



Steve Fenk Oral History Interview, August 12, 2014

Title

“A View From Inside the Athletic Department”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Fenk discusses his upbringing on a dairy farm in Tillamook, Oregon, his Beaver fandom as a boy, and his early interest in sports broadcasting, including a formative internship at KEX radio. From there, Fenk provides an in-depth account of his undergraduate years at OSU, including his academic progression, his contacts with numerous notable personalities in the OSU Athletic Department, his work with the OSU wrestling and basketball teams, and his memory of the campus climate at OSU in the mid-1980s. Of particular note are Fenk's recollections of his work as a color analyst for Beaver basketball games and his post-game responsibilities interviewing basketball coach Ralph Miller.

Fenk next recounts his tenure as an intern with the Pacific-10 Conference and his first professional employment at Montana State University, before describing his return to OSU in 1990 as Assistant Sports Information Director. In reflecting on his career at OSU, Fenk shares his memories of notable administrators and coaches, including Paul Risser, Mitch Barnhart, Bob De Carolis, Dennis Erickson, Mike Riley, and Oregon State broadcaster Mike Parker. He likewise provides a glimpse into daily life in the Athletic Department and lends his perspective on a number of memorable events in recent athletics history, including the 1998 Civil War football game, the 2000 Fiesta Bowl football season, OSU football's upset of top-ranked USC in 2008, and the 2006 and 2007 national champion baseball teams.

The interview concludes with Fenk's insights on various awards campaigns that he has managed and the Athletic Department's Everyday Champions program, and closes with his thoughts on the future of college athletics in a rapidly changing landscape.

Interviewee

Steve Fenk

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

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

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Okay Steve, if you could please introduce yourself with your name, and today's date, and our location?

Steve Fenk: Okay, and I'm looking at you, right?

CP: Yeah.

SF: Okay. My name is Steve Fenk. I'm an associate athletic director at Oregon State University, and today's date is August 12th, 2014.

CP: So we're going to talk a lot about your association with OSU as a student, and then within the Athletic Department.

SF: Okay.

CP: But I thought we'd start off a little bit first with some of your background before OSU. Where were you born?

SF: I was born in Tillamook, Oregon. I grew up there on a dairy farm, graduated from high school there, so in 1982. So, kind of was around people who always were OSU people on the Ag side of things.

CP: So your parents' backgrounds was in farming?

SF: Yeah, dairy farm. We had Holsteins, mainly. So my dad actually was involved with Oregon State a little bit in the Agriculture Department, maybe 20 years ago, or so. So he was very involved. He was on a board, even.

CP: So, what capacity was his involvement with OSU?

SF: I think he either served as an advisor—I can't remember exactly now, but I think he served as an advisor. He worked with a lot of people that I know, who actually worked with me in Athletics as volunteers up in the press box. He worked with a couple of those people, so it was always fun, and they knew each other, so. But he was always very involved with OSU, and they are still donors today.

CP: Uh-huh. What was it like for you growing up on the farm?

SF: It was great. I mean, you know, I developed a good, strong work ethic. You got to learn how to run machinery, obviously, and it's just, the world has changed so much now from when I was there. It's all robotics now, one of the few on the west coast that the cows actually get milked by robots, so. It's pretty crazy to go back there and see how much it's changed. It's still in the family. My mom and dad obviously don't run the place anymore. But it was great. I grew up right on Tillamook Bay, developed my love for fishing right there. And would have liked to stay out on the farm, just, my health—I had health reasons to get off it, so I just couldn't stay on the farm.

CP: Okay. The milk just goes straight to the Tillamook Cheese Factory?

SF: Yeah, I grew up shipping all of our milk to Tillamook, still do, Tillamook Cheese Factory. So always had good ice cream and cheese, of course, and that sort of stuff, so it was a—you know, a lot of things to do, a great place to grow up. The positive was—kind of a positive and negative; it was really close to Portland, so you could be in Portland within the hour almost, you know, on the outskirts, Hillsboro. So you could be in a big city. We used to go to Blazer games all the time, had season tickets and stuff, so back in the day, so. It was close enough to Portland to be really convenient, so that was awesome.

CP: Tell me a little bit more about the community, growing up, of Tillamook.

SF: Well, mainly dairy farmers, some loggers, but that was pretty much the makeup of Tillamook High School. You usually have some association with either industry, fishing a little bit. Tourism was just kind of really getting going, so. So a lot of hard workers, a lot of people go to school here. A lot of my classmates went to school at Oregon State. Some have matriculated back; others have gone on to other places. Some are in southern California, of course, like many people

do, but. Yeah, so it was a lot of fun. You know, we had a lot of common interests, fishing, ATVs, just that sort of thing—beaches. You'd go on the beach all the time, doing stuff.

CP: Do you have any siblings?

SF: I have two sisters. One is still on the farm. One of her sons pretty much runs it now. My other sister lives in North Carolina, so. She's actually retired, but they were big HR people in a big corporation.

CP: I assume you were interested in sports as a boy?

SF: Yeah. I played basketball a lot, golf. I was a golfer. Other than that, not really involved too much. A little bit in football, but it was mainly in basketball, golf type of guy.

CP: And did you grow up a Beaver fan?

SF: Yeah. Always grew up a Beaver fan, listening to Darrell Aune, the voice of the Beavers back then. Yeah, I don't know; I just was always associated with the Beavers. I'd watch them on TV occasionally when they were on then, but always had the radio on Saturday afternoon. Had it in the boat a lot, listening to the football games. Obviously, weren't too successful. [Laughs] But yeah, I do definitely remember watching—or, listening to Beaver games on the radio. And coming to campus a little bit. I came a few times with my mom and dad.

CP: So, do you have any standout memories from that time period of growing up a Beaver fan?

SF: I remember they used to have a Kiwanis Day on campus for a weekend, and bunch of Kiwanis would put together buses to take kids to football games and stuff. And I remember playing BYU, and they were nationally ranked, and had a really, really good quarterback, went on to play in the pro—NFL. And we beat them that day, and I was always—I always had kind of that memory, sitting in the old, wooden bleachers at Parker Stadium there in the end zone, and watching Oregon State upset BYU. So that was pretty cool. But yeah, just listening to some of the games, you know. [0:05:02] Even when I got a little bit older and had my driver's license, I would be listening to it in the car on the radio and stuff, driving wherever. And I remember the big comeback win against Fresno State way back in the day, when we were like behind 28-nothing. It was like the biggest deficit overcome at that point in the NCAA history, to win the game, and pretty much all did it in the second half, so.

CP: Uh-huh. How about basketball, any trips to Gill?

SF: Yeah, I made a few trips to Gill, but I remember just watching the teams back then. Ricky Lee, I remember him a lot. I remember beating Bill Walton that year that Walton came up and lost to both the Ducks and the Beavers. I remember that, watching it on a Saturday afternoon on TV. Came down a couple of times when they were really good, the Beavers were really good, in early '80s, number one, so. But yeah, that was fun times to watch the basketball team, and it was disappointing when they had to lose the NCAA tournament, crushing, so. But it was a lot of fun.

CP: And of course, at that point in time, football and basketball were pretty much it. Baseball was—it was around, but it wasn't really on anyone's radar.

SF: Right.

CP: Nor were any other sports, it seems.

SF: Yeah. Well, a lot has changed since those days, I mean, with all the ability to put everything on TV, and social media, and things like that. It's gotten a lot of the other sports have become more popular, for sure.

CP: Yeah. Well, tell me about your path getting to OSU from high school. You went to Mount Hood Community College, I believe?

SF: Right. Yeah, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I actually was—just growing up listening to games on the radio, my original path was to be into radio. And I got that degree from Mount Hood, and did a little bit, and I just decided it

was a little cut-throat, and you know, didn't see a lot of real good opportunities. And I thought, "Well, you know what? I probably should get a four-year degree."

And so it was just natural for me to come to OSU, because just growing up a Beaver, and being familiar with campus, and having—my older sister went to school here, and then I knew some people who were already in school here, in fraternities. So it just seemed like the good thing to do.

CP: And what was your academic progression at OSU?

