



Doug Oxsen Oral History Interviews, July 7, 2015

Title

“Remembering Coach Ralph Miller”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In his first interview, Oxsen describes his upbringing in the San Francisco Bay Area, his decision to attend OSU, his memories of campus life in the early 1970s, and his experiences of fraternity life and classroom work in Pharmacy and Business. He likewise comments on the atmosphere on campus during the years of the Vietnam War, recalls a series of major musical acts who played in Corvallis, and highlights the role that Gill Coliseum played the culture of campus outside of athletics.

From there, Oxsen turns his attentions to his playing days at Oregon State, with a specific focus on what it was like to play for Coach Ralph Miller. Memories of Ralph Miller are the primary focus of the interview. In particular, Oxsen reflects on Miller's coaching philosophies, his personality at practice and in games, and his demeanor away from the court. At the conclusion of the interview, Oxsen also discusses the team's off-season conditioning program.

Interviewee

Doug Oxsen

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

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

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: OK, today is Tuesday, July 7th, 2015, and we have the opportunity to capture the story of Douglas Reed Oxsen – Doug – OSU class of 1975. My name is Mike Dicianna, I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project. We're here in the Valley Library on the OSU campus. Doug, thanks so much for sharing your story with Beaver Nation.

We always like to start with a short biographical sketch of your early years, like where and when were you born, early family life, and what your parents did.

Doug Oxsen: Sure. I was born April 4th, 1952 in Honolulu, Hawaii, in Queen's Hospital. My father was a teacher at Punahou, and played some semi-pro baseball over there for a few years. So while they were in the islands, I was born, and I was the second child. And they decided that they didn't want to live on the islands, they wanted to be back on the mainland where their family was, so we moved to Walnut Creek, California, back when there were actually walnut trees and a creek. Now it's not so much that. But we moved there and lived there up through high school. And then I came to school at Oregon State in the fall of 1970. My father was a teacher, so he taught high school and community college. My mom did not work – actually, she worked really hard – she was a homemaker for three kids.

MD: Everybody has that significant memory – I've asked people about Pearl Harbor, the Challenger – people of our generation, do you remember when JFK was assassinated? Is that a memory that sticks?

DO: Yes. As a matter of fact, I know exactly where I was when I heard that: traffic patrol. I was in elementary school and I was out on traffic patrol duty helping kids get across the street, holding one of those stop signs. So it was during one of those sessions as a crossing guard that I heard about the assassination.

MD: Yeah, these memories that stick in everybody, generationally. I always like to ask those, because everybody's got one.

So how about your high school days? Any significant memories of high school itself? I know you were involved in sports.

DO: Yeah, I was always involved in sports. My favorite sports were baseball and basketball, but I did run cross country. I tried football my freshman year and learned you can get hurt, so I didn't do that anymore. So I ran cross country to get in shape for basketball and baseball, so sports was always real important in our lives. My father played baseball at Cal and was on the national championship team that Cal won when they beat Yale with President Ford – er, not Ford, President Bush, the older, was on that team. So anyway, my father taught me how to pitch, he coached our Little League team. So baseball was always a big part of our lives, but I always loved basketball. Basketball is fun to even practice, so doing those kinds of things were easy for me to do.

But education was always important in our family, so I always did the homework, did the schoolwork. We lived on a cul-de-sac, so a lot of kids on the street, and very fortunate that it was a stable neighborhood. People didn't move in and out. So life-long friends, because we lived together from age two to when everybody went off to college. So tremendous memories of playing around the neighborhood, whether it was street football or off the curb or climbing trees or digging underground forts or having dirt clod fights, it just went on and on and on. It was a great experience and I just feel very, very fortunate that it was a stable neighborhood with people that became, really, lifelong friends.

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MD: You had a fairly successful high school basketball career, so you were recruited out of high school, I assume.

DO: Yes.

MD: Were you looking at other schools? Or how did that whole process work?

DO: Well, back in the day it was a little different from today, but I had some success in basketball. My coach in high school was Doug Pederson, and he was an Oregon State grad in the mid-'50s. He knew Coach Anderson, Jimmy Anderson, they knew each other. So unbeknownst to me, there were some conversations between Coach Pederson and

Coach Anderson, and they saw me play a few times. I was recruited by Cal, Washington State, University of the Pacific – they had a pretty good program at that point – and a few other schools. But those were the ones that I would have considered. I wanted to play at a recognized school, recognized program. As you know, in that period of time, the Pac-8 was arguably the best basketball conference in the country. Some of our friends in the ACC – North Carolina – might have argued with that.

But it was a very, very good basketball program. It was the height of UCLA's run and Oregon State – I've got to brag about Oregon State – I didn't realize this at the time, but Oregon State was the only school to win a conference championship for a fourteen-year period during that period of time when UCLA was just winning everything. I had a very brief conversation with John Wooden at one point when I was down and stopped in and saw him on an unofficial visit. They were recruiting a guy named Bill Walton who is arguably one of the best players to have ever come through the Pac-8. He was much better than I was, so that recruiting conversation ended quickly.

So the recruiting process. My first airplane flight was from San Francisco airport, because I grew up in Walnut Creek, as I said. And so, flying from San Francisco up to Oregon on my recruiting trip. So that was a pretty neat experience for me, first airplane ride. So that was a process. But most of the recruiting time was with Jimmy Anderson, Paul Valenti, his staff, because he was the coach in the late-'60s, and then he retired and Ralph Miller became the head coach. And my recollection is Ralph Miller became the head coach, it probably would have been late March or early April, 1970. So once I heard that Ralph was the head coach – there were a couple of reasons why I decided to go to Oregon State. One is I loved my visit here, when I came. Loved the campus. It felt comfortable. The town, it felt comfortable. The coaching staff was really, really nice. I really liked Coach Anderson. And Oregon State also had a Pharmacy school, and Pharmacy was the area that I was interested in studying. And so that was important to me.

