy, those weeks of regionals and super regionals. You had so many friends and family there and, like I said, the support as the year went on, it was phenomenal.

GG: By the end of the season, the Beavers were ranked third in the country. The last team you needed to play was USC. What was going through your mind during that time?

CK: Well, we were one step away. Like I say, USC had a very, very good team, and we knew it. I think as a team – and I think everybody, individually, they would say the same thing – it was just, like I said earlier, "we've got a chance to do something that hasn't been done here in a very, very long time." And the chance to host that was fantastic because, like I said, with the support that we had from the community, it was a huge advantage to play a game of that magnitude here at home, where he had, I feel, such an advantage being able to host that. To be honest with you, I can't remember – I think we won Game 1 and lost Game 2, and I remember after Game 2, there wasn't ever a sense of panic. We were all, like I said, pretty comfortable with how good we were, and we had played these guys plenty of times to know that our best was good enough to beat them. And man, that third game was as intense as anything I had ever been a part of up until that point. There were so many little moments throughout that game: Eddie Kunz striking out Jeff Clement with the bases

loaded; I think they even had another threat between that and the end of the game, the game kind of hung in the balance up until the last out.

It was incredible, that feeling of accomplishment, when that final out was made. It was pure excitement, it was chaos, it was everything all wrapped into one. And as everybody was kind of jumping on each other there on the infield, it was almost just a release of all the happiness and excitement that had built up throughout that year. Because, like I said, that team really flipped and turned Oregon State into a prominent baseball program.

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GG: After beating USC, the Beavers were bound for the College World Series. How would you describe the mood of Beaver Nation at the end of the post-season?

CK: Man, just total excitement. We had nothing but support. It was funny leading up to Omaha, because people were trying to figure out how they were going to get out there to watch. People making last-minute airplane plans, hotel reservations. I had friends and family who kind of just dropped everything that they were doing and had to find a way to get out there. And for us, we were kind of living every kid's dream: we're hopping on a plane and we're flying to Omaha and we get to play at Rosenblatt Stadium. You get to play on t.v. in front of everybody. It was so much fun, so much – like I said, the feeling of accomplishment too was very unique and very special to, I'm sure, not only myself but to everyone else. Even though it ended rather quickly and quicker than we had hoped for, that experience itself was something that, a little bit was indescribable. It was kind of a blur leading up to after we beat USC and then the couple of days getting ready to go to Omaha. I wouldn't say it took us out of a rhythm but the practices were much lighter and there was a lot of youthful giddiness to finally get over and go play over there. And even the two games – we competed with Tulane and Baylor and had a chance to win both of them, it didn't quite go our way that year. But it was quite an experience and it was really a precursor to what was about to happen in the years to follow.

GG: Your team was the first to go to the College World Series since the first OSU team, which was in 1952. Did you get a chance to meet any of the players from that team?

CK: I did not, no. I don't know if anybody else did, I know I personally did not. It would have been cool; it would have been probably a pretty neat experience to talk with some of those older players and just kind of compare experiences and the feelings, but I can't say I ever had the privilege to meet any of them.

GG: You touched on this a little bit earlier, but what was it like, what was going through your mind, when you attended the opening ceremonies in Omaha?

CK: It was one part business and four parts kid in a candy shop. You had the team introductions, you had the signing of the autographs beforehand – all the fans and the people attending the weekend came through, and signing autographs kind of makes you feel like a major leaguer, it feels like you're a pretty big deal there for that weekend. And then to be brought out on the field with everybody else, you get to see the highlight show of not only your team but of everybody else that's there. It was pretty neat. The fireworks display was pretty astounding. It was the last time to really kind of soak in what you had accomplished until you get back out on the field and try to take care of business and try to win a couple games. But the whole Omaha experience is, for me and for the guys that were on those teams, it's an experience that is unlike anything that, up until now, anything that any of us had experienced. And for most of us, it's the biggest stage we ever got to.

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The turnout that Omaha has for those two weeks, for that tournament every year, is incredible. I want to go back and see it as a spectator, hopefully in the not too long of future. It's a whirlwind of first-time experiences, and you're so happy to be there, you're just trying to take it all in. And then, like I said, once the opening ceremonies are over it's time to, "let's get back to business and try to understand that there's still more work to be done." We can still enjoy this now, but it's something I'll never forget, for sure. I hope the guys that are here now and that will continue to come through here, if they ever get the chance to go, you take it in and really appreciate what that accomplishment means. Because out of however

many college baseball teams, there are only eight teams that get to experience that every year. It's an honor and a privilege to have done that twice for me.

GG: When I interviewed players from the '52 team, they commented that the heat was overpowering. What was your impression of the heat and general climate of Omaha?