SF: Well, I came here, and I was a little bit drifting around, and then got hooked up with athletics through Darrell Aune, because I did an internship with KEX back in the day, and that's how I got hooked up with athletics. And then I worked through a couple of advisors on campus and created kind of my own major, a little bit Liberal Studies-type major. And just got really involved with athletics doing back then what we called sports information-type things, and so it worked out pretty well for me. I had a boss, even though I was a student, who really liked me. And then I was able to kind of parlay that into some other opportunities.

CP: So you sort of tailored your own degree?

SF: Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, yeah. I took some classes that I would never have thought, oh, I would be taking kinesiology. But then you work like you do with athletic trainers, and they start talking injuries, and they go, "Oh, yeah, I know." And I could kind of figure that out just because of my little bit of background in kinesiology, because the major I was in, they forced me to take some hours in some other things. But actually it worked out fairly good, because I got to learn some things when the trainers talked that I know a little bit about what they're talking about. So, but I took a lot of, you know, writing and just general communications classes.

CP: Tell me about Darrell Aune.

SF: Yeah, Darrell was, he was quite the character. Again, when I was at Mount Hood, I did an internship with KEX with the news department, so I actually was there at like six am every day. Drove in from Gresham down to—then it was kind of southwest Portland. But it was a lot of fun. I got to meet a lot of the really big announcers of the day. Bob Miller's still on air; he was a really big-time guy even then. But Darrell was doing sports, and you know, every once in a while, I remember like one of the assignments they had me do was, "Hey, you need you to go over to the Blazer headquarters because today is the—the NBA draft is coming up, and they're going to do this big thing with interview."

I think Jack Ramsey was there still, Bill McKinney. But yeah, that was the year that they drafted Sam Bowie, and they could have drafted Michael Jordan, so. At the time it seemed like the right thing to do. Obviously, it didn't play out real well, but. But that's where I got to know Darrell, and then Darrell would give me tickets occasionally to a basketball game, so I would come down. And that was about when they were—the team was number one. So I'd come down, and Darrell knew some of the people, obviously, who worked at OSU athletics, and knew that I was coming down here, so that's how I kind of got hooked up in with being a student.

CP: Did you meet Bill Schonely?

SF: I have met Bill Schonely. Actually, he worked—he did a couple of fill-in basketball games for us back maybe ten years ago now, in Hawaii, actually, so it was fun to talk to him and all of his stories. So, but yeah, Bill's a great guy [0:10:00], and such a showman, but he's a really nice guy.

CP: Uh-huh. So, as a student you were working in the Athletic Department. Tell me a little bit more about what you were doing.

SF: Well, the other staff was a lot less than it is now, so I remember I was working with the wrestling team then. It was Dale Thomas was the coach then, who is one of the all-time winningest coaches and a hall of fame coach. And we hosted the then-Pac-10 Wrestling Championships, and the two full-time people were gone on a football trip. So as a student trying to run this big wrestling meet, and it was just exhausting because it was an all-weekend thing, and then I had to go to class and stuff. But that was one of my memories of being a student there.

And the other one was the year 1985 was the year we went up to Washington and beat the Huskies, and we were huge, huge underdogs. And the Washington Seattle media were just beating on Oregon State, "Shouldn't be in the Pac-10. Mayberry-type school. Should be in the Big Sky Conference," whatever. We went up there and beat them, and I was actually doing stats for Darrell and his press box, and that was just an amazing experience to see all of the Husky Stadium, huge, even then it was huge, and seeing all of those fans just shaking their head, losing to lowly Oregon State. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah. That was an iconic moment for that period of football. It was—

SF: Yeah, it was like really the one in that whole era that you could really hang your hat on as a proud moment to be a Beaver, for football, anyway.

CP: Yeah. What was the climate like in the Athletic Department then? Obviously things were not going very well in football. Basketball was still doing reasonably well.

SF: Yeah. It was a different atmosphere, for sure. It was old time, a little bit old school-type athletic department. Really great people, people who had tasted success from the '60s in football, and early '70s. Had good track teams in that era, too, a little bit. But it was a totally different atmosphere than it is now. But you could kind of see things were starting to slip a little as other schools put more emphasis on athletics. You know, Oregon even not so much wasn't doing that yet, but you could see like the Washingtons, and of course USC and UCLA were putting a lot of emphasis on athletics.

CP: Yeah. Funding was a chronic problem, and it only got worse with Measure 5.

SF: Yeah, funding it was a huge problem, and it just got worse and worse. Athletics skyrocketing; scholarships started to become more of a costly ledger in the budget. And yeah, it got to be just really tough, really tough for Oregon State to compete.

CP: Mm-hm. Working with the wrestling team, I'm wondering, did you get to know Dale Thomas a little bit?

SF: Oh yeah, I got to know Dale Thomas really well. I would come over to—back then his office was in Langton Hall, and I'd go over there as a kid, just kind of shaking, because there were horror stories about the guy, you know, but he was always super nice to me. I ended up being the public address announcer for his team for quite a—for the two or three years I was here. And he really liked how I did things, so he was great—great to me, and you know, I got to know a ton of the wrestlers, obviously, and the assistant coaches. Some of them were huge names. Some of them today still, a couple of them even go fishing with me still today, out in my boat. So I got some good relationships.

CP: Yeah. It sounds like you wore a lot of hats as a student.

SF: Yeah. Yeah, I did. It was fun, though. I probably put too much time into that and not enough into the studies, you know, but I got to know a lot of people, and that helped me a lot.

CP: Uh-huh. Well, you mentioned the Husky game. I wonder what other standout sports memories from your time as a student?

SF: Ooh, as a student? I was here for Gary Payton's freshman year, so there's a lot of great moments there, just watching him grow, and just, wow, this guy's going to be incredibly good. I was here when Jose Ortiz was one of the best basketball players we had, tall guy, kind of a power forward center player from Puerto Rico. I remember him quite well, playing, winning some big games then.

So I remember being—playing basketball at Dixon Center one day, and they actually put the game on the radio. We were at UCLA, and AC Green was playing, and I remember they put it over the PA, because we were—UCLA was way ahead of us. It was at Pauley Pavilion, and we made this huge comeback to get back in the game, and I think they almost won. I don't think we won, but I think we almost did. And everybody just stopped playing, you know, and everyone was just listening to the radio, looking up at the speakers and stuff. So those are the—the basketball are mostly the fun moments. Wrestling was some fun times, and football was always, you know, an event, but you know, it's usually not, didn't turn out real well.

CP: Yeah. Different environments, I'm guessing, between Parker and Gill at that time?

SF: Yeah, very much so. Gill there was, you know, students would line up overnight to get into the building and watch basketball games. [0:15:03] In football it was, they might, students might show up, and if they did, they wouldn't stay, so. Yeah, the atmosphere just wasn't that great around football, because, you know, it was pretty much the writing was on the wall was going to happen. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah. Did you get to know any of these basketball players? You mentioned some of the iconic names of that time period.

SF: Yeah, AC Green I still see, especially in Los Angeles when we go down there for events. I still see him a lot. I know Gary Payton a little bit. Some of the guys after I came back, I know a lot better than I did then, but Bill Sherwood, famous for hitting the three at the buzzer in Eugene to beat the Ducks in this huge comeback; I know him. Ray Blume, Mark Radford, I know those guys. So yeah, I know a lot of them. I mean, I see them every once in a while.

CP: Yeah. I've wondered what Payton's life was like in Corvallis. He's probably the biggest star since Terry Baker, for sure.

SF: Yeah, I would say Gary Payton was the biggest star since Terry. I mean, everybody knew who Gary was. He had that aura around him, you know. If you were in the same building, you knew he was there. Just one of those—one of those guys who just kind of light up the room.

CP: Uh-huh. How about Ralph Miller?

SF: Yeah, Ralph Miller. I remember when I was doing stats with Darrell Aune at home games, I'd do one-on-one with Ralph Miller after the game. And that was probably my scariest moment ever, dealing with him, because he was a pretty interesting guy, pretty rough. And so I'd go down there like right after the game. Of course, the one year I really did a lot with him was the year we had our worst record in the '80s, and we lost a bunch of home games. It was, boy, it was hard. It was hard going down there. I'm sure my hand was shaking when I had the microphone, but you know, I got it done.

