



Yvenson Bernard Oral History Interview, September 12, 2014

Title

“Sonje Ayiti: The Improbable Life of an OSU Legend”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Bernard describes his upbringing in Florida, including his parents' struggles as Haitian immigrants and the impact that Haitian culture made upon him and his brother as youths. From there Bernard reflects on his early development as an athlete, his mother's death, and the major impact that her passing made on his family, both emotionally and financially.

Bernard then discusses the circumstances by which he decided to attend Oregon State University and shares his memories of adjusting to life in a very different part of the country. A detailed review of his college experience follows, including Bernard's insights on influential coaches and teammates, memorable games, social life, and academic work at OSU. He also notes his father and brother's continuing struggles back home in Florida during this time, and his efforts to assist them throughout this period of difficulty.

The remainder of the session is devoted to Bernard's life after his OSU playing days. Major points of discussion include the disappointments that he faced in pursuing a career in the NFL, the four years that he spent in the Canadian Football League, and his leadership of a major relief effort following the Haiti earthquake of January 2010. Bernard also expresses his pride in his brother's achievements as an NFL player, the good fortunes that have since blessed the Bernard family, his and his brother's continuing outreach work, and his return to OSU as a coaching intern.

Interviewee

Yvenson Bernard

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

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

Transcript

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

Yvenson Bernard: Yvenson Bernard, Oregon State, September 12th, in the Oregon State Library. [Laughs]

CP: All right, so we'll talk about your whole life, especially your association with OSU. I'd like to begin at the beginning, in Florida. Where were you born?

YB: Boynton Beach, Florida. It's in Palm Beach County, Florida, kind of a small town. South Florida is kind of huge and it merges all together. So, kind of a neat town growing up, and it's very sports driven. You know, a lot of the kids I grew up with, their only way, access out, was playing sports.

CP: Uh-huh. So it was kind of a tough neighborhood?

YB: Yeah, tough. [Laughs] Especially being immigrants, my mom and dad being immigrants of Haiti, kind of made things a little more difficult than usual, I guess.

CP: Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit more about your parents' backgrounds. It's a pretty remarkable story.

YB: Yeah. From Haiti, Port Au Prince, and seeking the American dream. So, when they were young—I want to say 19 and 25—they took a boat, or they flew to Jamaica, because you could fly to Jamaica without a problem. And so from Jamaica, they would boat to the United States. So, that's how that whole thing played out, just seeking the American dream, and trying to bring—work and send money back to Haiti, so they could eventually come to the United States.

CP: And what kind of work did they find?

YB: They were janitors at IBM.

CP: Uh-huh.

YB: So, doing the dirty work. Saved enough money to buy a—or they saved enough money through working at IBM, and then they wanted to change jobs, and they started working at a dry cleaner. Dry cleaner is a job that had a lot of, I guess, immigrants, and underneath-the-table action was going on. So they were able to get into that industry. And the guy that they worked for one day was like, "Hey, do you want to buy this dry cleaner?" And then Mom goes, "We don't have enough, but we could pay as a pay-as-you-go kind of deal."

And it worked out, and that was in Boca Raton, a very wealthy neighborhood in south Florida. And they made it, and just kept grinding and grinding, and eventually bought a house in Boca. I went to school in Boca; my brother went to school in Boca. It was kind of weird because there were no Haitian immigrants in Boca, living. You know, they would work, right, work at the hotels as cleaners or what not, housekeepers. For them to buy and raise a family in Boca was pretty neat, definitely different. And we were spoiled as kids. But before that all happened, we saw the other side as well, too.

CP: Yeah, I'm sure they were very proud to have accomplished that.

YB: Oh yeah, for sure. At least for us, my brother and I, we look at it as—it's kind of a thing that helps us drive through life. We're like, man, we can't—coming off a boat and doing that, that's something else.

CP: Yeah. Well, what were some aspects of Haitian culture that you grew up with in your home?

YB: Work ethic. Work ethic, not being picky about what's [laughs] on the dinner table.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: Never complaining, really, and just being happy about life, being so thankful about it. and appreciating every little aspect of life.

CP: Did you speak French in the house?

YB: Yeah, a little bit. More Creole, but I tried to catch some of the French, but it's difficult. I don't know why; it's for some reason for me. For my brother it's a little easier, but for me, because my brother went to actually school in Haiti a little bit longer—or, he went to school. That was his summer school getaway, because my mom couldn't watch us like that during the summer because school wasn't in session. So it was easier to send my brother off to my grandma and my mom's sisters to take care of him during the summer. So he got to go to school there, learn the French language, as well as Creole.

CP: Did you go back to Haiti when you were growing up?

YB: Yeah, I would go back. But that's when I started getting into sports. Baseball was my first sport. One of my neighbors was my friend [0:05:01], and he was like, "Man, you should come to practice." I was like, "Okay, cool." I don't know what baseball is. I have no clue what baseball is. The only thing I know is soccer. My dad played professional in Mexico, and played as a youth. He was like, "Yeah, it's this thing called baseball. You just catch this ball, and you just hit this ball." I'm like, "All right, whatever." I just want to go, because I don't want to be by myself. Because my dad and mom would work until like 9 or 10 at night, and so I was by myself a lot after school. And so he would have practice probably around 6, I want to say, and I was like, "I want to go. I want to go this time."

And I went out there [laughs], and it was the craziest sport! I ran backwards my first time. I hit a ball and I ran backwards. And then when I was catching the ball in the outfield, I wouldn't catch it like this; I would catch it like this. And so that was the—I guess I introduced—that was myself, my introduction to sports. And it was baseball was my first, which was crazy. Now, soccer? My dad never pushed soccer on us, so. He just said, "Do what you want to do. You're in America. Do American things." And so baseball was my first sport. I fell in love. But yeah, that was that, yeah.

CP: And so that's what you were doing during the summers when—?

YB: During the summers, yeah. And that's why I couldn't—sometimes I had to come back a little bit earlier than my brother, obviously, because I had baseball, then football. So yeah, summers were spent in Haiti a little bit, not much, just a little bit like probably two weeks, and then back here.

CP: What sort of an impression did Haiti make upon you when you were a boy?

YB: Oh. It made me thankful, you know. Just seeing all of the poverty, the trash, the homeless people, the conditions of life. It's crazy. I tell a lot of people that haven't been in third worlds to kind of have an open mind when you go, and don't get too emotional. But it's like no place.

CP: Outside of sports, what sorts of things did you care about when you were a kid? Did you have any other hobbies besides sports?

YB: Gosh. [Laughs] I would have to say probably just running around town on my bike. I loved to be on my bike. That, cars; I loved cars. My dad, you know, getting into the money he was getting into, he would always have a new car. And so that was kind of fun, just sitting in the cars, and that was neat. And just being a collector of little cards and stuff, and baseball cards. It was mostly just sports. I loved sports like that much.

CP: Yeah.

YB: It was all I did. I hated video games because I couldn't stand in front of the TV and just play with the thing all day. Yeah, so it was always outside. And Florida's just like, the weather's year round it's sunny, so you're always kind of outside and running around with your friends and stuff, so.

CP: You mentioned starting out in baseball. When did football start for you?