CK: I do remember the first game being very hot and rather humid. I don't think that it was to the point where it was too hot – I don't remember anybody mentioning that they were dehydrated or anything like that. I would say, the one thing that was much different was the size of the ballpark we were playing in. You now are playing in front of 25, 30,000 fans, and the park is so much bigger. But I think at that age and in that stage, for me, you didn't let it affect you or you didn't think about how hot it was. It was warmer, obviously, than what we were used to here in Corvallis, but I don't think the climate was ever really much of an issue when it came to actually playing the game.

GG: In the 2005 College World Series, the Beavers were put up against Tulane for the first round. How would you describe the mood of that first game?

CK: I would say, early on, I won't say we were tight, but it was a low-scoring game to begin with. So it was, already, one big play here or there, or a hit, could really turn the momentum. I think we were real excited to play them the first round, because that Tulane team was incredibly good. I think they were the number one national seed, they had been ranked number one most of the year, if I remember correctly. So obviously they came into the tournament with no introduction needed; we knew they were good. And they also had a couple of future major leaguers on that team.

But again, once you start playing, you feel like you can match up with anybody you're playing against. I don't think we were intimidated at all; I think we really kind of relished the opportunity to take on the top team in the country. Like I said, one big play kind of flipped the script in that game. Early on, we had just as good an opportunity to win that game as we did to lose. It didn't go our way in the end, but it was very exciting, it was nerve-wracking, obviously. But overall, I would say that first game and that year, it was a great experience to be able to play on that grand of a stage, that great of competition. It was a blast, even though that weekend didn't turn out the way that we wanted. I just think that we enjoyed being on that stage in that moment so much that, now looking back on it, even with the disappointment of not winning, just playing in that game was a very, very unique environment and a very, very fun experience.

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GG: Do you have any other particular memories of your time in Omaha?

CK: Of 2005? I do remember a few of the off the field events that we did. We had a couple lunches, we got to meet with the fan base, I want to say before the first game. I think it was we had a brief practice the day before and met with a lot of the fans that flew over. And that was really fun, that was kind of a down time to enjoy the support that the community and the state showed. One of the cool things, we got to stay at a really, really nice hotel, and I remember a lot of the guys enjoying the hotel rooms just as much as anything else while we were there that week. I don't remember the name of the actual venue, but they were all suites, all the rooms were suites, so we were going from one room to the other and checking out everybody's room. Just college guys hanging out while we weren't at the field. Some of those off the field things were just as much fun as some of the games. I still remember, a lot of guys brought Xboxes and video games, so there was competitions going on in several rooms throughout the hotel. Even though that year, 2005, we were only there for a few days, we enjoyed the heck out of it.

GG: What was the reaction of Beaver Nation after this initial appearance at the College World Series?

CK: Again, it was just unbridled support. I think not only everybody that showed up at Omaha and some of our games throughout the year, but people that tuned in to see how they were doing, a lot of people in a way thanking us for giving them something to root for as far as a sport in Oregon at that time of year, because the University of Oregon didn't have a program yet. So we were kind of the one baseball program for the state in a way that year. It was really neat to have everybody, even after we got back, to say, "hey, congratulations on a great year. We were pulling for you." All that support, it was a ton of motivation for us as a team and as players to really try to play to and above our expectations, and just to try to give the community something that they could try to hang their hat on and really pull for us. And that was,

like I said, that's something that you never ask for it, but when that happens, you're forever grateful that there were so many people that were supporting us and pulling for us that week.

GG: The Beavers began the 2006 season in the top ten teams in the pre-season polls, even going as high as number three by *Collegiate Baseball*. What was the feeling going through your mind at the beginning of the next season in 2006?

CK: We knew who we were, we knew we were good. We had lost Jacoby in the draft, which was a huge loss – you can't replace what he brought to the team and brought to the university, the guy was incredible while he was here. But even with that being said, I think a lot of us realized that just losing one great player wasn't going to diminish what the team as a whole could accomplish and was about to accomplish. Like I said, there are so many stories from that year, if you remember in 2005 when we got knocked out, Kevin was actually interviewed and was asked about, I think, "what do you guys have for next year." And he said, "I can guarantee you that we will be back in 2006." And I think that just kind of started and it just kind of rolled into the next year. 2005, it was a great year, a lot of things accomplished for the first time in Oregon State history, but after losing in Omaha, and then that whole summer and fall, it was almost like it just kind of carried over as far as the momentum that we had already built in 2005.