But he was interesting. I just remember practice was walking across the stairs or across the walkways in Gill, and Ralph would be out there smoking and you know, barking at players, and, "Don't dribble." That kind of thing, so it was interesting to watch, and a totally different era. You'll never see that era again. But you know, coaches these days get in trouble for what he did, and they get fired. [Laughs] But he was barking, screaming, "Do that. Sit on the bench," that kind of thing. So it was an interesting time.

CP: Yeah. There's not a lot of smoking going on on the court these days.

SF: A lot of smoking and drinking, too, because after games on the road, it was just a given, anyone associated with the team, except for the players, but coaches, staff, whoever, donors, would all go to his hotel room. He usually had a suite. And we actually traveled with alcohol in a case, or someone would just go to the store and buy it. So I mean, everyone would stay up all night, and talking about the game and talking about the next day practice, or whatever, so. Like I said, different era. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs] So, as a student, you interviewed him after the games, that's what you meant, "one-on-one with Ralph?"

SF: Yeah, yeah, for two years. Yeah, it was crazy. And he didn't hear very well during the end of his coaching regime, so I had to really talk loud, or like explain it, and he really didn't care to talk about—talk with the media all that much. I mean, he respected some of the older guys, but of course, I'm just walking in there and I'm not even 21, trying to do this interview with him. [Laughs] It was pretty funny.

CP: Yeah, yeah. Well, another person who's had a very long association with OSU, who we've actually interviewed for this project also, is Paul Valenti.

SF: Oh, yeah.

CP: I'm sure you know him.

SF: Yeah. Oh, yeah, Paul. Yeah, he flashes back to a different era, too. Just some [laughs]—you know, he was pretty much a volunteer when I came back to OSU. We paid him a little bit, but he was more like he did the summer work crew for student athletes; we would find them jobs around OSU camps and stuff. But he was a great guy, unbelievable knowledge of this place. Just incredible stories, you know, one right after the other. And the people he knows, and just the people who still are in contact with him to this day. Just a super, super guy. Funny, and just, yeah, loved being around him.

CP: Yeah. Well, outside of the Athletic Department, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about sort of what the campus climate was like during your time as an undergraduate, what it was like to be at OSU.

SF: Yeah, the campus climate was a lot different. I mean, there was half the students. There was really not much going on in terms of building. It was almost a little—I don't know if sad is the word for it, but you would see people walking around with Wisconsin, and Michigan, USC shirts, sweatshirts. You could go to the bookstore and you could buy a Washington shirt. [0:20:00]

And so people weren't really, I would say, necessarily proud to be a Beaver. And that revolves around athletics a little bit, because when you're always getting beat. And back then the sports pages were so big, so everything would be about Beavers lose, Beavers lose-type stuff, in football, anyway. So it was a way different atmosphere. And the town was not nearly as big as it is now, not that it's grown a ton, but it's just kind of turned over, and it's a little more cosmopolitan, if you will, modern. But yeah, the atmosphere, and I tell people that all the time. I mean, this place is so much different even ten years from where I'm sitting right now, or even in this building, the Library, it's way different.

CP: Well, talk a little bit about Corvallis. Were there places that you hung out, where the students would go?

SF: There was a place called the—it was called the OM. It was downtown. It was right next to a bank, and it was kind of a long-shaped bar. And I just remember rugby players would be in there, and soccer players would be in there all the time. And it was just packed! I mean, you could barely get in the place. That was one of the popular places. There was a place called the Beaver Hut, which is now a Mexican place kind of on the way, a little bit out of town towards Albany, that was very popular. And then there was a place called Mother's Mattress Factory on 9th Street.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: And that was just kind of just ending its run when I got here, but it was still pretty popular. I'm trying to think of the other places. Toi Yen, which is now the Elks Club, was a big, popular spot, so. But OM was pretty much where everyone congregated.

CP: That is the Old Museum, right?

SF: Yeah.

CP: And it had a whole bunch of Beaver stuff on the walls?

SF: Yeah. Yep, yeah. It had all kinds of Beaver, you know, photos, and that sort of artifacts and that kind of thing. So it was pretty cool.

CP: You weren't in a fraternity, were you?

SF: No, was not in a fraternity.

CP: Where did you live?

SF: I lived what is—a couple of different places. Actually, three different places; they're all still here. Campusville, which is right next to the railroad tracks, and Maple Tree, which back then rented to students. I don't think they do that anymore.

[Laughs] And Park West Apartments, which is still around. So we used to get in huge water fights, and we'd just drill random people as they were going by across fences and stuff.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: Yeah, we got all kinds of trouble, so. But it was a pretty fun place.

CP: I hesitate to ask, but what else did you do in your social life?

SF: Social life in Corvallis? That was pretty much it. You know, we'd go out to the popular spots. I was still really into fishing then; even then I was into it, so I would go. I would leave on the weekends to go fishing, especially in the spring and fall. But yeah, we'd do a lot of that. I'm just trying to think of what other kinds of things. We'd go to the beach and that kind of thing, but usually would just hang around those places downtown. Yeah, boy, I can't remember much else what I did, to be honest with you.

CP: Yeah. Were intramurals part of your life?

SF: Yeah, I played some intramural basketball. Yeah, I did do that. I played hoops in Dixon a lot at night, and I played intramural basketball. Trying to think. I might have even played a little intramural flag football—yeah, flag football too, so. But it was a lot different time, especially outside, because we didn't have the artificial turf, so it was a lot more mud pits and stuff like that, but. But basketball was what was really popular. A lot of football players would play, and even some of the basketball players would play. So the skill level was pretty high, with the basketball players anyway. With the football players, some of those guys you didn't dare hit a couple of shots on, because from then on it was tackle basketball. You were getting a shot off, you were going to pay for it. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs] Well, who made an impression upon you during your time as an undergraduate, either as a professor or within the Athletic Department? Do you have somebody you felt like was a mentor, or somebody who really helped you along the way?

SF: Wow! Yeah, that is a really good question. Yeah, you know, this is probably not for the camera, but I do remember a professor, but I don't remember her name now. But I guess probably just working with some of the coaches I worked with. Dale Thomas was really a nice person. Some of the—Aki Hill was the longtime women's basketball coach; talked to her a lot. Hal Cowan, who was my boss then, you know, a lot of people say different things about him, quite honestly, but he was always a nice guy to me, and helped me get a couple of other jobs afterwards.

Darrell Aune for sure, you know, was such a nice guy to me. Some of the people at KEX—Jim Howe, who was also on the radio, broadcasting. Jim Howe really helped me a lot. He was a longtime news anchor, director at KEX, very famous voice in Portland. [0:25:02] I still talk to him today, see him at football games, and he sends me emails and stuff, so he's really a super-nice guy. I'm sure there's others, they're just not—Bob Graham, who ended up being on the radio team, too, super-nice guy, still talk to him a lot. Just a lot of different people.

CP: Yeah.

SF: And that was kind of the nice thing about Oregon State, everybody's real approachable. Still is that way, I think. I mean, they talk about the football team having a family atmosphere, but it's pretty much on campus anyway.

CP: Yeah. Well, it sounds like you were sort of fashioning your entire undergraduate experience at OSU to pursue a career in Sports Information. Is that accurate?

SF: Yeah, yeah. And it's evolved, too. Really, my original—like I said, my original plan was to be a broadcaster, and I did some of that. I was actually on the air with Darrell at basketball games for like three or four years as a radio analyst. So yeah, that was my original goal, and then I didn't even know this existed, what I'm doing today. And I've just kind of taken—went that direction a little bit, and just kind of moved up the pole a little bit, the totem pole a little bit. And it's evolved into so much more than what it was even, you know, ten years ago, with all the social media, and internet and all of that, and all of those kinds of things. But it's a lot different than it was. But, yeah. A lot more interest, a lot more people involved, and so a lot different.

CP: Give us a sense of what it's like to be a color guy on the radio.