Also, Oregon State was a ways away from Walnut Creek, but not too far away.

MD: Not like going clear across the nation.

DO: Yeah, not like going all the way across the country. So I felt it was important that my parents could come and see me play. Being in the Pac-8, obviously we were going to play Stanford and Cal every year. Oregon State, they could drive up too. They could drive to L.A. schools. But I wasn't so close that they would be on top of me. So I think for all of those reasons – oh, the other reason was Ralph Miller being the coach. I believe at that period of time, his teams at Iowa and Wichita State had beaten UCLA. I think their record was 4-0 against UCLA. So if you can't play for UCLA during that period of time, it would be good to beat them. So for those reasons, I decided to come to Oregon State and I've always felt like it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. It was tremendous.

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MD: Well, let's key in on your time as a Beaver. We'll focus on athletics in a while; I always like to try and get some campus life stories. So coming as a young freshman, what were your first impressions of being, like I say, "I'm a college student," how did that feel?

DO: For me, I don't remember it being a difficult transition. As I said, in our family education was real important. I was used to doing all my homework, I was used to academics as being important. It's just something I grew up with. I had gone away to summer camps in the summer and so it wasn't like I'd never been away from home. So I didn't feel a big change along those lines. And I must say, we aren't talking about athletics now, but you automatically, in athletics, have a family. So coming here, it wasn't like I didn't know anybody. Embracing your teammates and being with them gives you an immediate community which is very helpful in making that adjustment.

There were two kids from my high school that came up here, one with me. So there were a couple of people that I did know from high school. So that helped. And I settled into Wilson Hall, and I think I was on the fifth floor, I think I was on the fifth floor of Wilson. And I made good friends with people in Wilson. Eating in the dining hall – eating's always been important to me – so spending time there, just made some really good friends around those meal times. So again, I feel just very fortunate and blessed to have met good people, and that eases transition.

And then you learn where the library is, you learn where your classes are. Time management was not a big issue for me. I knew that if I was going to be successful at Pharmacy and basketball, I'd better take advantage of every minute possible. So in between classes I found my way to the library or some place to study. We certainly had fun on Fridays and Saturday nights and doing those kinds of things, but it was important to stay focused on what you were doing. So I guess that was my experience. I didn't do a lot of extracurricular things during basketball season. During the spring, there was intramurals, so I did do the intramurals. I became part of a fraternity house my sophomore year, so I moved into the house from Wilson Hall, sophomore year.

MD: And that was?

DO: Delta Tau Delta. So I had a tremendous experience in the house. Again, a lot of friends, a lot of connections. And one of the things I remember doing, or having time to do, is the IFC Sing – Interfraternity Council Sing – which, I totally loved it. I like to sing; people may not like to hear, but I like to sing. So getting involved in the IFC Sing, we did it in conjunction with a sorority, so that gave me an opportunity to meet some girls, which is always a good thing. Our fraternity house did well academically, it did well in intramurals. I remember joining the fraternity as a sophomore but in my pledge class, with all the freshman, gave us an opportunity to have some competitions with some of the upperclassmen that were a lot of fun to be involved in. Just being in a fraternity, you start doing activities that take you away from what the sports were. And so, house dances and various different social functions that were built into the fabric of the fraternity house broadened my perspectives and broadened my experience a little bit more.

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The sleeping porch, that's always a priceless experience. So some of the stories of being in the sleeping porches when some people want to sleep and other people don't want to sleep, and some of the things that are said along those lines are just priceless.

MD: And those stories go clear back to the turn of the century.

DO: Oh, I'll bet they do.

MD: They do, because sleeping porches have been a part of fraternity life for as long as we've had these buildings around here.

DO: Yeah. Well, and it was a tremendous experience. I did find though that, after a while, I got an apartment after living in the fraternity house for a couple of years. And the sleeping porch for me, because of the demands of playing a sport and staying up on my academics, rarely did I stay up after 10:00. Because all of my classes were in the morning, because you had to get it done so you could grab something to eat and then get to practice on time. Because practice was always 2:00 to 4:00, and you had to get there early to get ankles taped and get yourself ready to go. So carrying a full load, you've got to get some sleep. So that wasn't always easy to get.

But one of the other things that I enjoyed about the fraternity is your meeting people from all over the place. In our particular house, we had quite a few people from Pendleton and eastern Oregon which, I had no experience growing up with that at all. The agricultural background – not that everybody was in agriculture – but that type of community, I had no connection there. Friends from the Portland area, all the sudden you're making really solid friends so you can go and visit their families. I would say that my best life-long friends are either teammates or fraternity brothers. Those bonds never end. One of the fraternity brothers was the best man in our wedding and I was in his, so very special experiences that happen just by living there.

MD: You're listed in a couple places as a Business major, but your goal was Pharmacy?

DO: Right.

MD: So is that a Pre-Pharmacy type thing?

DO: There were, I guess the cut – some of the things, as a kid, you don't know, you're just living life, right? But after the sophomore year – I was in Pharmacy for two years, and I had to make a choice at the end of two years whether I

was going to continue in Pharmacy or continue in basketball. I was fortunate enough to, at the end of two years, I think, they make the cut to get into maybe what would be considered pro school for Pharmacy. And I believe I was number seventy-eight out of eighty-one that they took. So I barely made the cut, is my recollection. But labs were from 1:00 to 5:00, starting junior year, and practice was 2:00 to 4:00. So I just remember, I couldn't do both, and it was really, really hard on me physically to do both. Just the studying and everything. So I said, "well, if I want to be a pharmacist really, I could come back and do pharmacy," but I couldn't always do basketball. That clock's going to run out pretty quickly. So I chose to go with basketball and I switched over to Business. I had a great experience with Business. And as life happens and things go, that was a totally good education and good career, and I never looked back on the pharmacy. But having the good science background really has been helpful in life and in the things that I eventually did in my career, there were some science elements to what I did. So that experience was very, very helpful; I feel like it was good, broad-based experience.