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It got off to a rocky start, 2006 did, we were .500 for a couple weekends, but there wasn't ever any panic. The nucleus of guys that we had coming back, other than Jacoby, we really had the same guys, the same core guys coming back. It was a team that was mature enough and old enough and experienced enough to know that we're just as good as anybody out there in the country. And with that experience in Omaha under our belt and with another year of experience for the underclassmen, it was definitely, early on, it was almost kind of anxiousness to get the year going. I think there was anxiousness in the first couple of weeks because, not that we looked ahead, but we knew where we were probably going to be come late May and then into June. So it was, I wouldn't say it was inevitable, but that feeling of inevitability that we're going to be around the end of the year, come regionals and super regionals and then into Omaha. Barring something catastrophic, this team is good enough to do what it ultimately did.

GG: Darwin Barney once said that the road to Omaha seemed a lot shorter in 2006 than it did in 2005. In your experience, was this the case?

CK: Yes, I suppose. If I'm thinking about it the same way that Darwin probably was when he said that, I would tell you yes, and it's because of what I earlier described. It was a team that knew how good we were and it started out, like I said, not like it was going to be a formality, but it didn't have the big – as far as pressure goes on a team, that was kind of gone because we had been there before. It's not like the work decreased or the intensity or the work ethic of the team decreased. In fact, I think the intensity increased that year because I think we asked a lot of ourselves and the coaching staff asked a lot of us as well. We were able to put the disappointment of 2005 behind and move on and focus on the 2006 year as completely different from 2005.

There's always a chance to, when you're not prominent in the national spotlight, I think there can be a tendency to kind of hang on to one-time experiences when you're somewhat of a lesser-known commodity. But there were too many guys that wouldn't let that happen on that team and there wasn't, other than Mitch Canham, I wouldn't say there was one leader who got everybody going. The whole team knew what to do. In fact, Kevin and I were just talking about how practices that year almost kind of ran themselves, because we had a lot of upper-classmen and the younger classmen that contributed, such as Darwin, they caught on really quick as to how this program expects you to show up to practice, show up to game day, and basically just do your work. And your work individually will lead into team success.

[0:55:14]

GG: This time around, going to the College World Series, how did Beaver Nation react again? Were there any parades, parties or official send-offs?

CK: There was a send-off when we finally headed to Omaha at the end of the year. But again, it was just a ton of support, people now seeing us in the national spotlight for the first time as a baseball program, I think really kind of put a charge into the university once football season was over and then spring rolled around. We started having, like I said, the seats

were filling quite often, if not every game, here. You would notice more support on the road; more fans were traveling with us. It's hard to not keep saying it, but the support that was given was really a huge boost as far as the year goes on. Because even though you're playing baseball, you're still going to school, you're studying, you've got a full day. But when the time for the game rolls around, you have that extra energy given to you by the support of the fans and the crowd and the atmosphere over at Goss. We were really appreciative of that, to be actually known as being one of the tougher places to come and play. I mean, it really did.

I remember early on in my career going to places like Arizona State and Stanford were somewhat intimidating because of the crowd base and how good they were on a national scale. And then to kind of flip that and become that team who is kind of the big kid on the block, so to speak, now you're in the position where you can kind of intimidate everybody coming into here. And having that edge in any kind of sport gives you, not only physically but mentally, it really gives you an advantage over the competition, because that's one more thing that you've got going for you. And Corvallis became incredible starting as soon as we had home series – once the weather finally shaped up – it became a great, great baseball town to play in.

GG: How did it feel to come back to Rosenblatt Stadium this time around?

CK: The first thing we noticed was the new scoreboard. It went from a big kind of old, outdated scoreboard to a video screen, all digital stats, got to see your face up on there, which was pretty neat. But it was kind of a feeling of, "alright, we're back, now we have some unfinished business." And the "O-State Ballers" song that is now kind of infamous in Oregon State baseball lore, there were, like I said, there were some things that were mentioned that they came together. It was almost like we had predicted it from the beginning of the year and it just unfolded the way that we kind of thought that it would and hoped it would. And so when we got back there, it was now more of a sense of, "alright, let's finish the job this time. We're not satisfied with just getting here, now we need to make sure that we close the deal."

Obviously it didn't look good after Game 1, but the drive and the maturity of that team, it wouldn't allow us to give in. There was no quit in that team and, like I said, the beginning of the year, when we knew we had what our goals were, nothing short of really winning a national championship, to us, was going to be a success. And that kind of motivation and that mindset, throughout that week, I think was really the key to leading us to winning all those elimination games and then winning the second and third game of the championship series. I think that just kind of really carried us through, knowing that it's almost an all or nothing approach to the week. Obviously we got some crazy, crazy good individual performances from some guys that week. And now, looking back on it, that place will always, for me and I'm sure for everyone else, will always have a special place in our lives and in our thoughts, that this is where something incredible and special happened, and we were just really thankful to be a part of it.

[1:00:46]

GG: You mentioned "O-State Ballaz," it's credited to Mitch Canham. How did that song come about? Was it written on the road?