SF: Well, it's actually pretty interesting, because I'm also doing a few other things, because I'm also doing my job while I was trying to do the radio. Yeah, it was good, you know, because I knew the players, and I knew what we were going to attempt to run, like coming out of an out-of-bounds, in-bounds pass. Like I say, I got to know the players; I'd shoot baskets with them a lot in practices and stuff like that, so I kind of had stories, background stories for them, and got to— one of the players that I was—well, two of the players I really remember the most, athletic-wise, Brent Berry and Corey Benjamin. Both went on to the NBA. Still talk to them both today. Very nice people, super, super human beings, and it was always fun to talk to them. And Brent was always around his brothers and his dad, you know, the very famous basketball player. So, just to be able to talk about some of the stories that they've told me.

CP: Yeah, yeah. The Barry family has quite a lineage in basketball.

SF: Yes. Yeah, and Brent was kind of unique, because he didn't have the greatest relationship with some of his—well, really his father, probably mostly, but still, his father would come around. And Brent was just such a charismatic player, you know, and a charismatic person. He was just great to be around. He would write stories on planes and stuff about some of his teammates, and share them, and it was just hilarious, but he was a really good guy.

CP: Yeah. Rick Barry, a very large personality.

SF: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I saw him just about a month ago. It was just great to see him, nice guy.

CP: Uh-huh, yeah. Corey Benjamin was an amazing athlete. He was here for two years.

SF: Yeah.

CP: And that was an optimistic time for basketball.

SF: Yeah, it was. That was a really optimistic time for basketball, and I know this is going to probably run along quite a few years later than this, but I remember when Corey came in, he came in with about four or five other players who ended up transferring out of here various reasons. One was homesick. Well, two of them were homesick. And they're both coaches now, one in the NBA. And we're a little bit in that same situation today with, we just had Wayne Tinkle, who is a great guy, and it's going to be one of those things where he's going to bring in, the next class of recruits might be five of the best seven players we have. And it was like that when Corey Benjamin was here, because we—it was a bunch of circumstances. We lost players for various reasons. So we were almost all freshmen one season, and the outlook was so good for the next two or three years after that. But again, we lost players because they were homesick, mom didn't want them being so far away, that type of thing, so.

CP: Yeah.

SF: Which was too bad, because we were going to have good teams. Late '90s we were going to have some good teams.

CP: Yeah, yeah. Well, getting back to you, you graduated from OSU, and it sounds like you had an internship that made an important impact. And then you spent some time in Montana State. Do you want to tell me about that time period?

SF: Yeah. I was fortunate enough to get an internship with Pac-12, or the then Pac-10 Conference. Got to know some of the leaders in the industry. Jim Muldoon, who was the vice president of communications then, played a huge role for me, just got me opportunities, was great for reference. [0:30:01] You know, got me hooked up going to San Francisco Giants games with some people. I worked for the Golden State Warriors and got to know some people there really well. Just did a lot of really cool things around the Bay area. So that created some opportunities for me.

Following that, I applied for several positions. Being a white male right in that time frame was not a good thing, because, just in that era. So I was fortunate enough to get an interview with Montana State, and Kansas, and the Montana State job just looked a lot more appealing to me. And surprised, because I got the job. I was the youngest person as the head of Sports Information back then in Division I athletics. Montana State was a I-AA football school, but I-A in everything else.

And I remember getting there late. I didn't get there until like July, so we had to do a bunch of promotional stuff, media guides, etcetera. The first game we played was at Florida.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: So you know, the first time I'm kind of flying solo is at Florida, and gator bait, and going to that swamp, and you know, 80,000 people, and it was just—it was crazy. And I just always remember that, going, "Wow." People are interviewing me about what Bozeman's like, and I've only been there like six weeks. I really don't know. Yellowstone Park's there, but at that point it was on fire, so everyone's asking me about that [laughs], those huge forest fires, but. But that was really quite the experience, going to Florida, so. I remember when I got promoted to the head position here, our first game in football was at LSU. And everybody was, "Wow, are you going?" And I said, "Well, I went to Florida already, so LSU's not going to be that much different." And it wasn't. It was fine. By then I was pretty experienced, so.

CP: Uh-huh. You were in Montana for two years?

SF: Yeah, about two years.

CP: And I assume that was an important time for you? You mentioned you were quite young.

SF: Yeah.

CP: You were in a position of authority?

SF: Yeah, yeah it was. I learned a lot on the fly. Thankfully, we had a lot of people. With Montana State, so much like Oregon State, the town, the school, very similar, a little bit smaller. The school was then; I'm sure it still is. But it was just an amazing experience. I wasn't used to the climate whatsoever, coming from the beach, and I went up there when it's snowing every day in the winter. It's just crazy. It was really different. It was beautiful. The people were great. A lot of people there were transplants from other places, so got to know a lot of people. As long as I said I wasn't from California, they were all fine.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: "Oh, you're from Oregon. I thought you were from California." So you know, once I said I was from Oregon, I was more adopted. [Laughs] So it was really fun. I met a lot of nice people. And you know, didn't really know how much fun I was having until I left there, and I realized, wow, I really had a lot of fun there, and met a lot of cool people.

CP: Yeah. Well, you came back to OSU in 1990.

SF: Yeah, yeah.

CP: Tell me about the decision to do that.

SF: Well, you know, I'm an ocean guy, so that was always attractive. I wanted to get back in the league. I would have probably went anyplace in the league, Washington, wherever. But they guy who was—Hal Cowan, who was the head of the department then, called me and said, "Would you be interested in coming back?" So, I did, and yeah, it's just been amazing. I can't believe it's been this long that I've been here, but it's been fun to see everything grow, I mean, the university grow in such a remarkable way, especially starting in the late '90s. It's a completely different place, and people want to come to school here now. I'm not sure that was totally always the case, but yeah, it's a lot different.

CP: Yeah. And your positions have changed over time since you've been back?

SF: Yeah, I've gone from associate director to director, and now I'm associate AD, and have a lot more responsibilities managing staff and such. So, yeah, it's been great. It's a great place to be, and you can go do what you like to do, buy a kayak, which I like to do also, and it's just, give you that lunch hour-type stuff. So I ride my bike to work quite a bit, so.

CP: I'm going to ask you about a couple of names from the past that I'm guessing you had some contact with, and the first one is Mitch Barnhart.

SF: Yeah, Mitch Barnhart. Yeah, he really started the transformation of athletics, from a purely athletic standpoint. He came in and it was, gone was the old school way, not that that was necessarily bad. But he was the modern approach, marketing, promotions, big, big deal, shake it up a little bit, let's have some flash, you know. So that was important. [0:35:01] That was an important time for us, and we were at a critical stage. And he definitely, he started the ball rolling a little bit, for sure.

CP: Hmm. Another person that a lot of folks credit for helping stem the tide, or change the tide, in terms of athletics, is Paul Risser. Do you have any sense of that?

SF: Yeah, Paul Risser was the first president in a while that actually had the perception that athletics was the front door of the university, right or wrong. There's a whole section of the paper, and that was before social media and the internet. But there's a whole section of the paper devoted to sports, everywhere. And so he really—you need to make people feel proud of their university, and certainly Biology majors would feel proud, and all of that, Chemistry, whatever, but athletics is—you know, we're on TV every Saturday, or now pretty much every night now, of the week, during the season, academic year. And Paul realized that, and that was a huge marketing tool. And football, he got football going. I mean, he was the one who invested in athletics to really help us start moving forward, and it's been—he was unbelievable. A lot of people credit him to really, probably almost saving the university, really, because I mean, he was about all of the entire university. But he was the guy who really helped athletics immensely.

CP: Mm-hm. What were your impressions of Mike Riley when he was hired in 1996–97?

SF: Yeah, I mean, he was a very popular hire. He was so well thought of as an assistant coach. John Robinson was coaching USC then, had nothing but terrific things to say about him. And Robinson was an Oregon guy. He went to school at U of O, but he always knew about Oregon State too, so. I mean, he had a lot of credibility to our fans, what he was saying about Coach Riley. And so, yeah, he was a tremendous, tremendous hire, and recruited a lot of the players that Dennis Erickson then inherited, and took it to another level. But Mike probably doesn't get enough credit. Mike Riley doesn't get enough credit, probably, for what he's been able to do, was able to do back then, and even now.