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MD: Oregon State served you well.

DO: Absolutely.

MD: You were in college during the early to mid-1970s, which were still some turbulent times in the United States. Vietnam was still in process and the whole counter-culture, do you have any memories of what that was like as far as your perspective versus everybody else on campus? Were you part of the counter-culture?

DO: [laughs] No, maybe my hair grew a little longer than I was used to, but I would not have been confused with a hippie, that's for sure. The Vietnam War would have been in the back of everybody's mind. The draft was going on during that period of time. I had a 2-S deferment as a student, so it didn't immediately affect me. My overall classification was a 1-Y, which meant that I was too tall to serve; if memory serves me right, I think 6'6" or 6'6" might have been the cutoff, so I was too tall. So 1-Y, they said, "if our country gets invaded we would call you up, but other than that, you aren't going to be there." And my draft number was like 254, so I wouldn't have gone anyway. But during that period of time, you have friends who weren't as fortunate. Their draft numbers were much lower, and I just remember that I could trade my number with some of the people that I knew that had to go through the Vietnam War.

So I was certainly not an objector. I didn't get involved in the anti-war movement. I grew up in Walnut Creek, which is just outside of San Francisco, and our next door neighbor was a California Highway Patrolman. So every day, he had to go into Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco. So he was spit on, he had rocks thrown at him, he was abused any number of ways. So I guess I would have been influenced by some of the stories; I mean, I just didn't feel like that was right either. So on the turmoil side, I would say I had that kind of feedback more than the radicalized side of things. So when I came on campus, it was easy to stay apart from that because of basketball and because I was focusing on studies. I didn't really get involved with that.

It was also a period of time of racial unrest too, so it was really an interesting period of time. So I was probably a little more involved on the racial side, just because of playing basketball, there were teammates that had to make some decisions – were they going to continue to play or were they not going to play – because of some of the pressures they were under to not play. It was a period of time where there were relatively few blacks on campus, and if they were, they were athletes. I remember we played BYU one year and there was a backlash against BYU by the Black Student Union, because of their racial stand as a church and a religion at that period of time. And again, I don't remember all the details behind this, but I remember there was going to be a circle around the court and they were going to hold up play. And then the wrestling team came in and they were going to do an exhibition, so they moved their mats out on the court. It was an interesting experience. But again, I didn't get involved in all the details, but I just remember that was a turbulent time and just kind of going, "whoa, what's going on?"

MD: Yeah, you were kind of one of the people – you were part of the "silent majority."

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DO: Probably. Yeah, I would have been the silent majority. I didn't grow up with any racial animus at all. I remember my mom telling me one time about, I watched some of the riots and water cannoning of people down in the South, and I made the comment, "boy, that's so evil. Why are they doing that?" And I just had no concept of that. Walnut Creek, I think we only had one black in our school. But I went to Oakland during the summers to go and play basketball on summer leagues, because that's where the better basketball was. So you go and you play, and I never had any issues at all. My teammates were my teammates. They had my back on everything, and I was in the minority. Very turbulent time, Mike, but I was treated well by my teammates, they made sure I was taken care of. My tires never got slashed. And looking back on it, they never said anything, but they made sure I was safe going from the gym to my car. Nobody ever messed with it. Other people's cars got messed with, so I'm sure there was word out that, "hey, this skinny white guy is ok." And so I just never had any of that animus or anything that I would have wanted to protest on one side or the other. My nose was on the grindstone, doing my thing.

MD: One of the things, I see it all the time in the yearbooks during your time: concerts. Big names – Three Dog Night, Donovan, we've had everybody here. During your period, all the names that are now oldies but goodies, but you saw them.

DO: They were great. I'm glad you brought that up, because I never missed a concert. Going to those concerts were fantastic, and the one that I really remember influencing me was Gordon Lightfoot. And I think it was because his style of music, the folk music, was easy to sing with. I dabbled with a guitar – and I'm talking dabbling – but I had this gentleman who is a friend and a roommate and we were best men at each other's weddings, and he played the guitar more. Gordon Lightfoot, we really had an appreciation for his ability to play and his music. But we would not have missed a concert. It was great. Now I'm trying to remember all the ones who were there, but I think Donovan was there, Dionne Warwick was there.

MD: It's all the big names, because before the time that they played these huge stadiums, they would come and play Gill Coliseum, at colleges.

DO: That's right. And Gill Coliseum, don't underestimate Gill Coliseum, because when Gill Coliseum was built in 1949, it was the largest arena west of the Mississippi. And so Gill Coliseum hosted regional basketball playoffs, because it was a major arena.

MD: The only facility that could handle it.

DO: That's right. Now in my period of time, the Memorial Coliseum had been built up in Portland. So you think about these artists, they probably did a double hit. They hit us and then they went to Portland and on to Seattle, so that's what people did. And Gill Coliseum, with 10,000 people – or, one of the memories, was the largest crowd ever at Oregon State was during that period of time. I believe it was Cal versus Oregon State, it ended up Oregon State lost 101 to 100, one of the most amazing games I ever witnessed. I did not play in that game because freshman could not play, and then I was redshirted. But Cal was highly rated, had five guys on their team that went on and were drafted into the pros, and they won on a last second shot. But Gill Coliseum, it was standing-, or sitting-room only in the aisleways. And I think it was up over 11,000 people, but the fire marshal put a stop to that. I think it was during my freshman year because, by the time we got up from the locker room, after showering after the freshman game, the only places to sit were in the aisleways, all the way up to the ceiling. So the place was packed. Anyway, Gill Coliseum was a big facility back then.