CK: To be honest, I don't know because I had no part in it. I actually think Mitch had – the way it came about was Mitch, I believe, had a friend in the music business back in Seattle. And I want to say that it was his friend who had the idea of, "well, let's make a little song about your baseball team." And I think one idea got thrown out and it just kind of snowballed into, "well, let's have some guys from the actual team step up and do a part." [laughs] When it was first finished and it was finalized and it was played and everybody heard it for the first time, for some of us, it was kind of like, "well, why did you do that?" It was kind of stupid, kind of idiotic.

And then as the season went on and it was being played in the locker room every single day, it almost became funny to the point where – because at the end, I think one of the lyrics was, "Texas, you're about to get your ring took." Texas had won the national championship the year before. And I think it almost kind of started becoming, in a way, we kind of started using like, "well, now we have to back this up." We can't let this get out into the public, which it obviously eventually did, and then not do something about it. It almost became something that kind of, like I said, forced us to step up to the plate and live up to what that song had conveyed, and that was to become a national champion. So in a way, it was almost a blessing in disguise, if you wanted to describe it that way. I don't think it was ever intended to become such

a phenomenon, but it was, like I said, something individualistic to that team and that season that all of us will always think back and get a kick out of.

GG: As you mentioned earlier, the Beavers lost to the University of Miami by the score of 11-1. After beating Georgia 5-3, the Beavers had a rematch against Miami to advance in the College World Series. How would you describe the mood of the team as you entered that rematch game?

CK: I think it was just almost seen as they were in our path to our ultimate goal, which was winning the national championship. Obviously, quick revenge was also on our minds because they had just beaten the crap out of us a couple of days before. We were very excited to get the opportunity to play them again. It gave us a little added motivation after beating Georgia, being able to stick around for at least one more day and have a chance to stay alive. I think we got – man, I hate miscrediting people – I think Mike Stutes started that game, do you have that down there?

GG: In that game, Stutes played, Kunz played, and Gunderson played.

CK: I think Mike started that game and, from what I remember, just an outstanding performance against an offense that was very potent. A lot of big, strong, powerful bats in that line-up and he was able to shut them down enough to allow us to score a few runs early. Obviously with Miami being a national powerhouse in college athletics period, it was a great chance for us to, again, take another step towards where we wanted to get, and being able to get that revenge opportunity, and to knock off a very proud program in Miami was huge motivation for us. It definitely felt good to get them back and to know that, "well, you may have got us the first time but now we're the team advancing," it was, in a way, very sweet revenge to get a chance to play them again.

[technical interruption; 1:05:39]

GG: OK, so we were talking about beating Miami the second time, before the break. Anything else that you wanted to add to that?

CK: The only thing I would add to that was, getting back to the first game, there was a rain delay...I don't know, mid-way? I don't recall exactly. But anyways, we were already down and myself, Kevin and Jonah went into the locker room during the delay and pulled out one of the brackets for the World Series. So we had kind of marked us down as a loss. So we kind of went through, game by game, and kind of put down who we thought was going to have to pitch where, which team we were going to have to play, how it was going to go, who was going to be available out of the bullpen. The funny thing about that is that we knew we were going to be short on pitching the further and further along we got, so we were kind of taking chances in our mind about who we thought was going to be called in to pitch. And you jump forward a couple games, Mike starts the game against Miami, just like we had thought, and we advanced there. And like I said, things just happened – it was almost kind of eerie by the end of it, how it happened in accordance with what we had predicted, not only at the beginning of the year, some other times throughout the middle part of the year, but even there in Omaha. It started to take shape how we kind of originally had planned for it to happen. Maybe the other guys didn't really catch on, but it was almost like a comfort level. It was like, "alright, this is what's going to happen, this is how it's going to play out," and then it did, starting with that game in Miami. In a way it was like, "well, here's what's going to happen," there was almost an inevitability to it. "This is how it's going to happen," and lo and behold, it started to unfold just that way.

GG: After beating Miami, you had to go up against the number one seeded Rice University. What was the mindset of the team going in?

CK: Well, we knew we had to win two games. Again, playing the number one team, everybody there is a great team but that team had outstanding starting pitching which, to us, was nice, because we had equally good starting pitching and relief pitching. So we felt like we matched up pretty well against them. Again, they had what at times could be a very explosive offense. We had some great, again, Daniel Turpen coming in had a great outing. They had a team that could kind of run away from you and hide, so to speak. They could just put up huge innings and before you knew it, you were dogpiled under runs. But we were able to keep a couple low-scoring games close and, again, with the emphasis that we had that year – pitching and defense, playing a lot of small ball, moving guys along, taking the extra base – we just kind

of executed, in a way, Beaver baseball for those two games. It was just more step that we knew we had to get through to continue to advance, to continue to have a stay there in Omaha.