CP: Mm-hm. And he went to the NFL, and Dennis Erickson appeared out of nowhere.

SF: Yeah, out of nowhere. I remember the story. Dennis called Mitch Barnhart, who was the AD then, and Mitch thought Dennis was recommending someone. And the conversation went for a while, and finally Mitch said, "So, are you interested in the job, Coach Erickson?" He goes, "Yeah, that's why I'm calling." You know, it took them a while to figure that out. And Coach Erickson had some baggage. He had some issues, and some things in his background that weren't necessary all his doing. Some of them were. [Laughs]

So I remember Mitch talked with some people, some influential donors and football people, Steve Preece, Bob Grimm, those type people, and you know, "Should we go with Dennis Erickson? What do you think?" And everybody said, "You have to. I mean, he's going to bring in instant credibility. He's going to bring assistant coaches, and it's just going to be a different atmosphere." And it was a totally different atmosphere with Coach Erickson. I loved dealing with him. I really like the guy. I mean, he's one of those guys that barks a lot, but there's not much bite. You can be a little bit scared of him, or be a little nervous around him, but really, behind that kind of façade was something completely different.

CP: Yeah. I'm sure it was invigorating immediately for the department.

SF: It was huge. One of the greatest things I remember was the streak, when we broke the streak of 28 losing seasons against Cal. That place, that Parker Stadium then was just crazy. I mean, people were crying. It was just an unbelievable atmosphere. Then, the following year—well, we went to a bowl game that year. Then the following year we went to the Fiesta Bowl, and this campus was just on pins and needles, just going nuts, you know. So it was just an unbelievable exciting time, and it just, and then beating Notre Dame like we beat them. And just, what's this Oregon State about? And all of the sudden we arrived, you know?

CP: Mm-hm. Tell me a bit about Bob DeCarolis, working for him.

SF: Yeah. Probably a guy who doesn't get the credit he deserves, too, even when he was—he came with Mitch Barnhart, and really Bob was the guy, the nuts-and-bolts guy, to kind of help us get things turned around. Our budget was in

shambles, and the projects that he's tackled, expanding Reser Stadium in the economy that we did, during that era. He's hired some terrific coaches. He's invested. We've built, been able to build facilities. [0:40:01] Donors trust him. Super good guy, very loyal, hard working, just an awesome individual who deserves to be in the OSU Hall of Fame without question, or somehow highlighted. Because people talk about Paul Risser, Mitch Barnhart, Dennis Erickson, Mike Riley, Ed Ray, but I tell you what, Bob DeCarolis has done a ton for this university, and I've been very fortunate to work for him.

CP: Yeah. How would you describe sort of his leadership style?

SF: Yeah, his leadership style. He's a little bit—he's what we call a Michigan guy. So, he's pretty much straight-forward. There's really no gray area, but that's good. You know where you stand right away with him. It's like, "No, we're not doing that," or, "Yeah, do that." So yeah, it's pretty interesting that way. East Coast guy, Philly guy, so. [Laughs] So it's interesting how a Philly guy plays out in Corvallis.

So I think it took him a while, too, because the one thing that I've really told people, because I'm a native Oregonian, is in the fall, there are a lot of things to do. In Michigan, or Wisconsin, or some of these other places, there's—"What are you doing on Saturday?" "Well, I'm going to a football game." There's just no question you're going to the football game. Here it's like, "Well, hunting season starts, and fishing season's going pretty—okay, maybe we should go to a game. Or maybe not. Maybe we should go and do this." And it took a long—that takes people, really anybody here that's not from here, a long time to understand kind of the makeup of the state, and the traditions, and that sort of thing, so. It's different now; a lot of people come to football games. But still, there's some like, "Deer season opened today," so.

CP: Yeah. Well, somebody that I know, I'm guessing you can lend a lot of perspective on, is Mike Parker.

SF: Yeah, Mike Parker. Wow! I don't even know where to start. Probably not many stories are public-

CP: [Laughs]

SF: Public exposure, but yeah. I remember, I called Mike, and said, "Okay Mike, I need a quote from you so I can put out a news release that you've been hired as the new play-by-play guy." And apparently I jumped the gun a little, because he hadn't heard that from anybody.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: And he was shocked. And here's the Beavers hire this absolute huge Duck, 110 percent Duck, you know. Been to all of the Oregon football games for I don't know how many years, 20 years, something like that. Or Oregon basketball. He can name every Oregon football player. And so here we are hiring an Oregon Duck, and I just knew we were going to get lit up. And we did. We got lit up on the fan boards back then, kind of, "How could you, an Oregon Duck?" You know?

And man, he tried so hard, at the start of his career here, to say, "Look, I'm a Beaver now. This is my job." And he went overboard to criticize Oregon and that sort of thing, to kind of get him in the door with all of the Beaver fans, get them in their hearts. And he was successful, and people just love listening to him. I mean, I like listening to him, and I'm around him all the time. I see he's very emotional; he's very excitable, emotion on the sleeve of his shirt. And a lot of people come up to me at other places we're playing. I remember playing at Hawaii. I had a person, a medic, come up to me and said, "Hey, is your broadcaster okay? It looks like he's having some kind of seizure."

CP: [Laughs]

SF: And I said, "What?" I'm just looking at him. "Oh, no, that's just like he normally is, you know," or something like that. And no, he's a super guy, and he just is so loyal to OSU now, and he does a lot of things for the school. He's a master of ceremonies at a lot of places, or goes out and speaks on behalf of OSU at charity events and stuff, so. He's a funny guy. He's got some definitely quirky things about him, but he's a super good guy, and has OSU first and foremost, and it's been [laughs]—it's been fun, although crazy, being around him.

CP: Yeah. Yeah, you mentioned he's certainly emotional, he's also extremely articulate.

SF: Yeah, very articulate. Personally, I'm with him a lot for football. He used to travel for all the basketball games, so I wouldn't necessarily listen to him do those games, but I always listen to him in baseball.

CP: Mm-hm.

SF: And he is so good in baseball. I mean, he's good at the other sports too, but he's so good at baseball, and the stories. He knows the game really well. [0:44:59] Everybody always thought he should be at the major league levels as a broadcaster for baseball, he's so good at it. Just him calling the World Series Championships and stuff like that, it's been awesome to listen to him.

CP: Yeah. Well, fall football practices started pretty recently. I'd be interested to know what that's like for you, the practice regimen, and what your responsibilities are.

SF: Yeah, well, it's definitely changed in the last few years. Luckily, I have some loyal assistants who help me out, so I don't have to be out there every second of the practices. But things we do personally with video, and social media, and such has changed dramatically. We mic up players and coaches. We put Go Pros on them now, which is another—and some of the new technology. In another year or two there'll be something else we'll be doing. So that's interesting, to manage all of that. And then the traditional media, the *Oregonian*, the *Gazette-Times*, news crews, KEZI, Eugene TV, Portland TV—just trying to schedule all of the interviews.

For example, today we had Comcast SportsNet and a radio station in Portland come down and do a bunch of interviews for their shows, plus all of the other people that we have out there, so. Yeah, it's definitely changed. It used to be—Coach Riley is very open with practices, and that's not the case almost everywhere else. So it's a little more challenge for me just to keep everybody focused, and here's what we're doing. Otherwise if it's closed practice, we just do it in one area, do interviews and stuff like that, so. So it's pretty crazy. Pac-12 Networks, we had them over here last week, so I had to get them all situated and organized, and things like that. But it's good, you know. It's great for the program; it's great for the university, so. You just do what you've got to do. It changes every year.

CP: Yeah. So the YouTube videos that we see with the mic'd up coaches and the players with the Go Pros, those ideas are generated by your area?