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MD: Well, Gill Coliseum was a big part of your life in general.

DO: Yeah, it was.

MD: It's part of campus life during this period especially, the culture was – I've heard that some of the protestors, when they wanted to protest, they went down to Eugene because that was where you did that.

DO: Right.

MD: It didn't have that kind of huge presence on campus that you would expect in a college campus.

DO: Which is probably why I really don't remember a lot of the protests or marches or any of that.

MD: Well, Beaver basketball is near and dear to your heart...

DO: Yes. I'm sorry, before we start down that road, you were talking about how big Gill Coliseum was in the life of the university. We've talked about IFC Sing, we've talked about concerts, but that was where people went and registered, ok? So you go to Gill Coliseum and there were tables in Gill Coliseum, and you picked up your computer card for the classes that you want. And you go and you register and you had your little card, and they would say, "yeah, there's enough room in this class so we'll sign you up for this class at 8:30 in the morning," or whatever. So that happened at Gill Coliseum. That's also where graduation happened, was at Gill Coliseum. So in addition to athletics, it was used for a lot of campus life.

MD: Yeah, you come in the door and out the door there. And back in those days, it was standing in line.

DO: That's right, you'd stand in line.

MD: And that's why they always say at graduation, "this will be the last line you'll stand in."

DO: That's right.

MD: It doesn't have the same connotations now with online registration. People have no clue about what classes, just even twenty years ago, had to go through just to their classes.

DO: That's exactly right.

MD: It was an all-day event.

DO: It was an all-day event and it separated the people that were serious from not serious. Because if you were serious, you made sure that you got there early. Because otherwise, you may not get the class. And I was fortunate that, as an athlete, we could register early, because it was important to get classes that were in the morning, because anything after noon – I think the latest class I ever had ended at 1:00 or something.

MD: And then you had to rush to get over.

DO: Had to rush to get over and grab a little bit to eat, which was always tough, and get your ankles taped and get up on the court. But you just couldn't have a late class. So we were fortunate, as an athlete, to pre-register. But if your class was full, it was full, so you had to take it some other time and that's not easy to do.

MD: Yeah, it's still the same way today. But it is not easy to put together a schedule, it's just more difficult when it's on an IBM punch-card.

DO: That we took over to the computer lab, and I remember classes – I took a computer class – and you would have to program some problem. And so you'd have this stack of cards that were your problem to solve whatever problem you were doing. And oh, every once in a while you'd see a kid who would drop the stack of cards. Oh my gosh, so if they got out of order, you had to take all these hundreds of cards that you had programmed and put them back in the right order, so that it would run your program right at the computer center. And you would give them your stack of cards and they would say, "we'll be done in two hours," or "come back in five hours" or whatever. It was just so much slower, but back in the day, we were excited about that.

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MD: Oh yeah, it was cutting edge.

DO: It was cutting edge. Talk about cutting edge, the Hewlett-Packard or Texas Instruments calculator, it was when the calculators were first coming out. So you would get a scientific calculator that did sine and cosine and then tangent, and square root was a big deal, you know? But they were \$400 to get one of those. So when I came in, it was slide rule. As

I left, it was these Texas Instruments. But I, through all my science classes, we used slide rules. So you needed to know your slide rule and then you needed to know your calculator as you were going up and through.

MD: You're right in this transition.

DO: Right in the computer age. Now, don't ask me if I could still use a slide rule. I still have it, but whether I could use it to give you a good answer, I'm not sure. But anyway, that's an aside and I'm sorry for taking you down a different route.

MD: No, no, no. This is all solid gold.

Any other special reflections as a student, aside from athletics, that really stand out?

DO: I just had a great experience here. The professors were good. I just had no negative experiences. I remember going to smokers. You talk about the smokers, a lot of people wouldn't know what the smokers were, but it was an organized fight kind of deal.

MD: The Phi Deltas.

DO: Yeah, the Phi Deltas organized that every year. But I believe that may have been stopped during my period of time. I believe that by the time I was a senior, maybe they weren't doing smokers anymore.

MD: Yeah, that was a period of time when fraternities in general, the Greek system, was under great change; hazing, for one thing.

DO: Yeah, that was changing a little bit. There was still a little bit of that. Ours was never really bad. They also created some good memories too. But then, that whole thing was in the process of changing. A lot of change in the United States during that period of time.

MD: So your career as an Oregon State basketball player, storied as it is, and Coach Ralph Miller, is of great interest. I have very little on him as far as stories. Now he came to coach here in 1970 and he retired in 1989, and one of our greatest coaches, second winningest coach in history. So what are some of your best memories of Coach Ralph Miller?

DO: Ok, while I'm thinking about it, I'll throw this in. Oregon State in 1970, there were only three schools that had won a thousand games, ok? And Oregon State was the third winningest program in the United States. A lot of people don't realize that. So highly successful basketball programs through Slats Gills era. I remember Paul Valenti had in his office, "Teams That Have Won A Thousand Games," and Oregon State was number three on that list. So Oregon State had a great heritage.

So when Paul retired, Ralph Miller saw the opening, saw the heritage at Oregon State, saw this as a good opportunity to be in the Pac-8, a well-respected basketball conference. He came to Oregon State from Iowa, and the previous year, they went through the Big 10 undefeated. They had a very, very good team. I'm not solid on this fact, but they might have been to the Final Four. And I believe they were the first team to ever go through the Big 10 undefeated. So, highly successful at both Wichita State and at Iowa. But the opportunity to come to Oregon State was there. I think Jean, his wife, who is an absolute sweetheart of a lady, I think she was getting a little tired of the cold Iowa winters. And I think Ralph was a highly competitive person, highly competitive person. And it's not inconceivable that he said, "I want to get to the Pac-8 so that I can beat John Wooden." I think that there was a good, healthy rivalry between those two, and Ralph wanted to beat them. I don't want to overplay that, but I do think that that may have factored in to some of the thinking.