YB: Two years later. My uncle, my dad's brother, played. He came over from Haiti and his first year in the States was his sophomore year in high school. So he didn't know what football was, either, and just kind of tossed him out there. And he played for a while and went to junior college. His grades weren't good, just the education system kind of kicked him in

the butt. But so, yeah, I got into football two years after that, and it just took off from there. I walked in with him and he's like, "You ought to play football." And the same thing as baseball: what is this?

And I was kind of a big guy at that age. They put me at fullback, and so I just remember them always handing me the ball, and me just kind of trucking everybody. And I remember the first day I went in; I got my pads and stuff. I didn't know how it was, the fit. It was so weird to me. It was so heavy. I hated cleats. I was like, "What is this?" Because even baseball, I still didn't wear cleats at that time; I was still wearing shoes. So I had to get adjusted to cleats and all of that stuff. I had this huge fro going in to check in, and I had these biker shorts that I thought were cool, but they were biker shorts that had these huge pads in the butt. And people were just laughing at me. The kids were like, "Man, what is this guy wearing?" Like, I just remember the little kids pointing and laughing at me, but I got them back on the football field, so it worked out. [Laughs] [0:10:01]

CP: Uh-huh.

YB: It worked out.

CP: Well, talk about the importance of high school football in Florida. I mean, it's extremely competitive, and you were in the mix of it.

YB: Yeah. Yeah, Florida football, it's [laughs]—it's really intense. It's like, for a lot of those kids, their parents aren't—they don't have a college tuition fund kind of deal like that. They're not saving money for them for college. And my parents didn't do that. They didn't even know what that was. And so those kids in Florida, the way out for them is football, or baseball, whatever it is. And so, there's a lot of pressure.

As a youth I remember there being a corner section at the football stadium, in the stands, where the parents and the uncles and stuff would bet on us as peewee football. They would bet on us. And it was always loud and aggressive in that corner, you know. And so my uncle would bet on me and my brother, and I didn't know until we got older and he would tell us. He was like, "Yeah, you guys won me a lot of money back then!" [Laughs] It's crazy that it's a huge deal.

You know, as much—Texas gets a lot of hype, but Florida's kind of—because we don't have the funds? I think Texas has a lot of money and so they kind of like push it, "Yeah, Texas football," you know. But Florida football is where it's at. And so, growing up in that intense environment kind of gave it a different meaning to me and my brother. And so, I guess kids were like, "Yeah, just play to play." My brother and I never just played to play. We look at it as a means of making money, one, taking care of our family, two. And yeah, basically, just taking care of our family and making money; that's how we looked at it. And you can get the scholarship, you're looking at the situation as like, "Am I going to get the scholarship so I can make money and take care of my family?" That's it.

For me, as bad as it sounds, I'm not looking at it like, "Oh I'm going to the university and getting an education." I looked at it as like, "I'm going to play football to take care of my family, and get my degree just to have a degree." Because I've played professional, and I'm going to have to get a job somewhere, so I need that in my back pocket. So, yeah, that's just the experience my brother and I had with the game of football and baseball. I got drafted out of high school to play baseball, Major League Baseball, to the Twins, but it wasn't enough money for me to be like, "Okay, I can make 100,000 now, or go through college and play football, and make a little more than that." And so that's my reasoning I'm taking the route of football, and that's the importance of football in Florida, because a lot of those kids I'm sure have the same story as I do, when it comes to the intensity of football.

CP: Yeah.

YB: In Florida.

CP: What was high school like for you?

YB: I didn't really get to enjoy it as much as I wanted to. I didn't get to enjoy it. I was just so focused on making it to—getting into college, and getting a full scholarship, and being a starter. And for baseball, same thing—getting drafted and making a lot of money, trying to go as high as I could so I could get a nice signing bonus. So I didn't really—I didn't party much. I mean, I went out and had a good time, but I never drank. Even in college, I never drank, never smoked, just

never got in trouble. Because I knew. I focused on one thing; I didn't let any distractions get in the way. And a lot of the girls will be like, "Gosh, you're weird. You don't talk to girls, you just hang out with your boys. You've got to focus, you know? And so I was like a mystery kid in high school. Even though people thought I was popular—people said I was popular. I didn't think I was popular. I thought I was a dork, just covered up in pads and cleats.

CP: Yeah. You had a family hardship in high school as well?

YB: Yeah, yeah. Before high school, actually, my mom passed away. And I guess it kind of gave my brother and I another means to make it, because Mom passed away. [0:15:03] And she was our biggest fan; you always heard her in the stands yelling, "That's my baby! That's my baby! He's going to be a star!" And she would talk trash. [Laughs] She was a trash talker. I don't think she bet, though. She might have; who knows? I'm sure she might have put a few dollars on the table. But yeah, definitely my brother and I's angel.

Without her, some days we don't feel like doing some stuff; we think about her and she definitely pushes us along the way. But for my brother, I know it really affected him not having that mother figure in his life as much as I did. But you know, the time that he spent in Haiti, he was able to be around my mom's three sisters and grandma. So, it's kind of awkward. He's more [laughs]—more softer, and you can tell women raised him a little more than they raised me.

But yeah, I mean, words—I can't really describe as much as my mom means to me and my family, and my life, a lot of the things I do. And if I think of something that could be a bad decision or choice, I think of my mom: what would she think? And my father, because he [laughs] used to whip us really bad; we used to get torn up, man! That's just the way in Haiti, is whipping to discipline your kids. That definitely helped us. [Laughs] But yeah, we definitely had a different upbringing than other people.

CP: Yeah. Tell me about the recruitment process and how you wound up at OSU, on the other side of the country.

YB: Yeah, I know, crazy. I remember asking myself, "Where is Oregon? Like, where is it on a map?" I had to look at it on a map. I remember looking at it like, "What?" And then I looked down at Florida and I was like, "I'm going to go from here to there?"

CP: [Laughs]

YB: Like, that's crazy. But Oregon State was really crazy because I was getting recruited by Kansas State, Georgia Tech, NC State. But I was really, really shy. Like, I just remember always growing up and always embracing, hugging my mom's legs if I was somewhere, like I was so scared, I'd hold them tight. And my dad, the same thing. And so I've always been really shy as a kid, even camera-shy.

The first interview I did in high school, it was my freshman year, and I was just super nervous. I remember just staring directly into the camera [laughs] while the guy was interviewing me, and it was kind of funny. But, yeah. My best friend, Sabby Piscitelli—we played baseball and football together in high school. I got him into the football because in baseball I took his position as a freshman, took his position at center field, and so they moved him to left field. And so he was kind of like—that's when the competition started, like, all right, who's this kid coming in and starting in my position as a freshman on varsity, in center field? Who is this guy?

I just always remember him looking at me from the corner of his eyes, trying to compete. When we were up at bat, he would always kind of look back to me like, all right man, let's go. And so we played two years together; we became best friends. It was kind of like, God, what's that story? The Bears player. Gale Sayers and—

CP: Oh yeah.

YB: —and John Piccolo.

CP: Yeah, yeah. Brian Piccolo.

YB: Yeah, Brian Piccolo, which is crazy. He went to my brother's high school, Brian Piccolo, Saint Thomas Aquinas. But it was like that story right there. And we played—we did two years, and then my third year I was like, "Hey, you should

come out for football." Because I started as a freshman on varsity for football, too. And so that made him get a little, whatever. And I was like, "You should try it, man. Now, don't be scared. I was a freshman, I did it. I was kind of like that guy." And he was like, "Okay. I'll try it man, I'll try it." And so he comes out as a junior and stinks it up. He's terrible! And I'm like, "I don't know if I should have made this decision. Like, I feel bad. This kids just getting tossed around."