SF: Yeah, yeah. My area, plus the coaches. We have a couple of really dynamic coaches and staff people who use it for recruiting. So a lot of that is dual-purpose. We use it for recruiting. People inside—it gets people inside the program, seeing how Coach Riley is, how our coaches are, the players are. And I think our fans really enjoy it, too, for sure. They get to see what it's like to be a football player here. We have one coming out, another video coming out tomorrow, I believe, a day in the life of one of our senior linebackers. So it should be a pretty good story. It should be a really good story, because the player in mind is an incredibly different individual than he was when he was a freshman, and just amazing maturity. So it should be pretty interesting.

CP: Yeah. And does your area do all of the production?

SF: I have video staff that does our production, yeah. So, and they're really very good at what they do.

CP: Yeah.

SF: And they put a lot of hours, and effort, and time into it, so. But you know, they like doing that, so that's—

CP: Are these students?

SF: Some. Sometimes they're students. Mostly full-time people. Well we do have students come in; we have some students that have gone in front of the camera even. I've always felt like I need to kind of help, if I can, the KBVRs and the *Barometer* people as much as I can, you know, to show them how the industry really works. And I feel like I'm kind of an instructor, too, I guess at some point, especially with KBVR people.

CP: Yeah. Well, you were there as a student.

SF: Yeah, yeah, exactly. That's exactly right; I was in that position too. So I try not to get too upset or anything at them.

CP: Yeah.

SF: Say, "That's really not how you should approach that. You should approach it this direction."

CP: What is game day like for you, football game day?

SF: Yeah. You know, leading up to football game day is as much hectic as actually game day is, but during game day, by then we'll have—ESPN will be set up. We work with all of the TV trucks. ESPN will come in with three or four TV trucks, plus a satellite rig. We'll get them camera locations, and things like that. There's probably 50 writers, another twenty local TV crew, plus another sometimes 100 ESPN folks running around there, plus all of the radio people, the scoreboard operators. So there's a lot of people that I depend on to do their job. I mean, everybody from campus communications, to my staff, to video staff, to our facilities operations people. [0:50:00] And yeah, there's always a fire. There's always a fire. Something, some wireless will go down, or somebody's frequency is interrupting our coach's headset frequency, and so we've got to track that down.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: It's always something like that. Parking issues, it's always something. But it's crazy. It's fun, though. It's a lot of fun, and it's really cool. I've been fortunate to go to so many cool places. I mentioned Florida earlier, LSU, just being able to go there and see how their game days are, and Nebraska, and USC obviously is huge, but some really cool places.

CP: What's the atmosphere like in the press box?

SF: It's pretty hectic. Up until the game everyone wants to talk, talk to you, what's going on, you know. Or they talk amongst themselves. It's a pretty loud environment. Just a lot of high energy, a lot of energy. And then once the game starts, everybody kind of sits into their spots, and just kind of does their job. We have a lot of people working on doing stats on a computer. Of course, now that's all instant, because anybody on their smartphone can get those, and ship them off to ESPN, life stats on ESPN, Pac-12 Networks, that sort of stuff, so. Yeah, it's pretty busy. So, but it's exciting, I guess.

CP: No cheering allowed, of course.

SF: No cheering in the press box. Yeah, that's a code that's been in the industry forever. I don't really get too upset if someone says something. I just kind of pat them on the shoulder and say, "Just kind of keep it down a little bit."

CP: [Laughs]

SF: But it's usually pretty good out there. People out on our photo deck get pretty excited, because they get out on our photo deck; they get a lot of the atmosphere from the crowd, so when they start going crazy, it's kind of hard for them to not. [Laughs]

CP: Uh-huh. Do you do basketball directly now, or is that in the past?

SF: No, I have an assistant do that. No, I don't do that much anymore. I'm involved, but I'm not a day-to-day guy.

CP: Uh-huh. Do you have any memorable interactions with the media that come to mind that you could share?

SF: Well, you know, I've met a lot of really incredible people, a lot of people that are on—the Ivan Maisels, the *Sports Illustrated* people, Stuart Mandel. I just saw them about a month ago at Pac-12 Media Day in Los Angeles. Bill Walton, which I know, Bill Walton was incredible. You think about this guy who played at UCLA and then the Blazers, could barely talk, and now he doesn't stop talking. But he knows your name. I mean, if he met you ten years ago, he would know who you were. Boy, just hard to say.

I've met so many people locally and nationally that I can call, and they'd say they know who I am, and they'll talk to me or whatever, but just yeah, incredible. Especially—we had Coach Robinson here, Coach Craig Robinson. Of course, the

tie to Obama, we'd have like ABC, the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and all of that, so. But yeah, I've met a lot of cool people who've started their careers even at Oregon State, or even at the *Oregonian* and have gone on to the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and all sorts of places, so. Very fortunate to meet some of those people.

CP: Yeah. I'm going to ask for your perspective on some of the memorable moments from recent, semi-recent athletics history. The first one I'll ask about is the 1998 Civil War football game, the double-overtime win.

SF: Yeah. Actually I was on the keyboard during that game, doing statistics; I was inputting every play. And yeah, the atmosphere was amazing. Probably still, to the year 2014, the best Civil War that has ever been played. It was just—Oregon State won the game, but there was a penalty, and Oregon tied the game. It was just an amazing, amazing—fans are on the field. You thought Oregon State had like—up until that point when the Beavers beat the Ducks in the 1998 Civil War, it was like the biggest win in Oregon State football in, I don't know, 28 years, probably 30 years, 25 years, you name it. It was the biggest win. There's no way it's ever going to get any better than this at Oregon State. I mean, we almost made a bowl game that year. We lost a couple of games by less than a touchdown; or three plays, we'd lose. I mean, we should have been in a bowl game that year, really. But you know, no one foresaw what was coming. That was just, oh my gosh, we went 5-and-6, and the whole campus thought it was like the greatest season ever!

CP: Yeah, yeah. I'm still amazed by the fact that the fans tore up the artificial turf.

SF: Yeah. Tore up the artificial—

CP: I can't imagine that's ever happened before or since, anywhere.

SF: Yeah, tore up the artificial turf. [0:55:00] And the original plan was to try to stop that happening, but there's no way we're going to stop 40,000 people from—it's just, it is what it is, and you know, enjoy the moment, because it doesn't happen here that often.

CP: Yeah.

SF: At that point.

CP: Yeah. Well, we mentioned the first winning season the next year, but the year after that was the major single season in OSU football history, really. Talk about that Civil War that year. That was a very high stakes game between two extremely highly rated teams.

SF: Yeah, and it was so interesting, because that game was going on, and everybody was—I believe the Huskies and Cougars were after us. And everybody was, we're like, "Oregon State wins, and Washington State could beat Washington." Because there's no guarantee, you know, that we were going to go to a high level BCS bowl. It was like, okay, if we lose a tiebreaker with Washington, unless Washington State wins, so that was—everybody had all of these scenarios played out, and it was—yeah, it was such a huge game.

I remember talking to long-time media people in the state, going, "Could you ever imagine the Civil War with the stakes like they are?" And I mean, we had—you name it, the media was there from all of the major publications, and print, and electronic media. It was an incredible time. And then to win the game, because back then in that era it was—the Northwest was the power of the league. It was Beavers, Ducks, Huskies. It's amazing. We all kind of beat each other, so it was a three-way tie. [Laughs] And it was just unbelievable that night in Corvallis, leading up to that game, even in Corvallis, was just electric. You know, it was just an incredible atmosphere, and everyone was saying, "When are we going to see this again?" The Civil War is never going to be for this high of stakes again.

Oregon State was just so recent from coming out from this horrible spell that everything was another milestone. We beat Cal in 1999. Well, that was the greatest win ever, you know? Then here comes the next season, and we've got this quarterback who was basically a manager.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: [Laughs] Leading us, and then we had some really high-level players too, so. Yeah, I mean, that's just an amazing, amazing run that year, and especially after starting off, where we almost lost to Eastern Washington to start the season. You know, there was no expectations, and all of a sudden it got a little better, and a little better. Then we almost made this huge comeback against Washington, and almost beat them. Then all of a sudden everybody's going, "Wow, this is—there might be something here." Then we just kept winning, and then we beat, we start beating USC, and then we beat UCLA.