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So Ralph came here and he brought a new style. His team at Iowa was "get up and down the court," averaged close to a hundred points a game. His style was full-court press all the time, and run. But he believed in high percentage basketball. He believed in make fewer mistakes; take care of your backboard; execute, execute, execute; and do it well. Concentrate more on what you do that what the other people are doing. Heavy emphasis on defense, turning the other guy over and making sure you don't turn over. Press from start to finish. He would harass, harass, harass, harass, until they would say, "here, take the ball, I don't want to play anymore."

So that was the style. That was the way that he was coming into – over time, I've heard people talk about, "oh, it was a slowdown style." That was not our experience. We did not slow the ball down. If memory serves me right, we averaged seventy-five to seventy-eight points a game which, now, that's ten to fifteen points higher than what teams are averaging now. So we full-court pressed all the time and there were a few times that he would back off and he wouldn't do it. But given every opportunity, we would get the ball and run. He wanted to keep pressure on the other teams all the time. He wanted us to be in better shape than any other team that we played. And the world of basketball has changed – back then, there weren't timeouts every two minutes like there are now; you have media timeouts. Back then, there were no media timeouts. They might have had two timeouts a half, ok? So you could get the other teams tired and wear them down by harassing, harassing, harassing. So by the end of the game, hopefully you're in better shape than they are and they'll make more mistakes that you do. So this is the philosophy.

He did not believe in dribbling the ball gratuitously. He called the pass "the chief weapon of attack." A classic story, every year there would be some hotshot, as he would call it, some hotshot from California that would come up and thinks that they could dribble. So he would say, "ok, let's have a race." And the guy would take off from half court, dribbling the ball as fast as he could, and Ralph would take the ball, pass the ball down, and of course, his pass would get to the end quicker than the guy dribbling the ball. Point was made. And so his teams became legendary for the movement of the ball, passing the ball, passing and cutting. Fast break, get the ball off the backboard, get it wide, start the fast break and go.

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And so, in his practice sessions, he did some interesting things. He had a series of drills to start every practice and he didn't care whether it took the whole two hours of practice just to do these drills that I'll explain to you, because he incorporated into the drills what it takes to be a successful basketball team. He never did gratuitous running at all. We never did lines, where you just run. If you were going to run, you did it with a basketball. You were going to do it because you had to learn how to run and catch and pass when you're tired. And so, by getting better at doing that, you create fewer turnovers and you become better as a basketball team. I remember one of his favorite expressions was, "one bounce into oblivion," where some guy would – you've got the ball on half court or you're trying to break the press, you're trying to do this, and somebody would take the dribble and pick the ball up. It stops your flow, it stops your game, and he didn't like that.

And I would also say that we never practiced longer than two hours. I can't think of ever, in five years, that we practiced longer than two hours. As the season went on, practice time dropped off, but you were going the full two hours. He would stop twice during practice to shoot free throws for maybe five minutes, but during that period of time he would say, "why stand and shoot free throws for half an hour at the end of practice?" If you wanted some extra work, fine. But in a game, when are you shooting free throws when you aren't tired? Never. So we would have two – actually, I guess there would be three, because we would shoot at the end of practice – but you would shoot free throws for a couple of minutes and then you would get back after it. But again, you're doing things that are going to help you be better when you're in the game.

So this series of drills that I was talking about: he would start with lay-ups, and you would have to do twenty from each side without dropping a pass, without making a dribble, and without missing a lay-up. If you dropped a ball, missed a pass or missed a lay-up, you started over. Started from one. So this was true of every one of these drills that we did. So we did left hand, right hand, then we did where you split the post, where you have your two lines up in front, have a post man come up, and then you split off the post. But same thing – if you make a mistake, you start back at one. And then we did full court rush, is what they called it, so you stay in your three lanes, up and back is one. We had to do fifteen of those in a row without dropping a ball, throwing away a pass, or missing a lay-up.

Then we had to do three-on-three full court. And you had to do – I can't remember the number, but it was significant. But you couldn't, again, you could not let the ball hit the floor, turn the ball over, or give up an offensive rebound. Or you start over. Now, three-on-three, not giving up a rebound, that's not easy to do. But it made sure that you learned how to screen out people, it made you aggressively go out after the ball, because you did not want to do that set again.

So I think, in my five years, there was one day that it took us less than – or the shortest that we ever did was thirty-five minutes, and we made one mistake in all of those drills. Other days, it could have taken you forty-five minutes or fifty minutes. And literally, he did not care whether it would have taken all practice because, you can see, you're getting in shape, you're executing when you're tired, and you have to focus. If you don't focus, then you're going to mistake and then

you're going to start over. And that's a great motivator. He didn't have to yell at us, he didn't have to. He did, but he didn't have to.

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Other things that he started with was, you always started practice, your warm-up was a defensive position drill. So you had to get down in a defensive stance and it was a minimum of five minutes, and he got us up to the point where we would do this for twenty minutes. But you were in your stance and you would go left, right, forward, back, and just switching direction, holding your defensive position for that period of time. So you get good at defensive positioning, you get good at shifting your feet, moving your feet, not crossing over your feet – all these things you need to be good defensive players.

MD: And that's just warm-up.

