



Larry Bielenberg Oral History Interview, March 21, 2016

Title

“Memories of a Champion Heavyweight”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Bielenberg provides a detailed overview of his family background and upbringing, emphasizing the heavy importance that his family placed on hard work and discussing the particulars of life that arose as a result of being one of ten children. He then reflects on his first acquaintance with sports, which came about during his years as a student at Silverton High School, and traces his evolution as a wrestler from a novice to a state champion. He concludes his memories of his upbringing by reflecting on the Kennedy assassination and commenting on the important role that hunting and fishing played in his family's subsistence.

From there, Bielenberg recalls the process by which he was recruited to attend Oregon State University, noting his initial impressions of OSU wrestling coach Dale Thomas as well as many of his freshman year teammates. He then shares his memories of campus life in the early 1970s, responding to questions about the counter-culture, living in a housing cooperative, his academic progression, and attending OSU basketball games.

The next section of the interview focuses on Bielenberg's advancement as a wrestler at OSU, concentrating in particular on the development of his style, memorable matches, training methods of the era, and the difficulty of attaining All American status. Specific attention is paid to Bielenberg's sophomore season, which ended with his winning the NCAA national championship in the heavyweight division.

A major topic of the interview is former OSU wrestling coach Dale Thomas. In reflecting on his former coach, Bielenberg speaks fondly on Thomas's hard-nosed coaching style, his penny-pinching program administration, and his straight-forward approach to conditioning and skill development. He likewise shares multiple humorous stories of life on the road, travelling from meet to meet in a van and often staying in dorm rooms or people's homes. Bielenberg concludes with an appreciation of Thomas's achievements as a coach and a meditation on the important role that Thomas played in the personal development of generations of Oregon State wrestlers.

Bielenberg next recalls his career as a wrestler competing in international competitions. In this, he details his experiences as an alternate on the 1976 Olympic team as well as his participation in the 1978 World Championships and his travels all around the world for a wide range of international tournaments. Of particular interest are Bielenberg's memories of competing in the Soviet Union, near the Iranian border, during the period of the American hostage crisis in Iran. Bielenberg likewise speaks eloquently of his encounters with apartheid during a 1972 wrestling exchange to South Africa.

The final phase of the interview concentrates on Bielenberg's career in the pharmaceuticals industry, his being named to the Pac-12 All Century Wrestling Team, his induction into the OSU Athletics Hall of Fame, and the paths through life taken by his wife and children. The session concludes with Bielenberg's words of advice to students today.

Interviewee

Larry Bielenberg

Interviewer

Mike Dicianna

Website

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

Transcript

Mike Dicianna: Today is March 22nd, 2016, and we have the honor to capture the life history of one of OSU wrestling's greats, four-time All American, Larry Bielenberg. He was in the class of 1977. We're at the OSU Valley Library here in Corvallis, Oregon. My name is Mike Dicianna and I'm an oral historian for the OSU Sesquicentennial Oral History Project.

Well Larry, thank you for doing this. Basically, we always like to start with a short biographical sketch of our Beavers – like where and when you were born, and early family life, childhood experiences.

Larry Bielenberg: Well thank you for doing this, this opportunity; this is something I'm going to be very interested in seeing the outcome of. My history, I was born in Oregon about sixty miles from here in the little town of Silverton, which was the local hospital. I went to high school at Silverton. Actually the town that I was from was Scotts Mills, a little town, 235 people at the time, and our family and relatives made up half the town. So a small little farming/logging community east of Silverton.

My dad was a logger. He originated from California, the family moved up here in, I believe, the early '30s. And his dad started a farm up in the hills; actually, right across from where I grew up, his dad had a 260-acre farm that the boys worked and cut a lot of firewood to help make ends meet. My dad kind of spun off of that and got into the logging area. One of his brothers was a farmer up in the hills, another one ran a shop in the town of Scotts Mills that, for a while, all the brothers owned.

My mom raised ten kids. I was one of ten brothers and sisters – five girls, five boys. I was the fourth oldest; there were two girls, two boys, I was the second oldest boy and the fourth oldest child. And our background was just work. To make ends meet, the family had to work. Dad worked hard, he owned his own logging truck, so he was self-employed. But that was about half of the family income, the other half was my mom taking the oldest four or five kids, going from berry yard to bean yard to cherry orchard. We were one of the original migrant families that were permanent residents, and we picked every kind of berry and crop that you could think of, from strawberries to pickles. And at one point, before we started moving on to high school and college, we doubled the family income, which wasn't a lot but it was enough. Between living on a small acreage, being very self-supporting in terms of, we raised a one-acre garden, we raised every – it looked like Noah's ark. I mean, we had a little bit of everything as far as beef, pigs, sheep, chickens and so on. So we were very self-sustaining as far as our farming practices. We cut firewood on the side to help with the family income and then, like I said, harvested a lot of crops in those hills in those days.

I was kind of the fortunate one: my oldest sister went to a small business college, but I was the first one to attend a four-year university. And of course, for me, it was wrestling that gave me that opportunity and a wrestling scholarship. None of the rest of my older brothers even got to do sports, even at the high school level. So I was really the first one. I was the first one to get into wrestling; my older brother did do some football a year before I got into sports. But I really was the first to get into the sports.

We had an eight-grade grade school. In fact, we were a hundred feet away from the line and above us, up in the Scotts Mills area, was a one-room schoolhouse. And that was an eight-grade one-room school. Our family lived just about a hundred feet or so from the border there, so we went to Scotts Mills instead of what was called Crooked Finger. But at Scotts Mills, a small school, we had two grades in each class. No sports program to speak of. My eighth grade year, we got a new eighth grade teacher/principal, and he introduced basketball to us. And I think I scored two points the whole year; I wasn't going to be a basketball player.

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But that was actually my first introduction to sports, and then it wasn't until I went to Silverton High School that I got introduced to wrestling. And I never even played football my first year, because we just didn't come from that background. And my dad, it was really all about working. And he's credited for the absolute work ethic that it took for me to get where I ended up going. Our family was all about work. And for him, if decisions had to be made about sports – any extracurricular activity or any frivolities – and work, work came first. So that was our life and, like I said, I was lucky enough to kind of break away, get into sports at Silverton, and have enough success early that all the sudden, it kind of

changed my dad's opinion. And then my three brothers behind me all got into sports at Silverton – specifically, football and wrestling. None of us got to do spring sports; we all had to work in the spring. Football and wrestling because the weather was such that farming was done, and a lot of outdoor work was over because of our weather. But we got to do the indoor, winter, and start of winter sports.

MD: So you ended up being a wrestler kind of by the season?

LB: By the season. And my next door neighbor – which was a half mile away – and good friend that I went through grade school with, he had five brothers and they were all in the wrestling program at Silverton, and very good wrestlers. He talked me into it; he said, "I think you would be a good wrestler." Well, I was very powerful even as an eighth grader, because one of the things on the farm, my dad had bought this piece of property and it was just a solid rock pile. And we spent, from the age of probably six or seven, moving rocks off of that so we could farm like a two-acre piece here, put in corn, potatoes or strawberries or Christmas trees over in another section. And we were constantly moving rocks. There was one two-acre field that was right next to the road that came to the house, we actually dropped the elevation of that field by three feet from just moving rocks. And those rocks were all taken down on the back side of the property and we made a berm along – there was a little creek called Alder Creek, and there was a berm of rocks from the entire sixteen-acres long, with rocks that we took off that, mostly the one field.

But that was building strength that, we just thought that was normal. So there was no weightlifting or any of that stuff – you didn't need it.

MD: That's the epitome of the Oregon State aggie, come to school with a cow underneath each arm...