Those two games, they were extremely nerve-racking, because they were low scoring; they were close games. It was a great accomplishment to not only come back through the loser's bracket in what would turn out to be our third and fourth elimination games in a row, and it really had that sense of, we had some momentum going, we just needed to keep doing what we were doing, we knew that our best was just as good as anybody else's. And, again, it showed a lot of intestinal fortitude on our team's behalf to keep getting these gutsy performances, without a whole lot of rest, from guys who, as far as pitching goes, we didn't ask a lot out of throughout the year leading up to Omaha. We got some just unbelievable individual performances from some of those guys, Kevin included, coming out of the bullpen and throwing a ton of inning, when usually he's just a one inning guy for us. It was a lot of guys doing their part to try to help the team win and we were fortunate enough to get through them, two games in a row, and just continue to move on.

[1:11:06]

GG: After sweeping Rice University you made it to the championship round against North Carolina. What was it like to play against the Tar Heels for a national championship?

CK: It was what you always dreamed of. You just want that chance to play for the ultimate prize, and that was becoming national champions. Again, it seemed like everybody we played had a great pitching staff and this team was no exception. They had two very high draft picks – in both Andrew Miller and Daniel Bard – on that team. Once we got there, we felt like we had done the hard work, we got through all those elimination games, now we're kind of back even with a chance for two more wins to become national champions.

And it was, again, the support that we had coming out from Corvallis – even the people in Omaha. We had several instances – I did individually – where people who either had a team that was knocked out or didn't have a team, we had a lot of people pulling for us. I guess we had that underdog feeling and I think that's what drew a lot of people who were either on the fence or didn't have a side, it kind of drew them to us, the new national contender. Playing a team that had a great history, a great program for years, known in the college baseball spotlight, I think, again, when it comes to a little added motivation, it was given to us in the sense that I don't think a whole lot of people outside of our community gave us a chance to win that series. And fortunately – again, it didn't start out great in Game 1 – but we had that stick-to-it-ness and just kept playing until somebody had ripped our life out for good. And fortunately our best was able to beat their best in Games 2 and 3, and there we were again in a big old dogpile after that final out.

GG: Do you have any particular memories about that series other than what you've mentioned?

CK: Yes, personally I do. The first game against North Carolina, almost hitting a home run off of Andrew Miller was kind of cool for me. Cole hitting the home run that put us ahead, I think mid-way through the game, maybe early in the game, was awesome. That was a cool moment that I'll always remember him doing that. And I think I actually greeted him at home plate; I think I was on base for that. For that game, obviously because we lost, that was a tough one to have a whole lot of memories from.

Game 2 was incredible. Falling behind big early and then having that huge fourth inning, putting up seven runs. Obviously Bill Rowe's home run, I think that finally put us up for good. It was just that never say die kind of attitude that we had even though, again, it looked really, really bleak for us. But coming back to win that game and then knowing that it's one game for everything, I think, by that time, we really relished the opportunity to be fighting with our backs to the wall, where it was winner go home, winner go home, winner go home, and then, finally, it was one game for it all.

[1:15:26]

[laughs] I mean, that last game, it was so intense in the dugout, I don't think I can really explain or describe the intensity. The nerves were gone, I think, by and large, with the players. It was just pure competition. It was us versus them, it was live or die, and in that sense, it was an experience that you can't really describe it, but to live it and to feel it for those nine innings was absolutely incredible. And then when we finally took the lead there late, and went back on the field to have a chance to get three more outs to become the national champions, it was as good nervous as I can ever remember being.

And then the absolute utter exhilaration, jubilation, excitement at the end, when we finally won, it was absolutely incredible. I'll never forget those immediate, probably, two minutes after that. If I could paint, I could lay it out step by step for you.

GG: Do you remember that reaction? What your first reaction was?

CK: I do. [laughs] I remember, as the pitch was being delivered and as the guy swung, my first instinct was actually, "oh gosh, we just lost," because I thought when he swung, where the pitch was, I thought that he was going to hit it out. And then when it went up in the air and I realized that Tyler was going to have a rather easy catch, it was almost that time, those four or five seconds, move extra slow. You're just kind of like, "just catch it, just catch it, just catch it." And then when he finally did, I took my glove off, I threw it in the air and I turned around to find Darwin. I think that Darwin had already started to run back into the dogpile, so I followed Darwin, and it was like a sea of bodies colliding, because you had the guys from the dugout running out, you had Mitch and Kevin in the middle in their own little thing at first, and then you had everybody just kind of converge at one time. I took a cleat in the face jumping on. Actually, I jumped on, fell off, jumped back on. I don't think there were any words for probably three minutes, there was just screaming. The emotion that was running through everybody and the sense of accomplishment and the chance of sharing it with those guys you worked so hard with, some of the guys you've grown up playing with and against, and really becoming such close friends, and just the sense of "finally, the ultimate accomplishment" was amazing.