DO: That's your warm-up. One time – my senior year we had a very, very good team, we ended up going to the Sweet Sixteen that particular year. But we got in trouble for something and so he called us into the gym and said, "get your shoes on, let's go." And he did defensive drill for like forty-five minutes. And he said, "ok, see you at practice on Monday." He didn't say anything else; he didn't have to. But he wasn't mean about it, he wasn't evil or anything, but he built a work ethic and we were better defensive teams than everybody we played, virtually. And we learned how to play aggressively and it made us a better team. But then he also pushed the ball, and back door plays and running your offense. We didn't have a shot clock back in the day, but I'll guarantee you, we wouldn't have gone past the shot clock very many times, because very few teams can play good solid defense for thirty, thirty-five second, forty seconds. You'll break down, you make mistakes. And so you learn to take advantage of other teams' mistakes.

Offensively, he felt it was the responsibility of the receiver to get open for a pass. It's not the responsibility of the passer to make the pass. So again, it's high percentage basketball. If you're standing there and you aren't making yourself available, it's harder for the guy to make the pass, which leads to a higher chance of turning the ball over. He taught, you never leave your feet unless you know what you're going to do with the ball. If you're jumping up, thinking you're going to make a pass, he would call that a showboating kind of thing. Don't do it, because if you're in the air and somebody's in your passing lane, you're going to come down and that's a travel. Or you're going to shoot up some garbage shot or you're going to turn the ball over or something. So that was a no-no.

MD: Yeah, wasted movement.

DO: Wasted movement. Why not make one more pass and make it easy? That's basically his feeling. Phil Jackson talks about the triangle offense, well a lot of that is sealing people off, moving the ball, creating triangles that give you the opportunity to create an advantage.

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He didn't like bounce passes at all, and that was his cardinal rule. If you threw a bounce pass, whoo, you would hear about it. The only time he would allow a bounce pass was on a back door play, because if the ball comes to the high post, and you're doing this against pressure – the other team is trying to pressure a wing – you flash the post person up, you inlet the pass here, this guy back doors to beat the pressure, and there's nobody behind him because your man has come up with you. If your man doesn't come up, you turn around and you've got a little fifteen-foot jumper. But he allowed the bounce pass there, because he felt that it was an easier pass to make, because there's nobody behind the guy but your man might be on you up here, and so the bounce pass is going to be easier to get through. If you threw it any other time, you would probably find a spot on the bench. He had rules and he held to his rules. And so that was one of those rules that you would probably have an opportunity to sit next to him on the bench.

That kind of boils it down in a nutshell. We spent very little time, on a weekly basis, preparing for other teams.

MD: Yeah, watching game films and coming up with strategies, because you just stuck with the basics.

DO: Yeah, it's more important that you know how to play. I mean, they would spend a few minutes, but the amount of time that people spend watching everybody else now, you could see Ralph's thinking from the standpoint of, ok, they

watch films on you, you watch film on them, if they're going to play you and they see your tendencies on defense, they're going to adjust what they do to play against you. But you don't know what those changes are going to be. So you may come up with this great game plan for what they've done all year, but they may not do it the same way because they've scouted you. So he felt it was much more important for us to have solid defensive principles, to know how we were going to play. Know whether your guy is left-handed or right-handed; does he like to dribble or does he not like to dribble. Some of these basic things, you would want to know. Does he like to turn to his right or turn to his left – those kinds of things on an individual basis, yeah, you would do that, you would want to know. And you might have some basic things, you would say, "ok, I think we ought to play behind this guy in the post, I think we're ok overplaying one way or another."

But spending time running through patterns for long periods of time – maybe fifteen minutes on a Thursday. Games, back in the day, we played Friday and Saturday. Now it's Thursday and Saturday – now they play every day of the week, there's always two days in between. Then it was you played Thursday and Friday, which was tough when you play the Washington schools, because that's a long way to go. So there wasn't as much time to prepare.

MD: Now, you got to travel by bus?

DO: Some plane. We did that. I don't remember massively long bus trips.

MD: So if it was far enough for that, you would fly.

DO: Yeah, you would fly. The Pac-8 or Pac-12, it's not easy to drive to different schools.

So that was the philosophy and it was hugely successful. He's a hall of fame coach and there's a reason. If you don't turn the ball over, you don't give up a lot of offensive rebounds, you take care of what you're supposed to be doing, you're going to win most of the games.

MD: How was he on the sidelines? Was he flamboyant or was he quiet? Did he run the game?

[0:59:45]

DO: Yeah. And he was an intense competitor, he was an intense competitor, he hated to lose. Hated to lose. Whether that was a game of pool or a card game or a basketball game. And so that came across. And he was a stickler to his rules. You weren't going to do your thing. If you did your thing, you'd find your way to the bench. He would be hard on you, and some people left the program because they didn't want to do that, but that happens at every school. There's always conflicts between a player and a coach. But he was consistent in terms of what he required. But you were going to do it Ralph Miller's way or he was going to let you hear it. And at practice, he was not easy; he was very hard. But I think the great coaches are hard, and if you want to instill a system that you believe in and you want to be successful, guys need to play it. And they need to play hard. And if they aren't used to playing hard all the time, then you aren't going to be successful.

I've always felt that if you could separate what Ralph said from the way that he said it, you would have been very successful within his system. I know that there were times when I went home from practice, after he got on me, and you'd almost be in tears thinking, "I at least can tie my shoes right."

MD: But not according to him!

DO: Not according to him. So there's time like that.

And I think that there were times that it took a certain personality to not be afraid to make a mistake. Because in his system, if you made mistakes, you knew where the bench was. So if you weren't a person who could accept the criticisms and play through it and accept what it is, if you're tentative, then you aren't going to be successful either. So where that tends to manifest itself is more towards the end of close games. And Oregon State has lost some games that we shouldn't have lost at the end of games, and you can't totally – I'd have to look at the game film again on some of those – but I know that in some of the games that we played, you started to play to not lose instead of to win. And in situations where you have people that are afraid of making a mistake, then, if you're trying to freeze the ball for example, you better have

somebody who wants to come to get the ball if you're hesitant. Or you better be willing to step up to the free throw line and make your free throws.