LB: It absolutely was. And wrestling in particular, you could start wrestling at a later age because if you brought these tools in – like, I was lucky enough to have some speed and quickness along with the strength. Technically I wasn't very good for a lot of years, but I had some gifts because of the work that we did early and some God-given gifts that allowed me to jump into wrestling. My freshman year in high school, I can't remember how many matches I had, but we had a freshman team. And I couldn't beat anybody on the team. Silverton, at the time, was very competitive on the state level. In fact, we won a state championship two years later. But the year that I came in, I had pretty decent people that had wrestling experience in front of me, so I couldn't beat them. So I was on the freshman team and I think I had like twenty-five matches that year. I never finished a match: I either pinned or got pinned every match. Well, that was the lack of technique. And I think, at the freshman level, it was something like I was 21-4 or something like that. But I got pinned four times and I pinned twenty-one guys. [laughs] And that was obviously enough success for me to really get into the sport and use the tools that I had.

MD: And think, "is this where I want to go?" That's one of the things that I was kind of going at, why wrestling? But like you said, it was both seasonal and having the skillset.

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LB: Yeah and having the very good friend who talked me into it. And honestly, if that hadn't happened, I would have never known the sport existed. Like I said, we weren't exposed to sports, we didn't watch sports on t.v. Our whole existence, as we were growing up, was working. And there was a very limited t.v. time – Sunday night, watching Walt Disney or Lawrence Welk for my mom, and that was it. The rest of the time, it was schoolwork, work. We'd get up early in the morning, milk two cows in the morning, and then two cows at night. No matter what else you were doing, you had to do that stuff. So that was our life until we got into high school, then it started changing.

MD: One of the questions I always enjoy asking, no matter what generation a person is from, everyone has a significant memory of an event that basically sticks with them for life, like Pearl Harbor or new kids have the Challenger disaster. How about when JFK was assassinated? Or the first steps on the moon? Those are our memories.

LB: Actually, probably my first t.v. memory was John F. Kennedy being shot. And my memory is not real clear, but it does stick out as something that occurred and I believe we were let out of school. We didn't have t.v., radio or anything like that in the schools at the time, but we did have one at home – this was obviously the early '60s – and we came home and I remember watching that film clip of the car going through Dallas. And a lot of the things that I remember, I'm sure

happened after the fact, so putting them together in a timeline... But absolutely, that is my first t.v. memory and first really big event in my life. Up to that point in time, everything that happened was local. I mean, it wasn't even in Silverton, what happened in Silverton. We had no knowledge of what was going on in Silverton. We had just knowledge of Scott's Mills and the hills. We were true hillbillies in those days and our whole life revolved around the family, working on the farm, and for my uncle on the farm, and cutting firewood and hunting and fishing. Big, big thing. My dad was a big deer hunter and loved trout fishing. He taught us to fly fish long before fly fishing was kind of the thing, and we did it for subsistence.

Back in the day, if I can deviate a little, on Sundays, particularly in the summers, Dad would take my brother and I – the two oldest boys – and we would hike about two-and-a-half miles to this local creek. And it was two-and-a-half miles down into this canyon. And he brought us boys because he could keep twenty-five fish a piece. And we brought fishing poles and he would teach us to fish and fly fish, but he was catching the fish. He could keep twenty-five; anything over six-inches long he could keep, legally. So every trip, he had a big wicker creel and he would bring seventy-five fish out every single time. Put moss on them to keep them wet. And being the good Catholic family, every Friday we ate fish. So during the summers, he stocked up on the trout and then maybe once a year, he would go with a family friend and go offshore and do some bottom fishing. And we would stock up and that's the fish that we ate every Friday. And we were very, very religious about eating fish on Fridays. And in those days, even the schools catered to that – we had fish Fridays every Friday.

But hunting and fishing were a huge part of growing up. We couldn't wait to get our first bee bee gun and then our first .22 and go out deer hunting. That was a big part of our subsistence, particularly deer – we didn't do a lot of elk hunting. But deer hunting, Dad would get, all the boys would get tags, my mom would get a tag, and we would get four or five deer a year to subsist on.

MD: The freezer's full.

LB: After the beef. You went through the beef first, because that was the most desirable. We usually butchered one or two beef a year. Once those were through, we were eating venison for the rest of the year.

MD: Well feeding ten kids, that would run you out of house and home anyway.

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LB: It did, it did.

MD: When you were getting ready to graduate from high school, what influenced your – why I would go to OSU? Was it a scholarship? Were you scouted?

LB: Yeah, in fact, a lot of different reasons for OSU. First and foremost, my high school coach, by the name of Jack Berger, was a 1963 graduate of Oregon State, wrestled for Dale Thomas, was a conference champion for Dale in 1962 or 1963, and just sang the praises of Oregon State wrestling. And him and Dale would actually clash even back in those days, they clashed a little bit, some philosophical differences. But he was a diehard Beaver fan and wrestling fan. So when I got to the point that, "hey, I might be good enough to go," which occurred about my junior year... Ironically, my freshman year I said I wrestled freshmen, well the next year I wrestled JV and I still had a state place-winner in front of me that I couldn't beat. So I never started on varsity until my junior year in high school, but by the time I started the varsity the first match my junior year, I was ranked number one in the state. I had never wrestled varsity but what I had done was wrestle in a lot of summer tournaments and things. I went to some state freestyle and Greco-Roman, and actually did well enough that, by the time I came in my junior year, I was ranked first in the state.

So anyway, I was influenced by Jack Berger, the coach. And then my graduating year, I was actually being recruited for both football and wrestling, really all over the country. I had letters for football from Notre Dame. I was being recruited by University of Washington. I actually went on a recruiting trip to University of Oklahoma for both football and wrestling, and they had a great program; Barry Switzer was the football coach in those days. And then, of course, I was being recruited by Oregon State. Dee Andros sent an assistant to talk to me. They really thought that, for my position, I was too small and they showed a computer printout of everybody playing. And I was a lineman – I was a guard and a tackle – and they were saying, "oh, you're just too small." And unfortunately or fortunately, however it worked out, I

believed them, but I really wanted to wrestle at Oregon State. So I had the opportunity to do both at several schools, but I really didn't know if I could handle it. So I chose wrestling and I chose Oregon State because of my high school coach.

Dale Thomas, I had experiences with Dale Thomas my junior year when we went on a cultural exchange team. And we actually came down to Oregon State, worked out in Langton Hall with the OSU team, and so I was exposed to Greg Strobel, who was the defending national champion, and Jim Hagen, who was second. And when I looked at that room, there were five All Americans in that room, and I go, "if I'm going to get any better, this is where I've got to come." So it was a balance. And I was recruited very hard by Oklahoma and, like I said, that was the only place I actually – besides University of Oregon and Portland State – that I actually traveled to. And they had strong arguments because their athletic programs were so much more well-defined and developed than Oregon State at the time. Especially in wrestling. Dale's budget was almost non-existent in those days and he would always brag that, "I never gave him a scholarship or him a scholarship," that was his excuse for not giving some of the better kids in the state a scholarship, because he didn't really ever have the money to do that.

But he had other ways to get you in here. In my case, for instance, he brought me in and I was one of the first full-time or full ride scholarships that he had offered at the time. And like I said, I was being nationally recruited and that was part of the reason. But Dale also knew, "I can offer Larry this scholarship, bring him in here," and the moment I walked into the office the first day of school – and actually, we reported a little bit early – he said, "Bielenberg, get down to the Financial Aid Office," and he knew, with ten brothers and sisters, that I would qualify for financial aid. And I did. So I walked in and applied for aid, and that was a new experience for my folks, who had never done anything like that. But once we got through the process, I qualified for the equivalent – well, more than the equivalent – of a full ride. In those days, I think a full ride was considered like \$2,200, was tuition, fees, room and board. That was all they could give. And I qualified for more than that in grants and aid, not any loans. So there were actually several of us on the team that were in that boat; that could have taken more money than the NCAA would let us, through the state scholarship program. But, of course, we could only take the \$2,200, so that's what I took. So Dale then took my scholarship and he split that up for a couple other recruits. That's the way Dale ran the program. I mean, he did everything-

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MD: Rob Peter to pay Paul.