And then that summer, going to senior year, we trained together, and his senior year he got defensive player in Palm Beach County. [0:20:00] And the offensive player that year was Devin Hester, of the Bears, and now the Falcons. And so it was like, who is this kid? How did he get Defensive Player of the Year? He's only been playing football for two years, so he had no offers; no one knew who he was. Our academic advisor, his son played at Boca High with us. He played football with us. He was not a starter, never really played, but he was like, "Dad, we've got this kid, the only offer he got was like Fordham University in New York, and he can definitely play there. I will take his film and show Mark Banker his film," and Mark Banker fell in love. And so I guess the academic advisor here was kind of the start of the Florida deal.

And then I came on the trip to visit Sab. I was like, I've got five visits, so I got to just eat what I want, fly to Oregon, and see my best friend on their dollar. I was like, whatever. Fell in love with it. Saw the Fresno State game. The running back was Steven Jackson. He had like three touchdowns that game, and he was the main focus. He caught the ball, he blocked, he ran the ball. He was the guy. And I was like, "Okay, this guy is good. And they're always telling me this guy's good, he's going to leave; you should come." And I was like—he's going to leave early. And I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to go there. Like, this sounds awesome. I get to be with my best friend, and this guy is going to leave early."

And so, that made it easy—my best friend, and then Steven Jackson was going to leave early. And then I saw the depth they had in the running back position, and it didn't really scare me at all. I wasn't like, "Oh my God! These guys are going to have me playing the bench for a while," but. And so that worked out. And then I was like, all right. I committed my junior, my junior summer, I think, and kind of blew away all of the other schools really early. I was committed from day one with Oregon State, so.

CP: So you were recruited by Riley's staff or Erickson's staff?

YB: No, Erickson.

CP: Yeah.

YB: Yeah, so a month after I committed to Oregon State, Erickson leaves and goes to the 49ers. And I had a baseball game that day, and people were telling me. I was like, "No, I'm sticking there. Sabby's there." [Laughs] And it worked out perfect, because Coach Riley's been amazing, and I look at him as a father figure, and a nice guy. When I first heard him speak, I was like, "This guy's going to discipline us?" You know, because it was really high-pitched [laughs] and like, soft. I was like, "This guy is not going to be able to control these guys," and that was Erickson's group, too, which was—

CP: [Laughs]

YB: —a tough group. But he managed, and yeah. So yeah, I had Coach Riley and that was awesome. And now I get a simple call from Coach Riley, "Hey Coach." Or, "Hey, what do you think about coming back to Oregon State and coaching?" And I blew him off two or three times, and like the fourth time it was a recruiting dinner. "Think about it?" I was like, "All right, Coach. Let's do it." But it's like those things, you know? I don't know if I would have that bond with Erickson, and the opportunity that Coach Riley gave me, being able to be coach, or be a part of Coach Riley's staff on the coaching staff, not as a player but as a coach, it's really neat. And a lot of people respect him on the college level and the NFL level. And so it's a huge opportunity for me. And I'm sure, and I hope, that it leads to some big things.

CP: Yeah.

YB: I'm sure it will. Just knowing that I have him on my resume, and I was able to work with him.

CP: Yeah. What do you think sets him apart? We know he's a nice guy, but what else is there to Mike Riley?

YB: It's crazy. Like, I say father figure because he has that fatherly way of looking at you, and not wanting to disappoint him because he gives you so much leeway, I guess. He gives you so much freedom that you don't feel like—you don't want to cross that boundary to lose that respect and that confidence that you have with him. So, so, yeah. [Laughs] Yeah.

CP: Tell me about the adjustment to college and living in the Northwest.

YB: [Laughs] Man! They hit me hard. They hit me hard. Like, from Florida, the first thing I noticed, I was like, "There are no black folks." [Laughs] Like, I got off of the plane, at the baggage claim. I was like, "This is crazy." I mean, not a bad thing, but I felt like I was that fish in that bowl. [0:25:04] Like, that everyone was looking at me like, "Who is this guy?" Because you know that it's something, right? Something's going on, especially in the Corvallis airport. But it was difficult, and the weather was terrible—terrible! And it's crazy I say this: the summer was way too hot, that I'm used to. It's like, we don't get above 90 in Florida, hardly. You know, we get humidity; it'll be 85, humidity. And then, no apartments had AC.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: I'm like, "What? What? Like, this is crazy! Who doesn't have AC in their homes?" And so the heat I remember, and I had to put the fan against the freaking window to blow in the hot air. I was like, "What is this?" And so I'm staying with Sabby at his apartment, because we were supposed to be in the dorms our freshman year, but I just was like, "I'm going to stay with my boy. I'll check in and I'll bail out once they do room check," which I did once in a while.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: And then during the day I was with Sabby. And then the dorm was super hot, too. Finley, which is probably one of the older dorms here, that was rough. So then the winter comes around, which is the end of October. [Laughs] For me, winter was the end of October. Super, super cold, rainy, and I was like, "What is this, man? Like, this is crazy!"

CP: [Laughs]

YB: And, yeah man, it hit me real hard, and then missing my dad. Because I was always around—like I said, I was a shy kid, and I was always around my dad and brother. And so that was tough. I wasn't playing; I was redshirting because Steven Jackson was playing, obviously. And so I redshirted that year. And so it was tough, because I was doubting myself a little bit. I was saying, "Can I play with these guys?" I don't know why I doubted myself, because obviously that guy was going to start, regardless. He was a great athlete, and he's done so much for the school. He was going into his junior year, and he's a Doak Walker finalist. But you know, just as being that young kid, I wanted to play, right? I was like, "Well, if I'm going to be a running back, put me on special teams." But like, "No, we're going to redshirt you." And I was like, "No, no." Whatever.

So they were nice enough to redshirt alert me, which I got to travel, and I was the only freshman that got to do that that year. So I guess that was kind of Coach Riley's way of going, "It's all right, but we'll give you this little bone." So that was tough, with the whole weather, and adjusting to the scenery of the people. I had to adjust to being not many black people, or even culture. It was just white folks around, and so I had to—I was fine with that, but I always felt like I was getting looked at. I didn't know it was because of that reason, I just thought it was because I was a different color.

I didn't know it was, okay, people know athletes when they see them, right? They can kind of tell, and I figured out that's why people were kind of interested in looking at me, and trying to figure out who I was and what position I played, kind of thing. But the people—the one thing that was really neat that I experienced was just how nice people were here, super nice, super friendly, holding the door. I remember I was across the street, and in Florida, you just don't step out and cross. I don't even care if they give you the walk sign; you don't do it. And so I just remember there was a green light, and people would stop.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: I was like, "That was strange. Okay, all right. Thank you." People waving, saying thanks for letting them go by. And for me, sometimes it would backfire, because I was used to my Florida ways, so I'd just keep driving and wouldn't stop. And people would be like, "Whoa!" looking at me. I was looking into my rear-view mirror and they would just be mad.

But yeah, there's just so much. I'm sure there's more that I can't think of right now, but it was definitely an eye-opening experience. It was crazy.