And this isn't true just with Ralph Miller, but it manifests itself with the harder, more demanding kinds of coaches; some of that stuff might be a little more prevalent. The flipside is that, if you have a coach who's not demanding, you never get to that position. You're already behind and you're going to lose. So the style and the way you play allows you to be ahead by ten points with two-and-a-half minutes to go.

And I talk about Ralph being competitive, and if I'm jumping around at random, sorry for that. But I remember my sophomore year – and I was redshirted, so it was my third year in school but I was a sophomore – we played two Big 10 teams in the Far West Classic. One was Indiana, and Indiana had a very, very good team. They went on to be undefeated one season, and then lost one game in '75. But this particular team, they were loaded. Well, we beat Indiana with those guys in the Far West Classic. And then we played Iowa and this was the first time that Iowa had played Oregon State since Ralph left. So I don't know all the details about Ralph leaving, but it was the shortest pre-game talk ever. He walked in to the locker room and he said, "gentlemen, you will not lose this game," and turned around and walked out. So we said, "ok." [laughs] So anyway, he full-court pressed the entire game, never called off the dogs, substituted very little, and I don't remember the final score but we beat them by somewhere around fifty points. It was one of the worst losses in Iowa's history.

[1:05:58]

MD: A statement.

DO: It was a statement, and Ralph had no compunction at all for doing it. He was highly competitive. One of his goals was – I talked about his relationship with John Wooden – his goal was to force UCLA out of their press, because UCLA was known for their 2-2-1 full-court press. They were very effective at it, great athletes, they would turn teams over five or six times in the first ten minutes of the game, they would execute, they're ahead by ten or fifteen points and the ballgame's over, because they wouldn't make mistakes. So Ralph's goal, every time we played UCLA, was to get them out of their press. And we were good at that, because we passed the ball and we attacked, offensively. So John Wooden pulled out of the press because we were able to get some easy buckets. They were probably better, athlete for athlete, on the half court, because they had Bill Walton and Keith Wilkes and all these guys who went on to play in the NBA. So anyway, we could have some success in the open court, getting some easy buckets by attacking.

Other things that Ralph, kind of his rules, if you had a three-on-two offensively on the break, you either take the ball to the hole and score or you decide to pull it back out. I remember one time, one of our teammates came up on a three-on-two and this guy was a tremendous shooter. Tremendous shooter. And on a three-on-two, he pulled up from what today would be a three-point shot, and Ralph – I remember this because I was sitting next to Ralph on the bench – he says, "that better go in." [laughs] The shot went in and Ralph turned around and sat down, but had that shot missed, that guy probably wouldn't have played for two games. But that was one of his rules. And again, it's high percentage basketball. Why would you pull up from twenty feet and take a jump shot when you have numbers? So he wouldn't do it; that was one of his rules.

So on the court, what was he like? Ralph smoked constantly. He smoked all the time: during practice, before games, in locker rooms. I mean, it was a different time, totally different time.

MD: He even smoked during the game, probably.

DO: Well...

MD: Or he was busy.

DO: During the game, he wouldn't. But I guarantee you he would during halftime or before the games. So it was a different time. People now, looking at this, might go, "wow, he smoked? Are you kidding me?" But he smoked constantly. So he would, at practice – Gill Coliseum was configured differently than what it is today. The seats that are on the south side now that are orange seats, they're pull-out bleachers. And then, back in underneath, there's some offices and concession stands and that kind of thing. Back in the day, the seats were on large platforms that had wheels, castor wheels,

underneath them. So the whole set of seats would slide forward out from underneath the grandstands. So it was cavernous back in underneath with these seats that were just rolled in for storage. So Ralph would sit up in those seats, at times, during practice. And all you could see was the lit tip of his cigarette as he was smoking his cigarette, and it would be lit up. And one of the trainers was always responsible for giving him the number ten can that he put his ashes in. So he would smoke and he would give-

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MD: -all the directions with a cigarette in hand.

DO: -instructions with a cigarette in his hand. The locker room, there would be times you would go upstairs to do your warm-ups, and then Ralph always wanted us to come back down for his last comments that he wanted to make to get us ready for the game, and you would walk in the locker room and Ralph had been smoking. Other people, administrators, were smoking too. So you would walk into the locker room and there was all this smoke [makes coughing noise]. I mean, I exaggerate a little bit, but not a lot. So that was there. And I remember many a lecture in that locker room with the cigarette, and he'd shake the finger at us. So it was just part of the drill.

And again, not shocking for the time. We weren't going, "oh my!" People smoked. People smoked. And so we thought it was a little strange before warm-ups to come back in the locker room before you were going to play.

MD: How was he away from the court on a personal basis? Was there two different people there?

DO: Well there was but let me finish one other thing on the coaching side, and that is, during timeouts, there's no question who was in charge of the timeout. There wasn't a lot of – now you'll see a group of coaches get together and talk about various different things and then they'll come back and talk. I don't remember a lot of that. Ralph was – my sense is, timeouts were shorter. Ralph had things that he wanted to say and he let it be known what he wanted to say.

He wasn't one to make a lot of adjustments, at least with our teams. He didn't make a lot of adjustments. He might get on you about, "you need to get around the guy," you've got to do this, you've got to do that. I remember one timeout, I took an ill-advised shot in a game and he didn't have to say anything, he just gave me the eye for probably five seconds during the timeout. That was all that needed to be said. But he was in charge of the huddle and whatever he said went. And it was always direct. Ralph didn't beat around the bush. He said his opinion of what it was going to be and that's the way it was. At the end of the year, you would always sit down with him and he would give you a critique of what you did and what you ought to be working on. I remember after five years, the last time, "well Oxsen, we had a pretty good career, things were good, but I still think you took too long from the time you caught the ball, you weren't ready to shoot, to get that shot. We tried to repair that for five years and we never did get it right." He was always coaching.