LB: Yeah. His budget was so tight and nobody could stretch a dollar like Dale did.

MD: We'll get into him.

LB: There were several reasons that I chose Oregon State, and not the least of which, in 1973, my senior year, they just happened to take second in the country in the NCAA's up at the University of Washington. And of course, by then I was starting to follow sports and I happened to be, that particular year, University of Oklahoma was wrestling Oregon State at Gill Coliseum. And the Oklahoma coach brought me to OSU for a recruiting meeting there. It kind of backfired, because Dale ended up beating the University of Oklahoma which was ranked, at the time, quite a bit higher than OSU at the time. And then as the season went on, Dale's squad took second in the nation behind Iowa State. So that backfired a little bit for the coach – his name was Stan Abel – he really didn't expect that. I don't think they had ever come up here and lost. I don't know that they had ever lost to Oregon State at the time. Oregon State had always had a good program of course, but at the national level, we were always in the top ten – every once in a while jump into that fourth place – but the second place finish was the highest that Dale had ever had. And it just happened to be that year.

MD: Yeah, because his conference was continual.

LB: Continual. In fact, we may talk about this later, but my freshman year was the first year that we lost the conference championship in fifteen years. And I blame myself – not really...we had lost, other than Greg Strobel, we had lost all – actually, all but two of the All Americans graduated that year. Dale was left with a pretty empty squad. He had no idea how I was going to turn out – you never know how your recruits are going to turn out. I got lucky enough to do well my freshman year, but we didn't have, other than Greg Strobel and our 118-pounder Tommy Phillips, we didn't have a lot of strength on the team. We had some good wrestlers but not national caliber – nobody ranked. So the team kind of dropped

off my freshman year; but for myself and a walk-on from Virginia, we would have had a really, really poor year. But as Dale was apt to do, he developed some guys that nobody knew about.

MD: Well, we'll get back into athletics, but one of the things that I always like to talk about is campus life. You were here during the early 1970s to the mid-1970s, a changing time in the nation. We were just now getting out of Vietnam, counter-culture, were you on the outside of that counter-culture and just kind of watched it?

LB: I was so far outside that I didn't even watch it. And to be honest, I learned more about the counter-culture in high school than I did here at Oregon State. For the most part, I didn't experience that at all. And not because there weren't things happening, but just because my life was so focused on being a student. And being a student for me was a struggle. It wasn't a struggle necessarily because of IQ or anything like that, it just wasn't our background coming through high school. We had to do high school and we had to get through high school, and somewhere about my junior year, a counselor at the high school said, "you know, you might be think about getting your grades up because you have an opportunity here." I hadn't even thought of that to the point; nobody had gone to school from my family. And so, about my junior or senior year, I started focusing a little more on academics. When I got to OSU, that was my biggest fear. I had some fears about walking into the wrestling room, but my biggest fear was, "I've got to survive. I can't lose this scholarship." I mean, to me it was the greatest thing ever and the opportunity that I had that nobody else in my family did, I couldn't lose it. So even though I wasn't a gifted student and I didn't have a good background academically, I did focus and I worked as hard in the academics as I did in the wrestling. So it got me through.

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But that being said, there wasn't partying. There wasn't even really any campus involvement beyond the house that I stayed in which was a co-op, Reed Lodge. Reed Lodge, at the time, was a men's co-op. And I ended up at Reed Lodge not because that was my first choice, but my senior year in high school, I made a national high school team, and we traveled up to Poland. And I spent most of the summer working out in a wrestling camp and then traveling to Poland and then coming back late. And even though I had gotten my college entry paperwork in, I didn't get housing. So when I came back, it was all that was left, so I ended up at this co-op, which wasn't my ideal campus living situation. I mean, I dreamt that the dorms were where I could be left alone, I could go to the library and study, which was what I did a lot. And then just focused on my academics and my wrestling. The co-op life is similar to the fraternity life and I made a conscious decision not to go into a fraternity because I did not think that I could handle fraternity life, academia, and the wrestling world.

And so I ended up at this co-op and really, all that I remember about that first year is, other than a few house activities – ironically, the one that stands out the most to me is a wood-splitting trip. The house had a big fireplace and burned wood, so the president of our house rented a truck from the OSU car pool and we went out – some farmer had donated oak firewood to OSU and we could go out and, if we'd split it and bring it in, we could have it. So we went out and we got out there, and somebody had borrowed a chainsaw, but nobody knew how to run the chainsaw except me. So I fire up the chainsaw and I started cutting wood, and the rest of the house was supposed to be splitting and stacking, but nobody could split wood. So I ended up cutting and splitting, and the one thing they could do is I taught them how to stack firewood in a truck. And I cut and split five cords of wood that day and we filled a five-ton truck up with this oak firewood and hauled it back. It was a great workout for me, but it was something that I grew up doing. And the guys would just get back and watch me split the wood, because most of them had not done that kind of stuff.

MD: Yeah, they'd have to get their hands dirty before that. [laughs]

LB: That was one of the house activities. Later on in the spring, after wrestling season was over, we did some social events with some of the other co-ops on campus. But as far as the counter-culture, I was very fortunate as far as Vietnam, the draft ended. I got a number. I filled out my application and I got my draft number, which was very low – I think I had a 6. I would have gone or maybe got some kind of deferment, but I didn't have to do that because they actually stopped taking people in the draft that year; basically that summer.

MD: Yeah, you and me are in the same boat. Right exactly that same time.

LB: I was fortunate there. My older brother Tom actually didn't have to serve either in Vietnam because he had an extremely high number. He was two years older than me but he had a very high number, so he was never called. So he went to work right out of high school and is still doing today what he was doing then, and that is logging.

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MD: What was your major? Did you have any favorite classes or professors?

LB: I honestly can say I didn't have a lot of favorites back when I started. When I came down, I really didn't know what I wanted to do, so I went into the Liberal Arts. And then, as I started researching, I felt my niche was going to be in forestry and/or fish and wildlife. So that was my initial focus and I spent that first year having people tell me, "oh, you've got to get out of that. There's no jobs." And, once again, I listened to people and, in hindsight, I wish I hadn't because the science background that I would have gotten in either of those fields would have helped me later on in my career. But I let people kind of talk me out of things and then, of course, Dale Thomas had a big influence.

So what I went into was, at time it was called Health and P.E., now I think it's called Health and Human Performance. But I went into Health and P.E. with the intent of becoming a teacher and a coach, and I basically ended up graduating, getting my teaching certificate, and went on to do some graduate work in education as well. Because in those days – I'm not sure what the requirements are now – but eventually you had to get your master's or the equivalent in Education. So I thought, when I did graduate – I actually got my degree in '78, I finished my eligibility in '77. Because I had switched majors two or three times early, I gave up a lot of classes and I didn't graduate until '78, and then I started grad school right away. And I was actually granted a post-bac scholarship from the NCAA, so it was just a good progression to get that schooling that I knew I was going to need later on if I was going to be teaching and coaching, to get that done up front and maybe get me a little higher-paying job and so on.

So Health and Human Performance is what I graduated in, and then I started working on my master's in Education. Some things occurred and I had spread my graduate work out over two years, because I would take a term off and be wrestling, and I was helping Dale coach as a graduate assistant. Not paid, just graduate assistant.

MD: Just hanging around.

LB: Just hanging around, working out with the team and staying in shape, going to grad school, and just helping the team out.

MD: Well are there any other special recollections you have about being a Beaver? What did it mean to you to be a Beaver Believer in the '70s?