CP: How about becoming a college student?

YB: I lived on my own a lot, because my dad was always at work, right? And my mom passed away. I was by myself a lot, taking care of my brother. And so that wasn't really different. I mean, it was like not really different, because food was always at the cafeteria, so I was like, I got to eat, so I didn't have to make my own food [laughs], which was awesome. I just was like, "All right. Food is provided there, and I've got somewhere to sleep." So it wasn't different. [0:29:59] One thing that was really weird was showering my first time. In Florida, we didn't shower in high school after games, in the locker room, with a bunch of guys.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: So that threw me off. I was like, "Oh!" That was when my shyness came out. I was like, "Oh man, you've really got to do that?"

CP: [Laughs]

YB: But that was like, a lot of Florida kids, south Florida kids, never experience that. So I remember talking to my friends. You know, I went to Kansas State, NC State. I remember what they would call me, and like, "I was scared, man. I couldn't believe!" [Laughs] So that was like the funny part, when we would call each other and talking about those days, like, "That was so awkward." But yeah, it wasn't difficult in college, going to school, for me. I was always drove myself to high school, drove my brother, dropped him off, so that was normal going to class. I was never late.

One thing I was scared, but I shouldn't have been scared, of was being late to school in college, because they really could care less! [Laughs] Especially in the huge classes with like 100 kids. I remember always being ten minutes early. My friends were like, "Dude. You can just walk in whenever. You just need a syllabus." I was like, "No, I've got to go to school and be in class." And so yeah, it was no different than high school for me.

CP: What was it like practicing around Steven Jackson? What did you gain from him?

YB: You know what? So many people say, "you had to learn something." I really didn't. Different style back than I was, so I really couldn't take anything from his game and put it in my game, to be honest with you. You know, the one thing, just probably—God, nothing really, because I feel like I had a lot of qualities that he had maybe. Not the style of play, but the intensity he brought to the game. I had that because I knew how important football was for me as a youth, how hard he went every play. You know, so nothing really.

It was more like a friendship. I had dreads. I grew my hair out because I knew once I came out here on a visit, I was like, "I probably won't be able to get a haircut from anybody." So I grew my dreads out and he had dreads already. So we would go to Portland to get them done, re-twisted, as we called them. And so I remember him being like, "Hey man, let's go! We're going to go to Portland and get our hair redone." I was like, "All right, cool!" I mean, it was more just a friend, a guy that we hung out with. And he kind of told me, "Hey, have a good time. Enjoy this experience and all of that good stuff, when you become that guy."

And still today, we're friends. You know, I wished him good luck on his upcoming season. I know he's going to be wrapped up in a little bit, and call it soon. And so we got to hang out in Miami. He came down, and that was really fun. We got to do a lot of fun stuff together, and just talk about life and talk about things that we want to do here at Oregon State, try to bring a kind of a—not a black athlete thing, but getting those black athletes that don't know anything about what they're about to get into, and teaching them about—or getting them ready for life after football.

And so we're trying to get something going so those kids can be prepared for life after football, because it's a tough road. And it's not just football, right, opening up. You know, any other hobbies; it could be drawing. During your time at Oregon State, get into the Art Department, learn. Get into to the—I don't know; like there's so many different avenues that they can get into while they're here, but they don't know because there's no one telling them, "Hey, you can do this while you're here. No one knows.

I wish—for me, I was lucky because I got into Merchandise Management, which was categorized broadly as fashion, you can be a buyer. And I was lucky to get into that as a freshman, and that's where I stayed, and that's what I majored in. I was able to use it a little bit at Nike. I worked at Nike, did a temp job for six months there. A lot of kids don't know that. They're just doing liberal arts, right, just to get classes and be qualified to play for [laughs] the next football season. And so just trying to tap into that and use your resources early on is the program we're thinking about doing. And so I'm just waiting for him to call it quits, so we can. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs]

YB: So we get him, me, Dwan Edwards—there's another guy who wanted to be on board—and James Rodgers, guys like that. [0:35:04]

CP: Mm-hm. Yeah.

YB: Try to get it going.

CP: What drew you to Merchandise Management?

YB: Growing up in the dry cleaning business, I was always around clothes. I just remember sleeping on a bunch of, a pile of clothes in that big basket. I remember just sleeping in there. And I just always was into fashion because of the dry cleaning business. And my dad, growing up in the '80s and the '70s, he was always very flamboyant with his outfits and stuff. And so I saw pictures of him, and I was best-dressed in high school as one of my senior superlatives. And I [laughs] kind of got into always wanting to wear the flyest gear, you know? With the time of making good money, I would go to Versace Store and buy Versace pants, clothes, this and that, and all of that good stuff. But so I always kind of loved the fashion from experiences in the dry cleaning industry, before my dad went downhill.

CP: Mm-hm.

YB: We were doing all right. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah, yeah.

YB: Financially.

CP: Well, what was that first year like for you, the redshirt year? And I'm interested in knowing, too, about what you did during the off-season to try and prepare yourself to be a player to contribute a little bit more.

YB: It was mixed. That off-season was tough because I experienced my dad going bankrupt, losing the house, my brother being without a lot of things, starving, because dad couldn't provide. And so I remember having some money from my scholarship check and giving it to my dad to try to help them out, and then focusing on training. I was training with Sabby, obviously, because we grew up in the same town, and so that was my off-season training partner. So it was tough to balance both out.

And so that was a tough off-season. And then I also had a mindset like, "Okay, I'm seeing this happen. Now this football thing just went to a whole other level. I've got to take my football game to another level in the seriousness of it." It wasn't a game anymore. I didn't really look at it like, "Oh, I'll go have fun." I was like, "I've got to go get this money and make it happen, so I can help my dad and my brother out."

CP: Mm-hm. So you played some of your first year, freshman year, mostly in special teams.

YB: Yeah.

CP: There was a game that a lot of Beaver fans will remember with mixed emotions from that season, the LSU game.

YB: Yeah.

CP: Alexis Serna, of course, missed the three extra points.

YB: Yeah.

CP: I'm interested in knowing kind of how the team rallied from that.

YB: [Laughs] It was tough, and you what's funny is that my first—all of my special teams play that year, which I'm still upset at Coach Riley about; I should have been a starter, but.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: It's funny; he still to this day tells me. And he says, it's in the article, he did say it, "Yvenson Bernard should have played." But late Coach Riley, but anyways. [Laughs] It was tough. But that game I was a punt returner. Never punt returned, not even in college, but I was the only guy who could catch a punt during that Fall camp, so Coach Reed put me out there. And the first thing I did was drop the ball. Luckily, I fell back on top of it, and I remember looking at myself, or thinking to myself, "You know what? It can't get any worse than that."

CP: [Laughs]

YB: My first play being a fumble, but I picked it up. It couldn't get any worse. Luckily I was able to fall back on top of it. But just that game. After that game, in Serna's situation, walk-on, and pretty much a minority as well, being of Mexican descent. We didn't have any Mexicans on the team. So I think some of our players, I remember, teasing him after that game, just harsh stuff. But some of the seniors got around him, the older guys, and the freshmen that were with him as in the dorms, the freshman dorms, they kind of pushed him out of it. "Hey man, it happens. Everything is going to be all right."