You hop off the dogpile and everybody's hugging one another, and you've got Coach Casey's son running on the field and grabbing him, there's little individual snapshots that you just kind of mentally take as its unfolding. And then to finally get the hardware and to do that. But even the immediate, after the game, it kind of becomes a blur. The dogpile, I remember vividly, and all the hugging and congratulations with everybody. But then it just kind of becomes a blur for a little bit, because you're hugging so many people, you're seeing friends and family, they're hugging you, they're saying congratulations. You're kind of hanging on to what just happened, you just kind of want to keep living in that moment.

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And then going back to the hotel and seeing all our fans greet us as we drove back, a big reception down there in the lobby, those become the moments that you don't forget. Getting to spend the time with all those guys and reliving what had just happened, like I said, you're holding on to that experience and that moment for as long as you can before, inevitably, you know that you're going to have to a) go to sleep and then b) hop on the plane and head back to Corvallis. In a sense, return to a little bit of reality. But that whole night, it was just spectacular. Up until, like I said, a few months ago, getting married, it was the most fun, the most, I don't even know if there's a word for it. But the experience was absolutely thrilling and phenomenal and something that I'm very fortunate, looking back on it now, very fortunate and very thankful to even have the opportunity to get that far and to be a part of that. It's just truly, truly amazing; I'm very privileged to be a part of that.

GG: What was Coach Casey's reaction to being crowned national champions?

CK: You'd probably have to ask him to get an actual reaction from him. I would say, just knowing him and being around him for four years, I guess I can't really truly imagine what it felt like for him. Because like I say, the years before '05 and '06 must have been some of the hardest years, probably of his life, because the program was really just an average baseball program in a conference that was outstanding, top to bottom, for the most part, when it came to baseball. And then finally, for him to have that chance to be on the biggest stage and to be in the position that he was as the head coach of the national championship baseball team, I'm sure it had to have been so rewarding for him. All those years of hard work, all the players that he coached, all the people that he met, all the parents of the players that he's met. So rewarding to finally have it all pay off and to be the top dog in the sport. For us as players, I'm sure it's a completely different euphoric feeling of accomplishment. For him, like I said, all that hard work and all those previous years of some tough times. And then to see him with Jon, his son, Jon was our number one fan, and still is; he's the university's biggest supporter. It was great. I don't have kids yet, but if I do, even to have something somewhat even similar to that would be, as a father, it would be tremendously rewarding and grateful to be able to share that with his son Jon. Just incredible.

GG: What was Beaver Nation's reaction when you came home from Omaha?

CK: Oh, man. Just pandemonium, really. We flew back to Portland and, when we landed, they – I guess when a really renowned pilot is retiring, they bring the fire hoses out and spray the plane. I guess that's a really, very big honor. Well, they did that for us as we were rolling through the gate. At the time, I don't think we really realized what was happening, but that was pretty cool.

[1:25:00]

And then we went to, what is it, Washington Square? I believe, in Portland? And they had a huge reception for us there. And still all of us, first of all, were all working on about four hours of sleep. But you have all the fans cheering for you, asking for autographs, wanting to shake your hand, wanting to hug you. So many people just wanting really just to show their support and just be a part of something that really the whole state has never had that chance or that opportunity to be able to celebrate a national championship-type team. For it to happen while we were the only – well, between us and Oregon – the university that has a team, to have the whole state pulling for us, regardless if you're a Duck fan or a Beaver fan, it was kind of put aside for that spring.

It's hard for me to really put anything more into words other than you're just so honored and you're thankful for that support throughout an entire fan base. Now, ten years later, you really have a respect and a sense of thankfulness for all those people who took time out of their lives to come out and share that with you. At the time, we were just still so excited about what we had accomplished and really just letting loose, kind of turning it into one on-going party. But now, like I say, as you look back, very honored to be a part of that up in Portland, to have those people show up there. And then to drive back to Corvallis, have another big reception just outside the football stadium here was, again, another real cool moment. So much support for one team and a group of guys that we can never, I don't think, thank them enough or show enough gratitude for what they did for us that year.

GG: After your time with the Beavers, in 2006 you were drafted by the Yankees. How did your time with the Yankees and their organization differ, or was similar, to your experience with the Beavers?