LB: Well, for me, the Beavers were the only team that existed. Other than the short window of recruiting, where I did get to experience some other universities, if you go back to our background, we really weren't exposed to a lot of the outside world. Once I got involved with the Beavers, that was all that existed. The only other thing that stands out, and this is a little bit related to basketball, at the time – I can't remember if this was in '74 or '75 – UCLA was dominant in basketball. And everybody knew about that, because we had such a great basketball program here, yet could never seem to get over UCLA. But we did, while I was a student here, we beat them. And I remember, we didn't get to go to a lot of basketball games because of wrestling; we were traveling a lot. So we didn't get to watch a lot of basketball, but the biggest events in my career here, besides the wrestling, was watching Ralph Miller and the basketball team do so well and then finally beat UCLA. And in those days when they were so successful, the lines of students camping overnight at the Coliseum, for a week, just to get the tickets, because you had to stay in line to get the ticket. Those things I remember.

I remember coming home from road trips and it would be like a Sunday night or a Saturday night, and there would be students starting to camp out for the next weekend's game. And I'm going, "how do these guys go to classes?" [laughs] But those were campus things that caught us; we were involved in sports mostly.

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Academically, it was really a grindstone for me. I mean, really having to work hard at it. And once I got into my major, which was the Health and P.E., with very good professors, some of the toughest courses that I took were anatomy and

physiology of exercise. Those were the toughest for me, but the most enjoyable and the ones that I got the most out of. It was kind of like our wrestling program – the harder you worked at it, the more you got out of it. And it was that way. Dr. Campbell was our professor and he was tough. We had groups and we did basically like a term paper every week, and I just thought, "that's overwhelming." I didn't have the best typing skills. In fact, I didn't have any typing skills. It was finger pecking in those days. So you would try to get in a good group with somebody who had good typing skills [laughs] and you'd try to get somebody with a good brain. But we enjoyed those groups. And the labs in those classes were fun; hard but fun. I enjoyed those.

I didn't care for a lot of the, you know, we had a series of History. And I liked History but I didn't particularly like the History classes that I had. We had to take some Sociology and Psychology, and I thought I knew everything anyway as far as those things. So that stuff didn't impress me as much as it does now, what's really going on your head and in our world. Sociologically, what was occurring escaped me at the time and you couldn't really see, "why am I studying this stuff." And now you see it later on, once you start working with people. The psychology, just supervising people and guiding people and coaching people. You see the benefit later on.

MD: If you knew then what you know now.

LB: Obviously. It's just like with your parents. [laughs]

MD: Let's talk about your wrestling career here at Oregon State. You were very successful as a high school wrestler. You were ranked high, state-wide, as a high schooler.

LB: Right. I was, as I mentioned earlier, I didn't make the varsity but by the time that I had, I was highly ranked and was favored to win the state championship my junior year. And as things happened, one of the things I battled with as a kid, really all the way up through college, was an asthma problem. My mom had it extremely; in fact, she passed away at sixty-four because of asthma. And there were two or three of us in the family that kind of inherited that gene, and I fought asthma from the age of about four all the way through college. Well my junior year, it just so happened that at the state tournament – it was a nerve thing and it happens if you're nervous, it will kind of ignite an asthmatic reaction, which it did. I ended up losing my first match to a kid that I had beat during the year, so it cost me the state tournament. I did end up coming back and taking third.

And that same year – in Oregon we had what was called the State Freestyle and Greco-Roman, and you had the opportunity to be a triple crown champion with the state folkstyle, which is what they wrestle in high school, and then freestyle and Greco, which are the Olympic styles. Well I went on, three weeks later, beat all those same guys in freestyle and Greco, and won state freestyle and Greco. And then the next year, my senior year, I won all three styles. So I got to be called a triple crowner. So I was a two-time freestyle champion, a one-time collegiate or folkstyle champion in high school. And I came to Oregon State next.

MD: You came into Oregon State already as a champion and then you had to basically start over again as a freshman.

LB: Yeah, exactly.

MD: Intimidating?

LB: Very intimidating. I got some experiences that a lot of the average kids didn't get, but it was partly because I was motivated to work hard – I felt I needed the extra work. So I wrestled in the springs and summer. Later on, after I got my dad over the fact that, "maybe sports isn't such a bad thing," because he used to say, "you can go out and cut a load of wood to get in shape," that was the mentality. But I did a lot of spring wrestling and, in my junior and senior in high school, I went on a couple of cultural exchange trips and then I also went to the national high school freestyle and Greco-Roman championships. And I was lucky enough to win that my senior year as well.

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So when I came to OSU, that was partly why I was as highly recruited as I was. Because I had a national high school behind me that a lot of kids didn't. So I walked into the room with those credentials, but in my mind, I knew what I was walking into. There were literally – Greg was still active, he was going to be a senior, Greg Strobel, and he was the

defending national champion, Outstanding Wrestler his junior year at the nationals. And he was one of the key reasons why I chose Oregon State; I knew I was going to come in – I was a 190-pounder, just like him – I was going to work out with Greg.

My big goal – and this is so ironic – by big goal when I came to Oregon State, in wrestling, was I wanted to get a letterman's jacket. I wanted to get a letter at Oregon State. And I thought, "well, Greg's going to beat me my first year, I know that." I was a realist. "And then when he graduates, maybe I'll have a chance to make the team." Life works out differently, but I walked in knowing what I was getting into and being conscious of making that decision that, if I was going to make the OSU team or get better, I needed these guys to work out with every day. And that's what I did.

So when I walked in, even though I knew what to expect, it was very intimidating. Five All Americans in the room, every day, just thrashing you. And just out of the blue one day – I'm focused on 190-pounds, that's what I was in high school, that's what I was prepared to wrestle. I weighed about 195, so it was going to be about a four-pound cut, which is nothing. Dale walked up to me and said, "I want you to try to out at heavyweight." I had never wrestled heavyweight and I thought, "this crazy old man." But he knew what he was doing.

So we tried out and, ironically, the first tryout, I was only the second best guy in the room at heavyweight. We had a kid who was a sophomore from West Albany, Paul Jackson, that was beating me in the room, and everybody else, I would beat. I couldn't beat Greg at 190 and I couldn't beat Paul, so I was going to be second. Well, Paul got hurt. Right before our first road trip, Paul Jackson got hurt. So I was the next in line and I went on the first road trip, and the first road trip was a trip down through California. I remember wrestling – I think it was actually a flying trip – and we wrestled Cal Poly, UCLA, maybe Cal Berkeley. USC never had a team. And then we flew from California to Arizona and it was a big tournament at the beginning of the year called The Arizona Invitational. And I pinned my very first kid from UCLA, he was also a freshman. And I got beat by a big heavyweight from Cal Poly who was about 330 pounds, I recall. And I'm only about 195 at the time.

MD: Yeah, you were at the bottom end.

LB: And I did not know how to wrestle heavyweight. I knew how to wrestle like a 90-pounder or a 77-pounder, but I didn't know how to wrestle like a heavyweight. So I was wrestling these guys as if they were my size. Well, that very first match against somebody that was a lot larger than me, it cost me. I got caught underneath and he flattened me out and he ended up beating me. Less than a week later, we wrestled again in that tournament, and between that match and the tournament, I got him disqualified for stalling. It wasn't me so much as – the beauty of Dale Thomas was being able to look at a wrestler, look at a situation, and just with a few words kind of change your focus or change your attitude or even your behavior when it came to that. Now the one thing I was, was very coachable, and I think even Dale would have told you that. He never complimented anybody on anything, but I think he would have said that I was at least one of his coachable guys, because he would tell me to do something and I'd do it.

So we went from losing to this big kid at Cal Poly to having him disqualified for stalling. I ended up losing a couple matches there and placing, I don't remember, but bottom line, when I came back from that road trip, nobody in the room could beat me then. And the same guys that were beating me – with the exception of Greg Strobel, he could beat me that year. But of all the guys I was trying out against, nobody could beat me.

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MD: Well, your career record – I looked up stats on you – aside from being Pac-8 at that time, '77 and '76 champion, your career record is 164-15-1. Who did you tie with?