And I think seeing that from some of the players, our seniors and our young guys, the guys in the middle saw that and, wow, like, "All right, man. We have to get around him and support him, and get him through this." That was the best thing that could happen that season, I feel like. [0:40:00] It really was. I think it was the year after he won the Groza? Or that year?

CP: The year after, I think.

YB: The year after. But that year, if he didn't missed I think he could have been up for the Groza too, if he hadn't missed those three. But yeah, man, I just think it formed our team, which is kind of a weird piece that made things work that year.

CP: Mm-hm.

YB: So.

CP: You guys wound up beating Notre Dame in the Insight Bowl that year.

YB: Yeah. I remember, I remember. And that was Brady Quinn, was the quarterback. There was a lot of hype. And that was Derek Anderson's last year, I want to say.

CP: Yeah.

YB: So yeah, that was a cool year, man. It was neat. It was up and down. What did we go that year?

CP: 7 and 5, I think.

YB: Yeah. So it was kind of an up and down year, but I still don't think we had any business being 7 and 5. But then we proved our case playing Notre Dame, and we spanked them pretty good. Being a team that was 7 and 5 and playing Notre Dame at the time, with Brady Quinn. And that game, that bowl game was really neat, because I remember I didn't get one regular play until that game. That was my first offensive play.

And the whole week, for some reason, Coach Riley wanted to put up a special plan for me, and it was a screen. And he kept saying—I'm like, why is he so focused on me? I haven't had any snaps; why is he worried about me getting this play in a bowl game? We should be focusing on trying to win the game and having Dwight go out on his senior, and have a

great season, or a great game to finish his career, and he was focused on this screen. I looked at it like, he was kind of like—it was really weird, but there was an analogy that was really neat.

It was a lab rat, and it was about hope. And one was the rat was in the dark, and he was in water about this high, about half full, the glass. And the rat, they want to see if he could get out, and what was his hope? Like, how long could he go trying to scratch his way out of there, get out of there? And he tried and tried, and died in like three hours. And then they did another one with the rat, same water, it was half full in the glass, and they had a rope in there, a little rope hanging, not down. I mean, it was up there to the point he could still try to get it, try to grab ahold of it. And they shined a light on that rope, and he went like three days trying, trying, and trying, because that little piece of rope was his hope.

And so I remember in the back of my mind, that was my hope that year, that screen, and it went for like 30 yards, or 20 yards, 25 yards. And that was my piece of hope going into the next season. And that off-season was a way better off season, because I was able to help my dad and brother. I had a little more money, so I was able to help them out. And so training was a little bit smoother.

My brother started taking off, started making a name for himself. He was in the paper as—in Pop Warner he was making the paper, the local paper. And they were saying, "This kid's going to be great. He's going to be another Yvenson Bernard. This guy has the moves, he has the shakes." And growing up, he was a little, fat, chubby kid. He had weight issues. He couldn't make weight as a—and I thought he was going to be a linebacker or some D lineman. And then he starts to thin out, and we're working out a little bit together, having a good time, and we're actually becoming brothers—because the age gap is pretty significant, not huge, but I mean, seven years apart. And so we kind of started gelling a little bit.

And then his mentor as well was Cris Carter, the Hall of Famer. So I got to meet Cris Carter a little bit, we were training with Cris' son Duron Carter, so we all kind of like trained. It was really neat, the chemistry my brother and I had during that off-season, and just kind of seeing him become a little bit of an adult, I guess, even though he was young. But you could kind of see he was mature, because he was having a tougher upbringing, not having a mom, not having the lavish lifestyle that I had. [0:45:03] So that was really, that was a neat off-season, and I had hope, like I said, with that screen.

CP: Yeah. Well, it was some foreshadowing of some things to come. You would be hard-pressed to have a greater contrast between two seasons. Your redshirt freshman year you had two carries; your sophomore year you had 290.

YB: [Laughs] Yeah. Definitely, yeah. I guess Coach Riley, he had a little confidence in me, I guess, and that's why he gave me that screen, that screen pass. So yeah, it's crazy, just definitely a night and day season for me.

CP: Well, what was it like to explode like that? I mean, the team struggled somewhat that year. You went 5 and 6.

YB: Yeah.

CP: But you had a great year. You ran for over 1,300 yards. It was sixth all-time in school history.

YB: Yeah. I don't know; I never thought about it like that, to be honest with you. I never stopped and was like, "Ooh." I looked at it as like, "Okay, I'm one step closer to my dream," which was obviously taking care of my father, and making money and taking care of my family, taking care of my brother. And so that's why I looked at it as one step closer. And a disappointment for the team was not making it to a bowl game, because it had my name written on it, right? I wanted to make sure that the team that I was part of went to a bowl game. But a lot of people were like, "Man, you guys didn't make it to a bowl game, but you definitely changed the running game that we didn't see last year."

So that was kind of, I guess an upside of it, but it sucked not making a bowl game; it really did. And that was Matt Moore's first year. You know, every freaking quarterback in Coach Riley's system in their first year struggles, which sucked. He struggled big-time. I remember him getting booed out of the stadium. Now he's in the NFL. It's what, five years or four years? Something like that. Crazy.

CP: Yeah.

YB: So.

CP: Did you feel like you were becoming a leader that year?

YB: Yeah, and I was never a vocal leader. I never was like, "Rah, rah," kind of guy. I was like kind of a lead by example kind of guy. And so that year I felt like people were taking notice. Like, all right man, Yve's doing it the right way. He does it off the field. He doesn't get in trouble. And so I never had peer pressure, people telling me to drink or smoke, anything like that. If anything, it was really weird, but my friends never did it because I didn't do it, and they were afraid to do it around me. Especially my tight group never got into it, because they saw how I played without getting influenced by it and stuff.

So I definitely could see that my friends were kind of noticing it, and they supported me, and they always made sure that no one was messing with me even, sometimes. I remember being at parties and the drunk guys would get a little riled up, and my friends would just [makes speeding noise]. You would just see them come over, and Yve get back, you know. So I could kind of feel it then, and the community getting behind me.

People were noticing me, which was kind of creepy, and it was kind of weird to me, because in Florida there are so many awesome athletes—or not athletes, but football players in the community that you are just another guy. And so seeing it here, like being under a microscope, was really weird. You had to watch—I always watched my back, and watched what I did, and watched how I portrayed myself at Oregon State, and my family, Coach Riley, the football program. And so that was always—so in a weird way, I almost felt like I was becoming robotic in everything I did. And so, I guess I didn't really do the college thing like other people would have. But it worked out. I didn't get caught up in it. [Laughs]

CP: Yeah. Well, the 2006 season was a magical one.

YB: Yeah. [Laughs]

CP: The Beavers got off to their typical rough start. But I want to ask you about some of the games, some of the specific games. And the first one is the USC game, beating No. 3 USC at home.

YB: Yeah. Great, yeah, it was huge. I remember I was hurt; I had a bum ankle, but I still played, just taped it up with a heavy boot. But just, I guess me being on the field kind of just helped. You know, I was mostly a decoy that game. [0:50:00] But yeah, that season was amazing. Matt Moore struggled the first couple of games, but started finding his groove. The offense started finding its groove. We were able to spread the ball. It wasn't eight in a box like it was, to stop the run game, because we were able to spread it around a little more, more efficiently. Receivers were doing awesome.