Now, Ralph away from the court, it was a different personality. He would give you all the time in the world. I remember coming back and visiting him after I graduated, and he never seemed like he was in a hurry. He would always spend time talking with you. I remember on plane flights, there was one time that we flew to New York and we were flying back – it might have been that trip or it could have been Kentucky or Michigan, but it was a long cross-country trip – and he would come back in the plane and was talking to people, the guys on the team. And he was pointing down, "down there is Mount Rushmore," something that would be of maybe interest, or he hoped it would. We were still a bunch of eighteen to twenty-one year old kids. But he would give you all the time in the world.

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He loved to talk, he had a lot of different philosophies, things that he would talk about. He played with – the Paul Valenti Varsity O golf tournament was something that started in, probably the early '90s, late '80s, something like that. So the Varsity O lettermen's club had this golf tournament and Ralph played with our group for a couple of years. So a few of my teammates, and then Ralph joined us, and at that point he was getting older. He was a really good golfer. You'll have to do some research on Ralph, but if my memory serves me, he won the state Kansas golf championship, and on the same day, or on the next day, there was a track championship and he won four events in the track championship the same day. Tremendous athlete. He held the record for touchdowns in a game at – I can't remember where he played college ball now, it was Nebraska maybe?

MD: Yeah, something like that.

DO: I think it was Nebraska. But he scored four or five touchdowns in a college game and held the record there for years. Tremendous athlete. We used to his drive many times on that round of golf. So late into his life, he was still there.

Had a home at Black Butte. We would stop by, he was always out there and you could talk. If you talked to people that traveled with the team, I've talked to many of them afterwards, they just said they loved spending time with Ralph and just sitting there and talking. Jean was just an absolute sweetheart. He would invite us over to his house, the people that weren't going home for Thanksgiving, he would invite us over to their house for a meal. He was just always great. I wouldn't say he was going to be a warm, milquetoast grandfather, but he was certainly a different persona that what he would be on the court. A stark difference. And I don't remember, really, conversations that – if I was seeing him off the court – conversations...it wasn't like he would have gone back or tried to bring up court conversations or what happened in a game or criticizing or critiquing after the fact on anything that would have happened with basketball, when we were having conversations off the court.

MD: He separated the two.

DO: Separated the two. And from hearing stories that traveled with the team, quite effective at that. They really appreciated any time that they had together.

A couple of stories that I think would be interesting. Ralph Miller came in 1970. Nobody, other than Jimmy Anderson – he brought in all coaches that were from outside the area, other than Jimmy Anderson. So that was a connection. But we had an assistant coach named Dave Leach who played for Ralph at Wichita State, and he was in charge of our pre-season conditioning. So conditioning and weight training and all that stuff was so different. In the early '70s, basketball players didn't lift weights, because John Wooden didn't believe in lifting weights, and if John Wooden didn't believe in lifting weights, nobody lifted weights. So it was a period of time where that just wasn't part of the basketball culture at all. So there was no lifting of weights. In the off-season, Dave Leach might have slipped us a piece of paper and said, "well, if you want to do something, here's something you might think about."

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Off-season conditioning programs: in the spring, you came in and played pick-up basketball games. Now it's 24/7 on this and there's weight training all the time. But there was a track outside of Gill Coliseum where the intramural fields are now, so in the fall, Ralph says, "ok, I want you working with Coach Leach, he's going to get you in shape for the season coming up." So we get out to the track and Dave – because he was a Midwest boy and he had a Midwest accent, and he says, "boys, we're going to run some 220s and 440s today." So we get out on the track and we start running, and guys were finishing what would be the 220 on the track and the coach is reading off the time, "23, 24, 25, 26," as we were coming around the track. And then we started doing 440s and he started reading off the times, "54, 55, 56, 57." So he comes back in, and after a couple of days, Coach Miller asks him, he says, "well, how are my cherubs doing today?" And Coach Leach says, "you know, I don't know if we're going to have much of a basketball team, but we're going to have one hell of a track team."

So after a week of this, Dave Leach went down to Berny Wagner, who was the track coach at the time; just a legendary track coach. So Coach Leach says, "you know, I've got my guys on this track, right out there in front, but the times they're running are just really, really good." And Berny Wagner says, "well, that's a five laps to a mile track." It was an intramural, just "get the guys running" kind of track, so it was five laps to a mile, and Dave Leach thought it was a regular-sized track.

MD: No wonder you guys were so good.

DO: Yeah, boy we were fast. We hated Coach Wagner from that moment on, because now all of the sudden, we had to run the full distance. So anyway, that was fun. And having Ralph say, "how are my cherubs doing?" I could totally see Ralph doing that.

Talking to an assistant coach, graduate assistant, one time he says, "my first experience with Ralph on practice was, 'coach, it's 1:30, practice starts at 2:00. I don't have a schedule for the practice.' And Ralph says, 'listen, as long as you're

here in this program, just make sure you're on the court at 1:45 and that's the only schedule you're ever going to need to know." So he could be gruff and direct, and he was going to run the show. If he wanted those drills to last an hour and a half, they were going to last an hour and a half. It just didn't matter and Ralph would run it whatever he felt like he needed to do.

MD: Well you had an eventful career in basketball. You lettered in '73, '74 and '75. Now you said you redshirted, you had knee surgery as a freshman/sophomore?

DO: Yeah, I did. Actually, freshman year, freshmen couldn't play.

[1:24:42]