LB: Actually, who I tied with was that big heavyweight from Cal Poly, come think of it. [laughs] I actually wrestled him several times and I actually did tie him. And then shortly after that, the ties kind of went away. But actually that overall record is a little bit – they've actually got my senior record, in some stats, kind of wrong. They have me losing three or four times, I think. But my freshman year, I believe I lost seven matches, and the next three years, I lost three. So that first year was definitely a learning year. But the nice thing about it, and just kind of the example that I gave you, is early in the year I struggled, especially with the big guys. And by the end of the year, I was starting to figure things out, Dale was able to help me on specific heavyweights, "this is what I don't think you need to do against this guy." Because I had a style that

was very aggressive, which is good if you're any other weight class. But at heavyweight, if you shoot in under a guy and he's a decent athlete and he catches you – the biggest I got my freshman year was 205 pounds. So when you would shoot under a 300- or 400-pounder, you better not be stopping. You better be continuing to move.

MD: Yeah, because he'd fall on you and squish you.

LB: Yeah, absolutely. As Dale used to call it, they'd "belly whip" you. [laughs] Dale had some colorful descriptions of wrestlers, to the say the least, a lot of which I couldn't repeat here. But that was Dale; he kind of called it like it was.

MD: So describe a typical meet. How did you train then? Did you watch game films or whatever against these people? Or did you just size up whatever behemoth they put you up against?

LB: For the most part, we did very little scouting. And I can say later on my career, with one particular heavyweight, we didn't watch films or anything per se, but we had enough history with him – I wrestled him six times, I won three times, he won three times, over my last two years. We had enough history that the coaching was taking place in the practice room in terms of more philosophically what you had to do and what not to do. Dale's method of coaching was really duplicating what you did in competition, in the wrestling room. So he didn't like to drill a lot.

I wrestled for a lot of different coaches during my career on world teams, junior world teams, even Olympic teams, and a lot of the coaches we had focused a lot on drilling. Just drill, drill, drill, until that move became automatic. What Dale felt, and I what I found in my own career, is that you're not really duplicating that move when you have somebody that's dynamic and moving against you in a different way with strength and speed. So Dale believed in practicing exactly how you wrestled – whether it was a tournament or an individual dual meet. We practiced by doing a lot of live wrestling matches. We would do our warm-ups, which always included lots of – no weight lifting, he considered that an unnecessary evil. When we weightlifted, it was with people. So we would do squats, for instance. Instead of weights, we had a guy on our back, and you were doing squats with a guy on your back. Or headstand push-ups, or pull-ups on bars and things. You used your own body weight or somebody else's body weight to do your weightlifting. So there was some warm-up with that, before and after practice.

And then there might be a clinic – we'd call it a wrestling clinic – to show a situation that occurred. Like, "Bielenberg, you got beat the other night because you couldn't do this or you didn't do this," and he would simulate that situation, and then we would go out and practice that situation. Like, "ok, I got beat when I had a single leg up in the air and I couldn't finish it from here," we would get into those situations and then go live. We hardly ever did dummy drills other than just purely warming up before practice started, he would be fine with you grabbing a partner and going through drills and dummy moves. But when we worked on something, we worked on it one hundred percent, full speed all the time, so that you were simulating what occurred in a real match. And then to take that one step further, you would have periods of your workouts – you would work on situational drills, we called it. But mostly, it was live wrestling. Pair up – and, for us, it was the same guys every night – but pair up, and we'd wrestle two or three hard matches every night.

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And of course keep in mind, for me and a for a lot of guys on the team, we were going up against All Americans every night. So what better practice than to wrestle Greg Strobel every night, go a live match with him? He was beating me badly when I was a freshman; just to score a takedown on him was a huge victory, or to get away from him. And then the next time, you get that takedown and then eventually, "hey, I tied him." And then eventually, by my sophomore year, I could stay with him. Those were individual goals that you set. But you were wrestling All Americans every night, hard. So when you walked out on the mat, whether it was on the weekend or on a road trip, we actually warmed up against each other – Greg Strobel and I, and later on it was Howard Harris – we warmed up with a hard match, before our match.

MD: The other team must have been impressed with that, you'd think.

LB: I think it was great psychological warfare against them. They would see two All Americans just going at it as hard as you could possibly be, and maybe initially thinking, "oh, these guys are going to wear themselves out," because I remember thinking that. But you've gotten in such good shape and, frankly, the way that we practiced and the way that Dale's philosophy, we were always in better shape. That's why I won is because I was in better shape than ninety-nine

percent of the heavyweights; maybe a hundred percent of the heavyweights that I ever wrestled. And right on down the line, there was a big discrepancy for me between heavyweights, because most heavyweights didn't work like that. But when you've got a 90-pounder or a 77-pounder, they also know how to work hard. But our 90-pounders were in better shape. Our 25-pounders were in better shape; our 33-pounders were in better shape. And it wasn't an accident. It was because we didn't work on drilling so much as we worked on live wrestling and then Dale was just absolutely adamant about running.

The first memory, the first thing that happened when I came down to Oregon State, was a timed two-mile. And Dale loved the timed two-mile because it simulated the length of a match. Match length has changed over the years, but it used to be, internationally, it was nine minutes, collegiately it was eight minutes, and then it changed to three-two-two, so now it's seven minutes, and it's evolved over the years. Of course, high school it was six-minute matches. But he loved the timed two-mile because it simulated the length of time you were out there. So our job when we ran – and we ran every morning, either on our own or timed – was to beat our previous time. Now, you didn't obviously do that, but I can honestly say, for me coming in as a freshman, I was not a very good runner. And by the time I left, for a heavyweight, I was running eleven minute, eleven-thirty-two miles. Which for, as Dale would say, "a fat guy," wasn't bad. [laughs]

But we did a lot of running, and it was a discipline thing. Dale would have timed runs maybe on Friday mornings, and it was different with different teams. If he had a particularly difficult team that he didn't feel was doing the running, he'd make them show up every morning and time them every morning. But if you had a dedicated group of guys that were working hard on their own, he would leave it to them, except every Friday we would go out on a timed two-mile run. And then sometimes we'd stretch them out. But he loved running. He felt like, if you're a good runner, you're going to be a good wrestler, and it was a cardio thing. And it's mostly just a discipline thing.

[0:54:57]

MD: Cardio and stamina.

LB: For Dale, his whole world was around discipline. Everything he did on the mat and everything that he taught us was about discipline. And I came from a very disciplined family, that's what my dad did. My high school coach was a product of Dale, he was very disciplined and ran a disciplined program. So for me, those transitions weren't as difficult as they were for a lot of other guys that had more talent than I had and did a lot of what they did on talent. They didn't really have the work ethic that you needed to take this to the next level, and Dale weeded those guys out pretty fast.

But he had the ability to take anybody – and I mentioned earlier on about a walk-on my freshman year, and this guy's name was Gordon Iiams, a very brilliant student. He was in Dale's P.E. class and Dale was impressed enough to talk him into coming out for the team. The way Dale worked, I'm sure the way he worded it was, "I need a body to throw against these guys." He was never really full of a lot of compliments, but he had a way of talking people into things. And he talked this guy into coming out from his P.E. class onto the wrestling team. So as a walk-on, this guy becomes an All American. And I don't know what his high school career was, I don't remember that, but I do remember Dale taking kids that most colleges wouldn't even recruit – second, third in state – and making All Americans out of them. He had a way of – not so much that he could say, "I think this guy's going to work out," it's just, "I need this guy and this guy and this guy to cover these weights. I can't offer you any money, because I don't have any. But I think you can help the program and maybe we'll help you." And lo and behold, after three or four years, all the sudden these guys who were third in the state, they're second in the nation.

Most coaches weren't doing that. Most coaches were taking blue chippers – you know, I may have been considered a blue chipper at the time, but blue chippers were far and few between. And even though Oregon had some great high school wrestling at the time. During that time period, we had very good high school – we were as good as anybody in the country. But still, one of the classmates from my high school was a two-time state champion – he helped make me what I was in high school – he did sign a letter to University of Oklahoma. Another guy from Estacada went up to University of Washington. So we didn't keep all the best kids here, they weren't around, but none of them had the success as the guys that ended up at Oregon State. And it wasn't an accident. I think I saw that early, even as a dumb country hick, I watched the kinds of kids that Dale was bringing into the program and there were a few similarities. They better have the work ethic, they better be willing to work hard, take orders, follow the program like he wanted it followed and run. If not, you

were gone. I mean, there were a lot of great wrestlers that didn't make it very long that, for the most part, did not buy into his philosophy, which was: hard work. Just hard work.