Was that Stroughter's first year? It might have been, so we had a freshman—or he might have been a sophomore—coming on the scene, doing some great things. Who else? I mean, Sabby. The defense was awesome. Derek Doggett, that linebacker core was awesome. Our corners were awesome. I think they're both elite, Keenan Lewis and Brandon Hughes. I mean, the list goes on. It's a long list of awesome guys that we had during that season. Our offensive line was starting to get nasty, I mean, and physical. It had some confidence.

So we were just all-around a great team. That was a special season. I look at 2006 being the best season—one of the best seasons, or one of the best teams Oregon State had. It was just a neat season, a lot of close, nail-biting games, a lot of knocking big teams off. Yeah, it was just crazy. It was a crazy season!

CP: Yeah. You beat Oregon in 2006 at home, a team that had Jonathan Stewart—

YB: Yeah.

CP: —who was a college star, for sure.

YB: Yeah.

CP: I wonder about the rivalry with Oregon, the Civil War, what that meant to you as a player. It's obviously a big deal for fans.

YB: Yeah. I didn't know what it was until I came, and went to Autzen when it was my freshman year, and we lost, and it was just nasty, the hate I had after the game. [Laughs] Oh, it was just—it was crazy. And then the running back battle between Stewart and I. There was always a newspaper article about us two going at it, so that was always competitive. And so that was fun. It was just a lot of competition, and when both teams were doing well, it just brings it to a whole other level in just the way that, there's no professional team here in football. No professional teams, so they look at Oregon-Oregon State just being that thing. Especially when that game is on, it's just, it's nuts. It's awesome just the support, the media that goes into it, really awesome.

CP: Yeah.

YB: And then Missouri, and there it is, the Sun Bowl. And then we beat Oregon, and the Missouri game was nuts.

CP: And Hawaii, too.

YB: Yeah. Oh, with Colt Brennan, yeah, which was weird, when I was down there. I was telling the guys that story, like how crazy—I mean, I don't think that Aloha Stadium was ever packed like that.

CP: That was a really good Hawaii team.

YB: Oh, great! Colt Brennan, and I think they went to—it might have been BCS game, they went 10 and 3, or something? I can't remember, but awesome team. They had a receiver, Bess; he was an NFL guy for a while. But yeah, that team was awesome, and it was just going back and forth, going back and forth. My friend Gerard Lawson had a huge, huge kickoff return for 99 or 100 yards, something like that. That was the first kickoff return in a long time for a touchdown for Oregon State, for a while. So that was crazy, too. But, yeah, but that season, just so many games that were nuts like that. I'm sure there's others I can't remember, but yeah.

CP: Tell me about the Sun Bowl, because that was one of the more memorable games in recent history.

CP: [Laughs] Yeah. Sun Bowl, Missouri, really hot team, quarterback is all over the ESPN. Their offense is putting crazy numbers up. Defense—they've got some studs on defense. And there Maclin is a freshman; the receiver Jeremy Maclin is a freshman, so we didn't even know who he was until that game, really. And Chase Daniel is just marching down the field. We're marching down the field, here and there a little bit.

Defense is starting to get a little worn out in the fourth quarter. They're struggling; it's getting nasty. They were like, oh boy. That whole week with bowl game, bowl week, it was getting nasty. Like Missouri guys were being, I don't want to say the word, but they were not being cool. [0:55:04] [Laughs] And we were looked at like the—we were small compared to that Missouri team. We were a small team that year. And so they were like, "Oh, it's a joke with these guys." And so anyways, move along to the fourth quarter. I can just tell our defense is just getting worn down; they're just physically getting beat by a bigger offensive line. The D line is just getting beat.

And so, crazy enough, I don't know why—I mean, I've never suggested a play. I've never been that guy, "Hey man, what about this play?" I've never been that guy. I was like, all right, you tell them what to do, I'm going to do it. And I'm like, "Coach, let's just go for it." Or, no, there's a timeout, and it gives me way too much time to even think. At that timeout, if Missouri never took that timeout, it would have never—we would have just kicked the field goal. They take a timeout, and I don't know why they took that timeout. And so I go to Coach Riley, I was like, "Let's go for it. Our defense is worn out. They look like—I don't think they're going to make it through the overtime. They're just going to kind of fold. Let's go for it. Let's do a play fake, a dive pass, fake the hand-off to me, and then just throw the top." He was like, "Nah. Let's not." I was like, "Sure."

He was like, "Run play." I was like, "Are you sure you want to go for a run play?" "Yeah, let's do a run play." And I was like, "All right. So, run play." And so everybody gets in the huddle. This was like my first time actually being the rah-rah guy. I was like, "Come on guys. We've got to. Hey, this is it. Do we go home as champs or do we go home as losers?" And so, I was like, "All right. Let's do it." And so I went for it, and boom.

CP: Straight up the middle.

YB: Straight up the middle. You know, and neat, man. It was a neat experience, just running off the field, the yelling. It was nuts.

CP: Yeah.

YB: It was nuts! [Laughs]

CP: Senior year, a couple of other games of note. Went to California and beat them, No. 2 team in the nation at the time.

YB: Yep.

CP: On the road.

YB: Yep. [Laughs] Yeah. The quarterback, I remember he was from Oregon, and he had the same name as Coach Riley. And so, yeah, that was a—going into it, DeSean Jackson, Lavelle Hawkins, both receivers; definitely, obviously guys that went on to play in the NFL. Forsett, running back. Quarterback was I guess their weak link. Unfortunately, it definitely hurt them down the road. But that team was—Desmond Bishop was linebacker—the team was good, man. That team was good. So that was a lot of banging. I don't think I gained a lot of yards that game, or the offense wasn't super productive, but it was just kind of a nail-biter, grind out game. It just came down to the last minute.

And after that game, I think that season, that game definitely gave us an identity, that we were going to be that team that just kept pushing to the last minute, just kept pushing. And it was a struggle that season, because we had two young quarterbacks that were first year. That Mike Riley offense. And for me it was tough. They were putting eight in a box again. And I was like, "Oh, man, here we go. Here's the eight in a box." And so physically it was—I got beat, man. Physically, it was tough on my body. It hurt myself. I want to say Washington State game, it kind of hurt my draft stock. Obviously was undrafted that year; had some issues with my knee because I hurt it my redshirt sophomore year.

And that year, that running back class was—man, if I was selfish, I would have left after my junior year. But I wanted to come back and be with my team, and finish school. I didn't want to be a traitor, leave my team hanging out in the dust. But yeah, that class was stacked with Jonathan Stewart, Felix Jones, McFadden, Forsett, Forte, Chris Johnson, oh, man, Ray Rice. [0:59:57] So if you were any bit hurt, you were kind of screwed after that. So it was tough, that draft process after that season.

CP: Yeah.

YB: In my knuckle head, coming back after, I missed the Civil War that year, made it to a bowl game. We were still a good team. We were a good team, but we had a lot of injuries that season, missed out on Sammie Stroughter being out there. James Rodgers emerged as a freshman, so we lost a receiver that year. That kind of hurt the quarterbacks. There really wasn't much experience, besides some of the older senior receivers, but they weren't deep threat guys. And so that was tough, missing the Civil War my senior year. I tried to make it; I couldn't.