CK: I would say, immediately, it was very hard to transfer back to now playing meaningful baseball games. It was a very quick turnaround. If I remember right, for me, it was maybe three days. So I was back in town and three days later I was on a flight over to Baltimore, actually. And it was hard to not have that feeling of almost kind of like complacency, because you just accomplished the ultimate prize in collegiate athletics. Now you're trying to continue a career path and you have so many people congratulating you as you show up and wanting to know about your experience, you're continually just kind of reliving that moment for a while, at least for me personally. And then it really became a struggle for me that summer to take it as a profession. If I had to kind of go back and think about it now and try to give my younger self advice, it was really hard to, "ok, you're now doing this as a profession. You have to do it every single day, you have to work hard," because at the time, that was still all I wanted to do, was play baseball professionally, play it for a living. In fact, actually that summer, over in Staten Island, our team won the New York-Penn League championship. So for me, the year was incredible. Just a year full of accomplishment with teams and a lot of winning was going on.

[1:30:04]

The following year for me in Charleston was difficult to handle because I wasn't playing full-time. And even when I was playing consistently, I wasn't performing as well as I had wanted and as well as the organization was hoping for. So that year was, albeit in a great town – I love Charleston – but as a baseball year, it was rough. There's really no other way or word to describe it. It was very tough basically failing as much as I did. And then the last year, in 2008, was finally the year that I felt myself getting burned out of baseball. I played pretty much the entire year in the Florida State League which, just geographically, is a tough place to play for an entire year down there in Florida, especially when you grew up in Oregon. And I finally felt, as the year went on, that I could be ok, if this was my last year, being done with baseball.

Going into that year, I had worked hard in Charleston and then I worked pretty hard that off-season. I was trying to find a way to have the offensive numbers to stick around, and it didn't happen. Again, it became really frustrating and I wasn't playing a whole lot. It's a different dynamic once you leave amateurism; going from an amateur to a professional, it's totally different in the sense that, when you're an amateur, you're playing just because of pure blood and passion for the sport. You're still playing that way as a professional but you know in the back of your mind, "well, if I don't succeed at this, I have to go do something else." And so as that year progressed, I got to the end of the year, I had pretty much

told myself that even if they wanted me to come back for spring training, I was going to be ok with telling them, "I don't think I'm going to continue." And I got called that off-season, that winter, saying, "we're going to release you." They offered to contact several other teams to see if I wanted to continue playing. I thought about it for, I think, a day, and I called them back and I said, "you know what, no, I'm ok. I'll move on." In a way, [laughs] I feel like, after winning the College World Series, there's almost a sense of, "there can't be anything possibly better than this, is there?" as far as team accomplishment and just pure joy.

So now that I've been done playing baseball for several years, I actually went through a period where I just didn't even care to watch baseball. Didn't watch much, didn't pay attention much. I've gotten back to watching more of it recently, but I'm totally happy with what I'm doing now. Like I said so many times, I'm just so grateful for the chance to come to this university and be a part of what ended up happening. It was extremely special for me, for my class, to come from where we started in 2003 and then to see what we became in 2006. And then even in 2007 with a lot of the guys that I played with leading up to that. I obviously wouldn't trade it for anything in the world, ever. And now getting time to reflect – gosh, I can't believe it's already been ten years – but it's so funny how many people since then, even just the mention of 2006 Oregon State, not even here, some people tend to remember, "oh, was that the team that won the national championship? I watched you on t.v. that year, I loved watching you guys plays." To be able to have that and to be able to hear that come from so many people that I really, I guess, didn't expect to be paying too much attention or to be noticed, and to be thought of as somebody that really was a cool part of someone else's life, it's really, really nice and very humbling in a way to be known for that, as part of that team that was so incredible in so many different ways.

[1:35:55]

GG: What was your reaction to hearing that the Beavers won in '07?

CK: I was extremely happy, again. In fact, I lived with Jonathan Hovis, who was pitching at North Carolina the year before, and they played each other again. We, of course, had a friendly wager on the series. It was so amazing to think that, "man, this is kind of what we've built now." Being a team that, back to back national champions, and now basically one of the handful of teams that is looked at as a college baseball university. And to know that I had a small part in doing that for this program, for this university, is really neat and very special to me.

GG: What are your plans for the future?

CK: Family. Family is definitely in the plans, fairly soon hopefully. Right now, now that I don't play baseball I play a heck of a lot of golf. And I would say I've gotten pretty good at it, almost to the point where I've thought about continuing to try to play a little bit of professional golf; maybe going forward next year, trying to start on that a little bit. I currently caddy at Dallas National Golf Club, so I'm around it all the time. To me, I have to – growing up, always playing a sport, I just have to be involved somehow in a sport. Whether it be playing or just somehow involved with some kind of competitive nature. It's just kind of, I guess, who I am and what I really enjoy doing. So golf has given me – it's totally different from baseball, because it's just individual, you don't have anybody else to rely on but yourself. So it's fun in that sense but I also miss the days of hanging with the guys, being part of a team, getting to hang out and spend your downtime with some of your best friends.