And I remember we beat UCLA on the road, and we were coming back, going back to the airport listening to like these announcers on the radio, and they were just—postgame announcers, and they were just like, "UCLA, what are we going to do? We lost to Oregon State." We're all thinking in the car, "We might be pretty good. It might not be ULCA. It might be Oregon State's pretty good." And that's kind of when it kind of started hitting everybody, like, "Wow." And then you could sell your tickets. For any price, people want to go to the games, you know.

CP: Yeah.

SF: I buy a thousand tickets, probably wasn't enough, people going, so.

CP: Yeah. Well, so, it was announced that Oregon State was going to play in the Fiesta Bowl versus Notre Dame. I imagine the preparation for that on your end was pretty intense?

SF: Yeah, well just the day they announced that, because there was no guarantee. The Fiesta Bowl people were really playing pretty coy. And everybody had this notion that we were going to get kind of screwed up, screwed, because of Notre Dame, because everybody wants Notre Dame in their bowl game. That's instant sell-out. So everybody's going, "Yeah, I think Oregon State's probably going to end up playing in the Holiday Bowl or something like that," because the Fiesta Bowl, they were going to take Notre Dame and they were going to pick—I can't remember the other team, if it was Nebraska or Oklahoma, something like that. So then came that day, and then we kind of got—we got a call from the Fiesta Bowl, saying, "We're going to take you and you can't say anything."

CP: [Laughs]

SF: So then you're over there watching the players' reaction, because we had all of the players in the Valley Center then, and they had a bowl special where they would show all of the bowls, the Rose Bowls with this team, and blah, blah, blah. And they got to the Fiesta Bowl, and Notre Dame and Oregon State, and the whole place exploded. And so, like about a week later, the Fiesta Bowl had this—they had a team of volunteers that would come up, and they'd throw this huge party over in the Valley Center. Everybody was there, all OSU officials, and all of these bowl people and everything, and it was just a huge, huge deal. [1:00:00]

But yeah, back then we didn't have the indoor center, so we didn't really want—we wanted to practice outside in summer in Corvallis, so we actually went to Phoenix like two weeks before the bowl game and practiced at a—I think it was a junior college, might have been a high school. So that was an incredible, an incredible experience and just, Oregon State had never had that before. We really didn't know, what should we do? And what do you do on New Year's Eve and all that kind of thing. You have all of these big, high level functions the president and the AD are going to, and that stuff. So it was really exciting. And just, I remember having a pep rally in Arizona State's basketball facility, and our marketing people said maybe a thousand people will go up. So we weren't really prepared and it sold out. The place was packed. And they were shooting off fireworks in the building and everything.

People, we just drowned out Notre Dame fans at that stadium, at that game. We had so many people there, and it was just an amazing, amazing event for the whole university. And then after the fact, people on campus here were saying admissions went up, you know? Or applications to the university, just because of Oregon State, they're on the map now-type thing.

CP: Yeah, that was a very thorough win in that game, as well.

SF: Yeah, very thorough win. So we took a little heat over the penalties, but.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: But it was, yeah, and beating Notre Dame like we beat them, and of course, you know Notre Dame has a huge following and national prominence, and national media just fall all over themselves for Notre Dame. And then to hammer Notre Dame like that, and just to see what people were writing back east about, it was just crazy.

CP: Yeah. How about the baseball national championships, 2006 and 2007?

SF: Yeah, baseball, I mean, talk about coming out of nowhere. Really, Pat Casey was doing a great job. He was so influential in getting the south and the north to join into one league, because that would have never happened otherwise. Once that did, some of the south schools just were fighting it left and right. "We can't go to Oregon State because we'll get rained out. It's a waste of time, and what's it benefit us?" So to get that unified, and then Pat Casey just slowly building the program, and then more and more. He gets a lot of the Oregon kids that were not really recruited that highly and that sort of thing, so.

So, it just took off, and just some of the outstanding players we've had here that have gone on to the major leagues, and things like that, but. But yeah, the College World Series teams—the first year, in '05, we didn't win, but then the next two years we won the whole thing, and people were so excited around campus. And even Portland, we had a big rally after we won the first year down on the walks, and it was just amazing how many people came out and were excited for the team. And then, the *Oregonian* newspaper was just all over it, front page of the paper, that sort of thing, after some of the wins we had. And some of the dramatic wins we had, especially that second year we were there, were just, just amazing. How did we win that game-type stuff. You know, we'd get a clutch hit, or a clutch out, or some crazy play would happen, and it would benefit us, so.

And Pat Casey's done so much for the school, and he's so well respected, and people just love being around him in the program. When I grew up here as a student, I worked with baseball a lot too, and it was dreary, and we were playing Willamette, and Eastern Washington, Portland State, and nobody really cared. If it was a nice day, we'd get some people coming out to the games, but other than that nobody would really come in baseball. But it dramatically changed. Obviously, the facilities dramatically changed, and just the excitement, and it forced people to cover the baseball program. Now the media has so much thirst for information.

CP: Mm-hm, yeah. You were in Omaha for those three trips, I assume?

SF: No, actually, I have not made Omaha, just because of football stuff I was doing.

CP: Oh.

SF: So it was right back then. Just, today I could probably go, but I had a lot of football things going on. It's right at kind of a deadline for some of the football stuff we do.

CP: Mm.

SF: So, but I've heard it's awesome. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah. Speaking of football, the next year, number one USC came to town, and lost on a Thursday night on national television. [1:05:00]

SF: Yep. Boy, that year we beat USC when the Trojans were Number One, on ESPN. That was such a huge deal! I remember Mike Parker talking on the radio. I said, "I think we've got a chance to beat the Trojans." Fans are going to—we just got beat by Penn State, I think it was, and just, we weren't looking that good. We were just kind of floundering a little bit. And then Lyle Moevao and company had the big crew from ESPN here, Chris Fowler, Kirk Herbstreit, all of that crew. And I actually went down. I went by the announcer booth at the end of the third quarter and said, "Thanks, guys, for everything. Thanks for coming and stuff." He goes, Chris Fowler going, "I think—what are you thinking?" I said, "I wish we had a few more points on the board." [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs]

SF: And he goes, "Yeah, USC's coming." And I go, "Yeah, yeah, I know they are." So I went down to the field and we were ahead by six, I believe. And I was on the far end zone, just—I always kind of stand there when I go down to the field. Nobody's really standing there, and just kind of being in my own thoughts there, and just kind of watch it unfold. And we had punted the ball, and USC was pinned down like on its own one or two yard line. And I remember sitting there, and Sanchez went back to pass, and threw, and I was just perfect line of sight. And I just kind of said out loud, "He overthrew the ball." And he did; he overthrew his receiver, and Greg Laybourne was there, picked it off, and he was zig-zagging back right at me. And he got to the one, then we knocked it in. You know, we held on; as it turns out, we still held on. And I remember, I think that was the game that—I have to think about this. Who was the sideline reporter there? Well, I just drew a blank.

CP: Erin Andrews, maybe?

SF: Yeah, Erin. So anyway, Erin Andrews is the sideline reporter, and I knew her from a few other bowl games over the years that she's done, so we kind of knew each other pretty well. And I go, I said, "Erin, you probably want Coach Riley at postgame." And she goes, "Yeah." I said, "But you don't—I'm serious, you don't want to stand here, because all of that student section right there is coming down, and they're going to take you out." [Laughs] And so I kind of got her over to the end zone, and I told campus—there was a couple of campus security people there. I said, "You need to stay with her." And I told her, "I will bring Coach Riley. I will get you Coach Riley, so don't." And I remember I just about got trampled.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: And it was crazy, because you knew it was coming. And so it was crazy, and it was just a sea of orange. And it was on ESPN that night and the next day, and I remember thinking to myself, "Well, Friday, I'm going to have Friday off because we play on Thursday night."

CP: [Laughs]

SF: So I'm not really going to—but then, after the game, I said—actually, before the game—before the game I went up to Coach Riley, and I said, "Okay, you're going to have a busy tomorrow." And he just kind of looked at me like, "Why would tomorrow be all that busy? We play tonight." And I said, "No, we're going to win tonight, and we're going to have to do all these national media shows, you know. Tomorrow everybody's going to want you on. Dan Patrick's going to want you, and all of these people are going to want you on their shows the next day." And he goes, "Oh, okay." So I was just kind of joking with him, so.