And then I forced myself two weeks after my surgery to play in a bowl game, which was dumb. Because I wanted to play one more time with that group of guys, because that was part of the reason I came back, right? To play with those group of guys. And so that didn't help on my knee.

CP: You were the MVP of that game.

YB: Yeah.

CP: You ran for 177 yards.

YB: Yeah, it was painful. It was painful. I definitely was on some stuff to keep me going, some medication, some Toradol, which is a shot, not a steroid or anything like that. But it kind of helped the pain and stuff like that. Hydrocortisone in my knee, the area of the surgery. So, it was just dumb on my part, just telling the guys I could—because Coach Riley kept telling me, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" And I was like, "Yeah, yeah." I just didn't want to tell them the truth, because I wanted to play that game even though I knew it wasn't the right thing for me.

CP: What comes to mind when you think of your last game in Reser Stadium versus Washington?

YB: Oh, man, I forgot about that one. Yeah, shoot. I have the worst memory, I guess, because I was just so focused on making it to the next level and trying to take care of my family. It was always that.

CP: Your dad and brother came out for that game?

YB: Dad and brother, the first game they saw me in person play. And so that was tough, coming out of that tunnel and hearing my name. Obviously you hear your name on each play, the run play, but it was the last home game. "Give a huge applause for Yvenson Bernard." That, crying, running and seeing Coach Riley at the—that was the first person I saw; gave me the flowers to give to my dad. And I remember hugging him tough, and he was like—I remember Coach Riley saying, "I love you, man. I love you like a son. Thank you so much for what you've done for me and for this program, and the school." And then Sabby and my brother and dad were at the Beaver head logo, and it was tough just looking around, and looking at all of the fans. That was really neat.

CP: Yeah.

YB: And when I said I should have left my junior, that was kind of a cool experience that I wouldn't have experienced my junior year.

CP: The fans remember that game for how it ended.

YB: Yeah, how it ended.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: And my dad yelled at me because he said, "Yeah, I don't care. You fumbled still. It's in the record books." And so I didn't score a touchdown for my dad, or my brother, which sucks.

CP: Yeah.

YB: That still hurts.

CP: The video's on your side, I think.

YB: Yeah. [Laughs]

CP: Let's talk about life after OSU. You mentioned you were pretty beat up, and you had a couple of short stints in the NFL.

YB: Yeah.

CP: You went from there to Canada. Talk about that time period?

YB: Oh, man. Tough. Still eats away at me, definitely. I definitely knew my talent, my play could definitely match those guys that were in there, the guys I went to the combine process with. I definitely believed I belonged somewhere in the NFL, and so that was tough, you know. And then the injury, hearing that, degenerative knee, at the combine; it sucked to hear that. It killed a lot of my chances. Because, why are we going to take a risk when we have all of these other running backs, right? And there was like 12 of them that were starting in the NFL at some point, or actually 14. I think there's like 10 of them that start now. It's crazy.

And so why are we going to take a shot on a guy that's undrafted, with knee issues? So just hearing that stunk. Because going up, leading up to the combine, I was projected to go third or fourth round. I went to the senior bowl, which is, you go to the senior bowl, you're pretty much going to—you're going to be on an NFL roster. And so that was tough. [1:05:01]

I was doing Upper Deck, Topps; I was getting hundreds of thousands of dollars to do autographs, signing autographed stuff, and doing cards, and doing memorabilia stuff. So I was like, "I'm good." I moved my family, my dad and brother,

into a nice apartment in Florida. I rented it out for them, a really nice spot. So I was like, "All right, we're moving in the right direction." And the biggest thing I did there was, because I hated to see where they were, the living conditions they were living in, the rats, the caving-in roof above their heads because the floor, or because the shower of the bathtub above was leaking, and the sinks are leaking. So that was tough to see. The first thing I wanted to do was spend that money on them, put them in an apartment.

So I did that, gave my brother my car. And so yeah, it was neat to see my brother so happy, being able to bring friends to his place. And I told my dad, "He gets the master," so he got the master, and so he had his own room. And it was just neat. That's what I envisioned, and then my dream was becoming a reality. And then, boom, draft day, day one goes by. Day two goes by. Nothing. Or day two ended. Day two I get the call; I was undrafted, Saint Louis. I go to one of the two teams that don't do waivers on injuries, and so they bring me in. They're like, "We're going to let you go. You have a degenerative knee; your doctor looked at it." And I'm like, "Well, it was a combine. Let's re-do all of your testing. Why are you going to bring me in and sign as a free agent, knowing I have a bad knee? Let me go to the other teams where I can sign a waiver, where I could be like, 'Okay, you know, I know I have a bad knee. If something happens to that knee, it's all mine. It's on my dollar.' And why would you guys bring me in?" So, whatever, that stunk.

And then two weeks later, the Seahawks called me, and I'm still not happy, because I'm still mad at the opportunity I had at Saint Louis, being that Steven Jackson was there, and so I could get help on that playbook, and I knew I had someone that could kind of vouch for me, because he was established there. Then Roy Schuening, one of my linemen, was there, too. So that's a spot I really wanted to be. Then the Seahawks get me, and then that didn't work out. They had a lot of injuries, and so the price roster was kind of funneling through, because they had so many injuries at the receiving spot that they needed practice guys to be receivers.

And then like a month after that, no calls or anything. And so I just go up north after that, and I guess I was never happy up there. It wasn't the money I was making, and my dad and brother were evicted. I was still paying for it, but the guy that owned it, the housing market crashed, so the money I was paying, he was pocketing it. The owner was pocketing the money so he could—he knew he was going to lose the place, but he knew he was getting my money. If I knew, I would have just stopped. So I was seeing that summer, I can't remember what summer that was, but having to go back and move them out of there, and put them back into a crap spot again. I mean, it wasn't as bad, but it was still crappy. So that was tough.

CP: Yeah.

YB: Because it was a roller coaster on my dad's situation too. And so knowing my brother was going through it again, was like, what am I doing? I'm not making the money I can. Actually I can't really support them as much as I was. And as my dream kind of crashed, and I kind of had a bad attitude in Canada—not bad, but I knew I wasn't making the same money, and it was just like, I wasn't playing much because they only play one American guy at a position, so the guy there was already established. And so I was like, eh. So it just kind of sucked.

But did three years, or four, whatever, and then retired a summer after I worked at Nike, did an internship to see, because I kind of started having that feeling: all right, I needed to start doing something else, just get myself ready for life after football. And I was like, all right, I got this new internship opportunity that I have here. So they gave me a call. [1:09:59] It was like, "Hey, we took over the NFL. Would you like to get into it?" I was like, "Yeah, sure enough." Loved it!

And my brother's going to be a redshirt sophomore in college, and after his freshman year, he was just killing at UNC; he was just killing college football. His name was getting hot. And I was like, "You know what? You are not going to stay another two years like I did. Do not hurt yourself." And so I wanted to retire so I could enjoy and go watch him play a game, which I never was able to. I watched maybe one high school game, and he was a highly touted player in high school; he was a big-time recruit. We tried to get him, but he saw too many like billboards or whatever, my face up in the building.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: He was like, "I want to make my own name," which was really neat, and I respected that. And so he ended up going to UNC, and people are like, "UNC?" Well, Cris Carter's best friend was an offensive coordinator there, and he knew he

could start right away, and he didn't have to get into that whole like Alabama-UNC running back competition going there. He was like, "I'm just going to go there, play. Cris Carter's best friend is the OC, so I'm going to have someone watch over me."