MD: You mentioned this term All American a number of times. You are a four-time All American. How does that work in wrestling? And did you get a free cup of coffee with this All American rating?

LB: [laughs] In wrestling, it's sad to say, because I've done a lot sports in my life. I raised a couple of girls and helped them do high school and college sports; I've coached a lot of different sports in that process. None of them are as tough as wrestling, hands down. I've done a lot. I've played soccer with my daughters and football and we used to play basketball for fun. That was a break from wrestling, from workouts. We'd go swimming. And those are all tough sports, in and of themselves, but just the overall intensity and pressure of wrestling and the everyday toughness on the mat, nothing matched it.

For wrestling, to be an All American, there's really a fine line between an All American and a guy – and we just saw it this weekend, OSU was just in and Ronnie Bresser, our 125-pounder, just missed out. His last match, if he wins the match he's an All American, and he loses it by one point, and he's not an All American. Well, he knows he's just as good as the guy that he lost to. In fact, I believe he's beaten several of those guys that ended up All American. In my day, it was the top six guys in the country, in the NAAs, were All Americans. Now it's the top eight. And it's a very grueling road, particularly if you lose that first one. Like Ronnie Bresser lost his first match and now he's got to come back and win like six times to become an All American. That's very difficult; that's the hardest road.

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Ironically, that's what happened to me my freshman year, because I was new and I was unranked at the time, basically. In those days, you typically didn't get ranked unless you placed the year before. So even if you had beaten quite a few guys, which I had, you still might not be ranked when you went to the NAAs. So I came in unranked. I drew what was called the pigtail match – it was a thirty-six man bracket I believe, or forty-eight man, I can't remember. Anyway, there was a couple extra wrestlers, so you would do a pigtail match out front. I drew the pigtail match and I beat a guy from Alabama that first round. The next round, which is actually the original first round, I drew the number two guy in the country. He was an All American from Oklahoma State and he was ranked number two. And he wasn't a big guy, so that part wasn't intimidating, but I let that seed kind of affect me a little bit. And I proceeded to wrestle him, I lost to him, so I got dumped down into consolations and I had, I think, seven matches. I had to win five straight to become an All American.

And then once you became an All American status, then you'd wrestle again to see if you get in for third/fourth or fifth and sixth. And to give you an example of how coachable I am, it was that tournament – and I beat the last guy, knew I was going to be an All American, knew I was going to be at least sixth place, and I'm wrestling a kid from Yale who's a senior, and if I beat him I go in for third or fourth. And he was a lot better wrestler than me, but I was in a lot better shape than him. And he jumped on me and I came back, and there was about twenty seconds left, and I had taken him down. And this is a heavyweight match and the score is like 10-11; that doesn't usually happen in a heavyweight match, but it was that kind of a match where he had jumped on top of me and I just kept taking him down and letting him go, taking him down. Well, I had taken him down the last time with about twenty seconds left to go and the scoreboard showed that I was behind by one. What Dale didn't see and the assistant coach didn't see was that I had riding time, so essentially the match was tied and all I had to do was ride him for ten seconds. And he was so tired, he couldn't get away. I mean, he couldn't do anything, he was absolutely just-

MD: -whipped.

LB: Yeah, whipped. They didn't know I was ahead, they told me to let him go. So I let him go with ten seconds, shot in – because they told me to, so I did what they told me to. I let him go, took him down, had him sitting on his butt as the time ran out, I didn't get the takedown. So I ended up losing the match and I would have gone into overtime, because it was actually tied with riding time. And so had I just rode him out for ten seconds rather than let him go, I would have won that match, or taken it to overtime. And I had taken him down like three times in a row right before that, so he was just fatigued. But it was one of the times that – I never let Dale forget that. "Because Dale, if I wasn't so coachable," [laughs] because one of his big beefs was if he would tell somebody to do something and they wouldn't listen. Well, I always listened and it cost me at least third or fourth place at the nationals my freshman year.

But I was able to come back and then, ironically, when I lost that match, I went for fifth or sixth and I met the guy that beat me in the first round. The kid from Oklahoma State got upset in the semifinals by a great big heavyweight from Northern Illinois, and so I wrestled – this kid's name was Tommy Hazel – I wrestled him again. And this time the fear of the seeding was completely out, because I had the confidence of knowing I just went through this tournament and had beaten guys who had beaten me during the year, beaten guys who were previous All Americans. And I shot right off the whistle and took him right to his butt and then slammed – you may remember from your wrestling days an arm bar – but I slammed an arm bar and ran it, and I pinned him in less than thirty seconds in the first period to get fifth place.

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And it was just a difference here [points to head] and that *is* the difference in wrestling. There's probably twenty guys who could be All Americans, but who has it here [points to head again] and who's ready to go? And just in that tournament, I took a big step from a confidence level and was able to achieve All American status. And then, of course, the next year was the year that I won; in 1975 I took first place.

MD: You were the NCAA champion and that was also the year that OSU took, or was that...?

LB: Uh, '75 just wasn't a good year team-wise. Like I said, the year before I got there, we graduated a lot of people, and so the team was actually down a couple years. In fact, my freshman and sophomore years were the first two years Dale did not win the conference. And we had a chance to win the conference – University of Oregon had become very strong and my rival was from the University of Oregon, Greg Gibson. In our career, we met fifteen to eighteen times and specifically that year, we met in the Pac-8 finals and then we met again – in fact, my only blemish my sophomore year was I lost to Greg Gibson in the Pac-8 finals. Just one of these roly-poly matches; that one ended up, he beat me 12-11. Sometime in the match, I sprained both ankles. That wasn't an excuse; I didn't even know it until afterwards. But something happened and he beat me.

Well, two weeks later, I met him in the national finals. And I had never lost to him before that match and I never lost to him again. I think I beat him 7-2 in the national final match. But we had a great rivalry for three years. He was a year older than me, so he graduated a year before me. Then him and I, the next two years, our big nemesis was big Jimmy Jackson from Oklahoma State; he's the guy that beat me my junior and senior year for the national title. And he was 360 pounds. Jimmy Jackson was – I wrestled a lot of big guys and most of them, they had size, some of them had strength, but none of them had the whole package really. Jimmy did. I compare him to a lot of people, I don't know if you remember William Perry from the Chicago Bears?

MD: Yeah, the Refrigerator.

LB: The Refrigerator. That guy was such an athlete. He was huge – a big guy, strong – but such an athlete that they could hand him the ball and obviously he could blow people out. But what people don't realize about it, he was a great athlete – he had a good balance, good strength – and Jimmy was like that. He's almost 6'6" and 360 pounds, and literally, there's pictures of me and him at Gill Coliseum here, and we had 6 to 8,000 people here watching a wrestling match, which doesn't happen. And I had his leg completely over my, almost over my head; I mean, higher than my shoulders. It was cradled here. [points to crook of his arm] I had his leg up this high and he's dancing around and I can't take him down. And most guys wouldn't have nearly that flexibility; as soon as you did that, they'd just topple like a tree. He would dance around, I had to do all kinds of things to knock him off his feet. It was very difficult.

Jimmy and I made teams together. In 1975 we were on the junior world team, in 1973 we were on a high school national team together – that was the team that went to Poland. And then in '75, we went to Bulgaria on the junior world team; '76, the Olympic team. Him and I worked out and wrestled for years. And so, I was beating him every time we wrestled up until my junior year and he finally figured out how to stop my shot and kind of neutralize me. Basically, he surprised me during a dual meet down in Oklahoma City my junior year, and that was the first loss that I had that year. And we knew we were going to meet again in the national finals, and he just had my number. That was my junior year and he was only a sophomore then, so he won it as a sophomore.