Sure enough, after the game, I went to his office and said, "Okay, are you ready? We've got already two tonight." And so then I said, "Tomorrow we already"—you know, during the game I'm getting all of these texts, and calls, and stuff, from people saying, "Okay, we win, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I don't know how many he did that day, but he didn't—he did a ton of radio interviews and TV interviews and stuff, so. But that was pretty incredible. And USC's just had such a difficult time up here in recent memory, you know. They've lost some really tough games that have really hurt their seasons.

CP: Yeah. Was that the first game that had the sky cam on the wires?

SF: You know, I think it was the first time the sky cam was in there, so. So that was equally—just incredible shots, you know, to have that. And everybody was in orange, and all coming out into the field, so. Yeah, we used that for recruiting a lot. [Laughs] Then we had all these screen shots from *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN.com, and all the screen shots. We had *USA Today*.

CP: Uh-huh. Well, a couple of years later the Pac-12 Conference was formed, and the Pac-12 Network came after that. I'm sure that it's made a big impact on you.

SF: Yeah, Pac-12 Network has really made a big impact on the entire university. It's really enabled us to, of course, showcase a lot of teams that don't necessarily get on TV, but the ability to just kind of showcase the university. So we do a lot with the people on campus, the video people here on campus, Larry Pribyl and his team, to showcase different aspects of the university. Some of the things we're doing [1:10:00], you know, is maybe sometimes they have a hook with athletics, but we're doing something, Bob DeCarolis' Parkinson's Disease. Some of the research that's being done on campus with that. So we've done those type things. We've done some things, people with stuff that's been invented on

campus, or other things that have gone on. So yeah, it's been a big impact for the university, and it has definitely created more work, but our ability to showcase things has been great.

CP: Mm-hm. Well, just a couple more questions for you. I'm interested in the awards campaigns that you've been involved with.

SF: Yeah.

CP: Some successful ones, Alexis Serna, Mike Hass, Brandin Cooks, have won national awards.

SF: Yeah, I always remind people I'm three-for-three.

CP: [Laughs]

SF: If I can get people to that stage, you know, they do all the hard work. I just have to sit there and kind of just kind of push it a little bit, find ways to kind of get—because we're still, we're still Corvallis, Oregon, Oregon State, West Coast. Most of the voters are on the East Coast. Our games sometimes are late, so they're already in bed, not seeing us play. So that's probably my proudest moment in my job, is having those three guys win that. Because the experiences that go along with that are just super incredible. But you know, we start with, okay, Brandin Cooks. People are not seeing him play. So I always have our video team put together something, or have some infographic or something. I'll start firing it off to people that I've known, gotten to know over the years. I go, "Hey look, you know, I just don't do this every year. I'm not going to do it for just everybody, but this kid is really special," or, "These kids are really special. You need to really pay attention." And so that has been really cool.

I know Brandin Cooks won the Biletnikoff Award in 2013 by one vote. He won by one vote. And Mike Hass and Alexis, the years they won we had a losing record; we didn't even play in a bowl game. But those experiences that come with that, going with Brandin last year to Orlando for the ESPN Awards show, and being around his family, and his family is just—they're just awestruck by this. And I've kind of gone through it before, the red carpet treatment, and these huge balls, and ballrooms, and events, and things like that. It's a huge deal, and to see them be involved in it, to see his mom crying when he won.

And I got tipped, because actually I sit next to all of these Biletnikoff people. I know a couple of them really well from just the years when Mike Hass even won. And I sat down next to them. I didn't know. I didn't know he'd won. I had a feeling he did, but I didn't know that. And then I sat down with one of the guys I'd known for ever, and he kind of winked at me and gave me the thumbs up, so I knew he'd won. And it was so special, you know. We did a lot of videos and stuff with him. We got him backstage with a tie and everything, putting his tie and coat on and everything, so.

Yeah, and the same experience with Mike Hass too, and Alexis Serna, and they were great. And we went to the Biletnikoff Award banquet, which was a really big deal at Florida State; they held it at Florida State. And it's just a huge deal, a lot of fun to be around, and just, you know, most people will never get to see events like that like I get to see.

CP: Uh-huh. A campaign of a different sort that you lead is the Everyday Champions. Am I right about that?

SF: Yeah, Everyday Champions. That was thought up by our marketing team, and then so we started—we try to highlight an individual from every team during the course of the year. We're going to take a look at maybe revamping it again this year. And that's been—I've kind of—my assistants deal with it more now that I just don't have time to. But for a while there I was getting to interview them, and interview student athletes who I would probably never run across, soccer players, or a volleyball player. And it was really interesting to get to know them and some of the things they've gone through—you know, first one in their family to ever go to college, or overcame a childhood disease, or something like that. So it was just amazing to be around people like that.

And unfortunately, I don't really, other than the football student athletes, really get to be around some of the other ones, but when I do have that chance, it's just like, "Oh, this is why I do this." It makes it worthwhile to get to know these individuals that come from all walks of life, you know, Europe, Asia, inner-city. And then to see—again, I see mainly the football players, but to see some of the football players come into the program as true freshmen, and see where they

end up as seniors, I would have never guessed I would be taking that individual to Pac-12 Media Day. When he was a freshman, there was no way. I mean, it's a completely different person now.

CP: Mm-hm.

SF: A lot of that, that goes to our coaches. Our coaches really do an outstanding job. And of course, again, I'm with Coach Riley more than any of them, but I'm just—if you come play at Oregon State for Coach Riley [1:15:01], you're going to end up being in the kind of the Coach Riley mold, or you're going to fit his—I mean, even people who work with him, like I do. I mean, with Dennis Erickson, it was different. It was fine; I liked it. There was no problem. I had a great time with Dennis Erickson. I understood him, knew where he was coming from, but different philosophy.

So with Mike Riley it took a year to adjust to that, because Dennis would, say, be yelling at somebody, or be saying, "We're not doing that." And Riley would say, "That's fine, okay, we'll do that." [Laughs] So, different, different for sure. But yeah, the Everyday Champions program has been really good for us. I think people have taken notice of it, and just getting the opportunity to showcase it a little bit, especially in Gill Coliseum we do some really cool artwork and things like that, videos.

CP: Mm-hm. Yeah. Well, my last question for you is about the future of OSU Athletics in a changing landscape. Collegiate athletics is changing rapidly. Even in the last couple of weeks, there have been some pretty major changes that might be on the forefront. What do you see for the future of OSU, fitting within that culture of change?

SF: Yeah, I think that's a really good question. One that we ask almost every day over in Gill Coliseum is, "What does the new legislation mean? What if it passes? What does it mean?" Yeah, it's really different. Nobody really knows right now, because what's true today, tomorrow may not be. So, I mean, there's a lot of people just, how do we even approach some of the new things that are coming into effect? But I think what you'll see more of is student athletes will have a lot more say in what is, in their—with regards to their experiences, especially healthcare-wise, cost of attendance going to school, that sort of thing. They put in a lot of time, and the university benefits a great deal from many of them. They also—I mean the other side of the coin is they also have, a lot of them get a scholarship. So there's that balance. So there's that argument on both sides, for sure.

It's going to be really interesting to watch. I think Oregon State's in a Power 5 conference, so that's good. I mean, that's really, really good. So financially, hopefully, we'll be a little more self-sustaining at some point. And I think that probably will be the case down the line, but it may take a few years. But there's so much thirst for college athletics, football particularly, basketball, but football particularly. I just see it, it will continue to grow. Now, there's going to be some changes. There's going to be some philosophical changes to health care, and how the game is played. For sure, that for sure will happen, but. I just don't see it not continuing to grow, for sure.

CP: Yeah. Well, Steve, I want to thank you for spending this time with us and giving us some insight into the Athletic Department here at OSU.

SF: Well I appreciate the time, thank you very much. Go Beavs!

[1:18:19]