So, he went there and built kind of a football program up again, kind of changed it. And so I wanted to experience his last year of football, college football. I did, and I went to two games; was able to follow him, track him. And in that off-season, I told him to leave. I was like his manager, so I took care of a lot of things, and found the right agent, found the right marketing people. So I was kind of like doing that, so yeah.

CP: And it's been a very happy ending for him. He's starting now in the NFL.

YB: He's starting. [Laughs] He's starting.

CP: That must be so special for you.

YB: Oh, yeah.

CP: To see how he has risen through.

YB: Oh, man, yeah. It's awesome just to see my brother, the guy that went through so much, make it. And now the dream that I had, and he's making it happen. He bought a huge vacation home/home for my dad in Florida, and so we all have our rooms there. Our dad's on the first floor; I'm on the second, and my brother's on the third.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: And so, yeah. Then he bought me a nice car. [Laughs] He bought himself a car, and then Dad—or he gave Dad the car I gave him. So it's gone through—and my dad, he won't, he doesn't want anything else but that car, the car that I had, that my brother had. And he's driving that around, and he's living good. He has his dry cleaner now; we got him a dry cleaner. And so he's back on his feet.

CP: Great.

YB: He's living good. [Laughs]

CP: Well, I want to ask you about a couple more things. The first one is January 2010, the earthquake in Haiti. You came back in the news around here, anyway.

YB: Yeah.

CP: Because you immediately started a response to that.

YB: Yeah.

CP: Can you talk about that?

YB: Yeah. Yeah, my wife Michelle, she—I can't remember where I was; it was the off season. It might have been a workout. I checked my phone, and she texted me. And the text was like, "Oh my God! Did you see what happened to Haiti?" I go, "No." And I call my dad, because I know that we have a half-brother in Haiti. And I call, he's young; at the time I want to say he was seven. And he can't get ahold of them. And I'm like, "Oh my God! What's happening?" Like, got to find out what's going on. And he kind of like led—and she's like, "You have to do something, Yve. You've got to do something. Not only that you've got to get in contact with your brother, but you have to just raise some money. This is like the best time to raise money and awareness. You have to do something, and you know Oregon State will back you up."

And so, I start a little nonprofit foundation, and our first thing was to get as much stuff as we could get donated. We had a huge semi-truck. I called Reser, the son, because I think Al had passed away at the time. I called Mike Reser, and was like, "Can we ship this all? If we get this huge thing filled up, can we ship it out?" [1:15:00] And he did. And so, had

the whole Oregon State, everyone, not just the athletics, but the whole school involved. It was like 30-something tons of goods. Shoes, clothes, food, everything you could think of we put in that thing and we sent out.

Then we had golf tournaments, had football camps. We had this whole thing going, and then took a CFL team, had the whole—CBC, Canadian Broadcast, had them involved. Had the TSN, which is their ESPN, and had the CFL involved. Just a huge thing, raised tons and tons of money. And then I was like, "Hey, let's start a school." And I talked to my aunts that lived in Haiti, and they're like, "Okay. We've got some land because when your uncle's house crashed [laughs], was destroyed." and so we wiped out the whole thing, and then started trying to raise money to build a school.

And so we have, and it's been a long thing in process. And I was telling my brother, I was like, "Well, hey Gio, my name's kind of fading out, so we're going to have to use your name a little bit." And so he took that and made it the Run Gio Foundation. And so now we have the NFL, which is huge, right. And now we have ESPN, NFL Network. And so yeah, now it's become his foundation through my inner vision. And so yeah, we got the school going. We finally got the building. Now we send stuff to the kids, and we're going to keep on adding classrooms. And so it's hot now. [Laughs] Things are running a little more smoother now, so.

CP: [Laughs] You mentioned your wife. You proposed to her on the field during a TV timeout, did you not?

YB: Yeah. It only made sense [laughs] to do it at the stadium that made me who I am.

CP: I assume you met her here at OSU?

YB: Yeah, where it all started, and so I wanted to do it there. And one thing I knew, it would surprise the heck out of her. [Laughs] And I wanted to do it on the football field, because that's where I did my work. [Laughs] So I wanted to finish off with my last piece of work, my last Van Gogh, or whatever you want to call it, Picasso.

CP: [Laughs]

YB: But yeah, it was neat to do it there, and have Coach Riley on the sidelines looking at me as an adult now, as a man. And so, yeah.

CP: And you got married at the stadium as well?

YB: Got married at the stadium, too. I was like, "You're going to do it all." And so at the stadium, and had all of the coaches there, the former players there, about 250 people or something like that. But it was awesome, and now I'm back. I didn't think I'd be back either, but, you know.

CP: You talked a little bit about how you came back to the coaching staff. You're working with several of your old teammates.

YB: Yeah.

CP: I'm interested in knowing how the program has changed from the time that you were an athlete to now that you're a coach?

YB: We have more well-behaved kids. [Laughs]

CP: [Laughs]

YB: Our players, I guess part of it was because we had some Erickson guys. We were crazy. Those guys were some nutcases, and were trouble. But these guys are so nice. They're polite kids, man, and well-behaved. You're not seeing sheep deal [laughs]; you're not seeing the selling the stuff to the taxi driver deal. You're not seeing them drive around stealing the golf cart deal. Like, there's a lot that has come. I mean, you just don't hear those things from the football players. If we're going to do the fights, like Oregon would come to one of the parties? Oh boy, forget about it!

CP: [Laughs]

YB: It was a fight. And you just don't see that anymore. There's none of that, and it's really neat to see that. The kids are awesome to work with, and they're just a different breed, you know. Some days, I wish they were a little bit more of the dirtbag in them, but there's always those nice-guy teams that end up doing all right, so. They're good kids, man, and it's neat because a lot of the kids that come on the recruiting trip, they see that. It's a family. We still have that family feel. I mean, maybe like three coaches are new in the last eight, or six years. [1:20:01]

CP: Yeah.

YB: It's crazy to hear in college football, now. So, yeah. It's just a different breed of guys, but they're awesome. But yeah, it's a little different, a little more nicer.

CP: Yeah.

YB: Yeah.

CP: Well, my last question for you is just to reflect on OSU, what it's meant to you, what it continues to mean to you.

YB: Oh man. I didn't know the importance of having a degree, and having that Oregon State degree definitely is an honor. And this university has done so much for me outside of the football. Really neat, the amount of people I've been able to come in contact with. It's a special place, special from any other campus I've been on. It is small, but it's tight-knit, and everyone respects each other. Everyone wants to make Oregon State well-known, and there's just so much love for it. And yeah man, just seeing—I love seeing the Oregon State stuff around the world is really neat. I've been places where like, "Oh, man, where'd you—?" You know.

So it's just a really neat town. People love Corvallis. It's really awesome. Once you get older, you've got a different appreciation for it than when you're a young kid that wants to be in the city and around. It's really neat to come back and relax, and know that you can leave your front door open, and all that good stuff. So it's definitely a special, special town.

CP: Yeah. Well, Yvenson, I want to thank you very much for sharing your time and your memories with us, it's been a lot of fun for me. Thanks.

YB: I appreciate it. Thank you. [1:21:56]