If golf doesn't work out, I couldn't tell you exactly what I would gravitate towards. I've really had a liking of sports talk radio. I still watch all kinds of football, I'll watch basketball in the wintertime and, like I said, I've gotten back into watching a lot of baseball recently. I think talking sports is something that will always come easy for me; it's not something that I really need to try and act excited about or try to get into. Like I said, it's very natural for me to do. So that may be something that I look for, maybe to getting into in the future. I guess I'm, in a way, just kind of waffling as far as what I want to do and set what I want to do. But I can pretty much guarantee you that sports will be involved somehow, one way or the other.

GG: I wish you all the best with that. Chris?

CK: Thank you.

[1:39:56]

CP: Just a few questions to finish up. I'm interested in what it was like to share an infield with Darwin Barney.

CK: [laughs] He was such a kid, even as he grew up in college; there was just pure joy. He never exuded any stress, there was no stress to him while playing. If he got out, he got out; made an error, he made an error. But it was always fun. And for me, I felt like in 2006, he felt like a little brother to me when we were playing out there, because we were constantly talking to one another throughout the game. Obviously you know Darwin, how much he likes to talk – or how much he liked to talk back then – and we would literally be having full conversations during at bats. And at times, I just wanted to be like, "Darwin, just be quiet for a little bit. Let's get through this inning and you can talk about whatever you want to talk about when we get in the dugout."

But he was so fun to play with, just in the sense of how much fun he had playing. And not that I wasn't having fun, but he exuded it, you could see it physically on his face and throughout his play. He wasn't afraid to show that side of him while he was playing. And so getting to play beside him that entire year was fun. And also kind of teaching him some of the things, I guess, that he took with him as he played another couple years, I know that he's mentioned to me a couple of times – and I'm very thankful that he's mentioned it – he said, "you know, you really helped me when I was younger, realize what it took to play and how to play in the manner that very accurately depicted what this program was about and the style of Beaver baseball." I love the kid to death. I absolutely loved playing with him and I'm sure everybody else did too.

CP: What was school like for you?

CK: School was difficult early on; it was really, really tough. As far as academics go, I was an average B student through high school. I think I was, naturally growing up, even athletically and in school, I was just naturally gifted with being able to learn quickly. And once I got into college, and courses and studies became fairly difficult, it was hard to just convince myself that I needed to put school first. I was so into baseball that I really, really struggled my freshman and sophomore year, to the point where I was close to getting booted from the school. There's probably not a whole lot of people that know about that, but it took an effort on Coach Casey's behalf and some people in the Compliance Department's behalf to help me get through that and to kind of, I guess, teach me how to be a student first. I was never a great student as far as grades go, and I think the biggest issue for me was I truly wasn't very interested in a lot of stuff that school was offering at the time.

Initially I chose a poor course of study early on, in Exercise and Sports Science. I don't think I really fully understood what I was getting myself into as far as what I was needing to do in the classroom in that field. Like I said, it was hard because I really wasn't interested in the sciences and all that stuff. So I struggled mightily for the first two years and then, when I switched, I switched to pre-Communications, and it still wasn't something that I was truly indulged in. I really couldn't find something while I was at school to be something that I strived to get better at. It was just something that I had to do to make grades and to stay eligible, just because you had to.

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Obviously looking back at it now, I wish I would have taken school more seriously. But I also wish that I would have done a better job of trying to find something that I could really lock onto and really be passionate about, because baseball was the number one important thing on my list, all the way through college. So I do wish that I would have taken it more seriously but you can't go back. But I think being so close to losing what meant the most to me at the time made me realize – it gave me a life lesson, moving forward, as to how to approach certain things in your life based on their importance and how to prioritize things in a proper manner, as I grew up.

CP: The last thing I want to ask you about is just, as somebody who grew up around here and was a piece of one of the crowning glories of this program's history, what is it like for you now to see where this program is at?

CK: Like I said earlier, I feel really privileged to have been in the timeframe that I felt turned the program around. I see the new stadium and I see all that stuff, and obviously I'm jealous because that's not what we had. But I feel honored that it's because of us, in a way, that that's what those kids have now. You get to pass on a little bit of your own legacy, your team's legacy, to the kids of the future that come here. And to see what they have now, it's fantastic; it's one of the best facilities in the country. To think, then years ago, I would have never, ever, ever pictured all the stuff that is available to

them now, as far as their facilities, as far as the workout rooms. Even the library and the university itself, there's so many opportunities that they have now, and I would like to think that we were a huge influence on that. It's really cool and really neat to have that feeling.

CP: Well Chris, I want to thank you for this.

CK: Absolutely.

CP: This has been very valuable and we wish you the best of luck going forward.

CK: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

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