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And the difference is – this is the next two years – he beat me at the nationals, but we were able to beat him in some dual meets, being here in my senior year. And it was Dale's coaching – that was one of those situations where, we didn't look at film, but we knew the particular situation where I would get into trouble and what I had to do to neutralize that. And we worked on that specifically in the wrestling room on how do I take Jimmy down, because of his balance. "Stay away, don't get underneath him," those kinds of things. That wasn't hard to figure out. [laughs] First time I was flattened, the first time he had beaten me, I thought it was kind of a fluke. It was down in Oklahoma and I shot and he flattened me and got a takedown, and then he ran. He ran the rest of the match. And of course it was in Oklahoma City, they didn't call him for stalling, and in a normal match he would have been disqualified. But it was down there, home field advantage, and so in my mind I thought that as a fluke and that when we got to nationals I was going to beat him.

And I made the same mistake for the second time, and this time he really made me pay for it because he not only flattened me out but he was able to throw me in a cradle and he scored five. Well, five is hard to come back on on a guy his size, because I couldn't turn him. He was so big. There were a couple of guys that I wrestled, big Jimmy was one and there was a big kid from Boise State that was 420 pounds, and I equate trying to turn them like taking a six-foot old growth log with two limbs sticking out, now try to flip them over that limb. You can't do it. [laughs] Their arms are bigger round than my leg; they were massive people. And even in that point in time, I was only about 210 pounds. I was still a very small-

MD: -half of them.

LB: I think at the time, I was probably the smallest heavyweight to ever win the nationals. I don't know if that's correct, just based on the names and even Jess Lewis, who was considered a small heavyweight in his day, Jess was over 220 pounds. My sophomore year, I didn't weight 210 when I won that. And like I said, the biggest guy I wrestled was this Mark Bigg from Boise State, 420 or 30 pounds.

MD: So heavyweight is 197 and above?

LB: In those days it was 191 and above, and above was unlimited. There was actually a big heavyweight from Columbia Basin up in Washington, a community college, and he was over 500 pounds. Now I never wrestled him, but the guy that I happened to beat off the team, this Paul Jackson, later on Paul wrestled him and beat him. By then, I had a couple years in and Paul kept wrestling with us for a couple years, and I actually took the J.V. team up to a tournament at a community college, and he wrestled this guy. And he's the biggest guy I ever saw on a wrestling mat. And we beat him; Paul beat him. We used things like arm drags and things; I was able to impart a little of my experience, "don't get under him!"

MD: Well, just to look at Coach Thomas a little bit more, he's a storied coach at OSU. He came here in 1956 and lasted as the NCAA's most winning coach until he retired in 1990. So what's your favorite memory of Coach Thomas?

LB: [laughs] I mentioned a little bit earlier about, Dale could pinch a penny like nobody. Part of it was by design, but he was also a product of the era. A lot of his generation had gone through the Depression and, like my father – my dad and Dale Thomas were born the same year, so their early livelihoods were similar. You just learned how to go a long ways. One of the things – and I can't remember which year it was, I think it may have been my senior year – but this was just so typical of Dale, two instances. He would never go out and pay for these elaborate training meals. And wrestlers, they're cutting weight all the time. That's a huge part of wrestling. It wasn't for me so much, because I was a heavyweight. But we'd go weigh in and then we'd go to a training meal, and he was always – you could not order what you wanted, he ordered for you, and only what he wanted you to eat. And that was at a restaurant.

[1:15:12]

But most of the time, he had arranged a meal. Like, first instance, we went back to New Jersey and there was a big tournament in New York. He had arranged for us to stay at, we were wrestling Montclair State College, a small college, in those days a Division III, but one of the nationally known Division III. We stayed at the equivalent of an old folks' home, because their coach had set that up and we stayed there free. And Dale said, "hey, I've got a great deal for you guys. We're going to stay over here in this house," [laughs] and it looked like an old farmhouse within the city. And we went in and we slept in the equivalent of an attic. They served us our training meal – after we weighed in, they took us back to this house – and the training meal, all they had was corn flakes. And all of this is free, so Dale didn't have to pay for any of it, so we eat corn flakes as a training meal. We had guys that had been cutting weight all week, they hadn't eaten anything, just

drinking sips of water and chewing ice cubes. And they get this Corn Flakes for a training meal. Well, part of what Dale did was because he was tight and he didn't have much of a budget. But the other part was he could have afforded more, but he knew that it built tough wrestlers. He constantly put us in situations that, pardon the expression, but it would just make you so mad that by the time you were out wrestling, you felt sorry for the guy you were going to wrestle.

MD: You would take it out on him.

LB: Yeah, it was a psychological thing that Dale did. And one of the reasons I think he was so successful, he was so cheap by design. When we did get a hotel room, it was six guys in one room with maybe two beds. Just fighting and scrapping for anything you could – he loved it when we were home here, because then he could send us to a dorm and he had something worked out, and we could get a halfway decent meal. But when we were on the road...his favorite though was when you could go to a King's Table and pay \$2.50 all you could eat. That only happened after the match, not before. So one of our road trips to Seattle, we would stop at a King's Table up there after the dual was over and then guys would just gorge themselves, and it only cost him \$2.50 a plate or something like that.

There's just literally dozens of stories. My senior year, we're on a road trip down to California – and this was a driving road trip, and that was real typical. He would get a van from the OSU car pool and it would be one of these big, long stretch vans, because we might take fifteen guys. So there would be the coach and fifteen wrestlers, in case somebody got hurt. And we would drive all the way down and we'd stop at Southern Oregon, wrestle Southern Oregon, Humboldt State, Chico, San Francisco, just all the way down to San Diego. In seven days, we'd maybe wrestle nine or ten duals. And that was the typical road trip for Dale – get as many matches in as you could. But the sad thing about that trip was you had to turn around and drive back. Now you're down in San Diego and Dale [laughs], he had so many tickets driving in California, he couldn't drive. So we would make the wrestlers drive. And we were coming back from a road trip, and this particular trip, he actually drove his own private car and the guys had the van. And he goes, "you guys head up the freeway north. I'm going to stop in, I'm going to grab your breakfasts," and this was like Sunday morning after we had wrestled Saturday night at Cal Poly...I think Cal Poly was our last one. And he goes, "I'm going to grab you some breakfast and I'll catch up with you and we'll stop off the freeway."

So sure enough, forty-five minutes later, he catches up with us and pulls up in front of the van – pretty obvious, a big school van – and he we pull off and we go, "what is he doing?" And we pull out into a cemetery and we go, "oh, he's not going to make us eat breakfast at the cemetery?" Sure enough, we pull into a cemetery and he gets these bags out, and there was some kind of a bench there, and he has milk and he pulls out cereal again. It's Life cereal. And we're eating Life cereal, Sunday morning, in a graveyard. That's the kind of budget that he operated on and just the philosophy of Dale Thomas. That's all we knew and it had the effect of, sub-consciously, every time he did something like that, just making you tougher and tougher mentally. That was his game.

[1:20:42]

Not a technician, very big on basics. When he taught technique, he taught basics. Very basic stuff you learn in high school, but repeated over and over and over, and make you practice that in the live situation or in the mat situation. He felt wrestling was a sport, "I'm not going to teach you how to do an arm bar and how to do a half nelson," or whatever the pin combination or whatever the takedown. We already knew those moves. He said, "you develop that. In your wrestling career, you will develop your style and your repertoire. I'm here to teach you the basics and good position," very big on good position. And he developed some terms – he coined a term, and this was right about the end of my career, he called it "quasi-vertical." And he actually did wrestling pamphlets and built his whole career around this quasi-vertical wrestling. And basically it was all just positioning, and it was positioning that most good wrestlers already knew. But you would watch people over your career and on the different teams, and not everybody did it. Most people weren't doing it to the extent that he coached, and so we developed our own style of hand-fighting in this quasi-vertical position where people couldn't knock us off our feet, they couldn't knock us off of our base. We called it a cupcake drill and this quasi-vertical, you get in the quasi-vertical and you could stop anybody from getting their hands locked around you or getting their legs in. Just a lot of things that would happen negatively to you when somebody was on top of you, you could neutralize that.

Dale, he was a real educator and teacher, besides a coach. He was a professor here, half of his salary was paid through the teaching, but he was great at getting his wrestlers – we all taught some of his classes for him. [laughs] In fact, we taught a lot of his courses for him. But that was just because, "oh, Dale's trying to get out of work," it was his whole philosophy on

life. What he did do, he turned out more high school coaches than maybe anybody in the nation, but certainly no one else in this state – University of Oregon, Portland State or any other colleges – turned out a fraction of the number of coaches. Guys like Greg Strobel, who came to school in the School of Business and was getting a Business degree, they changed their degree, kind of like I did, to get into coaching because he had such a profound effect on making teachers out of all of us. In the wrestling room, every day when we were wrestling hard, the guys that weren't wrestling weren't resting and weren't drinking water. They were coaching and refereeing, every match. Every match you were involved in – you were either coaching, officiating, or wrestling. You were never resting; you were always learning. Because his philosophy was you learn so much quicker by teaching than you do by actually doing. And that was right.

If you have to coach somebody and break down what they're doing wrong or what they're doing right, it sticks in your consciousness and it's like – you've seen a lot of the athletes that go through the concentration and the mind-melding and visualization of moves and so on, he was doing that, physically, by every time you coach somebody or showed a move, that was imparting something or leaving something behind in your brain. And you became better at it, and it was true. It worked for most of us, I'd say.

[1:25:05]

MD: He was quite the figure here at OSU and, after he retired in 1990, he still remained active and he did some camps.

LB: He had the Double-D wrestling camp up in Harland, Oregon.

MD: He had gotten too ill, and I believe has passed away in 2006?

LB: Boy, I should remember that. Because my dad and him had similar lives other than the sports, but were born the same time, passed away – my dad passed away in 2005 and I think Dale was just shortly before or after, so I think you're right.

MD: It must have hit the team members hard.

LB: Yeah. We had the memorial service here at Gill Coliseum for Dale. And this happens, I think, with any great person or any great coach, you're judged by what you left in this world. And when you saw the people that came back to his memorial – and Dale was a tough guy, he was a hard guy to like, he was a hard guy to work for, he expected so much. He worked us not only on the mat, but he worked us out at the farm. He used his wrestlers to help build his house. He just had high expectations – if you were in his program, these were the things you did. So it was hard to like the guy. But without exception, if you made it through his program, if you put up with Dale and bought into his philosophy, you loved the guy later on. And for a lot of us – not me so much, but for a lot of guys – it was later on when they finally, the light went off and they go, "dang, why didn't I listen to him?" I still have guys coming up to me and saying, "jeeze, we hated to wrestle you. Why did you work so hard? Why did you do that?" I look at them and I go, "why weren't you a national champion? You could have been; you were better than I am." That was the difference. I chose Oregon State for a reason, I followed that reasoning and followed my instructions, and it worked out for me. And it did for most of the people that bought into it. And for me, I was going, "why didn't you buy into it? You can see the writing on the wall. You see all the All Americans and national champions. Why didn't you do what he told you to do? You could have been way ahead of where I was, because you had the skills I didn't have."

And there was an awful lot of that. We lost a lot of good kids over the years that wouldn't buy into the system and a lot of them, even to this day, realize that. The guys quit and then come back and they go, "man, I blew it." And the other guys that did make it through and had a tough experience – I mean, a really tough experience, it was not fun – without exception, every one of those guys are just die-hard Dale fans.

MD: Changed their lives.

LB: Changed their lives. And whatever their career in life was, they owed it to Dale. They owed the work ethic or just the toughness of the sport and Dale in particular making you even tougher than the sport already was going to make you. So most of us that went through the program, we idolize him to the point that a lot of the current coaches probably get tired of hearing about Dale. I mean, he was the most successful wrestling coach in the nation in terms of dual meet wins. And his career, thirty-six years or whatever it was, I mean, unbelievable career. You can't argue with the number of conference championships that he won. Jim's [Zalesky] got a great thing going right now with the conference championships, but

Dale was able to do it at the level and, he was never able to win a national championship as a team, but from an individual standpoint, I think we've had twelve national champions and sixty-some All Americans. Hard to argue with that success.

The thing that I admire about Dale, because I considered myself one of these people, he did it with people that weren't the most talented. A lot of these programs that are doing well, they're doing well because they've got some good coaches but also they're able to bring in ten guys that are blue chippers. Unfortunately for Jim Zalesky right now, he can't do that. We don't have the resources or the wrestlers to bring ten guys in that could be All Americans the first year. Iowa, Oklahoma State and Penn State, they're doing it. They're getting ten guys that walk in as freshmen that could be All Americans. So Jim has to develop guys and that's what Dale was able to do so well, is develop guys that weren't on anybody's radar. And then when you get a few that are, boy you better win it, you know?

[1:30:34]

MD: Well, you continued wrestling as a post-graduate. As far as a wrestling career, you were first alternate for the 1976 Olympic team. What's the process there? Did you end going to the Olympics? Did you go to Montreal in case somebody got injured?

LB: I did, but in 1976 we had – the first thing you do, you can qualify by placing in the NCAAs. They have the national AAU tournament. If you win that or place in the top six, you qualify for the Olympic trials. So, several qualifying venues and then you go to the final trials and try out for the Olympic team.

I lost to a guy from Wisconsin, Russ Hellickson, and he was my international nemesis. In 1976, he beat me for the team. I was the first alternate. We actually would bring about five or six guys at each weight to the Olympic training camp. And at that time the AAU, which was in control of wrestling, would sponsor like the top five guys, sponsor us in camp, which means they would pay our meals to come there. But that was it, we had no other support. We had to get there on our own, they fed us while we were in camp, and so we worked out with the number one guy, which at my weight was Russ Hellickson. So I went to the Olympic camp and then actually, that year in '76, they actually started up two different Olympic training centers, and that was new. Colorado Springs, Colorado, which is now the big Olympic training center in the U.S., and then we had a smaller one in California that was the site of the 1960 Winter Olympics – the name escapes me right now.

Anyway, we actually went to three different training centers in the weeks previous to the Olympics and worked out. Like I said, these were new training centers that had just started up. They fed us, they housed us, that was the extent of it. So I did spend – we got down to the Olympic training center and then we had to go to Binghamton, New York, and our last training session was at Binghamton College in Brockport, New York. And then we left from there to the Olympics.

I didn't get my way paid up to the Olympics. I actually hitchhiked to the Olympics. And me and another guy that was an alternate at a weight below me, we didn't have any funds. We were both broke. So we hitchhiked to Montreal, got rides from some fantastic people. We did have the uniforms, we had U.S. uniforms. They had given us each a bag of wrestling pins and USA pins, so we passed those out to people and they were just dying to give you help and a ride. So that as kind of cool. But then when we got to Montreal, we actually stayed at a fraternity at McGill University in downtown Montreal. We stayed there and somebody had arranged that housing so it didn't cost anything. We stayed there and then they would bus us into the Olympic training center, and we would train with the guy. And then, of course, all of us first alternates, we were there training every day and doing everything that the first teamer did, in case he got hurt. That didn't occur, so I didn't get to wrestle in '76.

But I got the whole experience other than marching into the Olympic venue; we didn't get to march in with the team, but we watched all the events. I got to watch some fantastic boxing – the USA had great boxing in those days. I got to watch Nadia Comaneci in gymnastics. I saw Bruce Jenner – before she was Caitlyn Jenner – I watched Bruce win the decathlon. We got to watch fantastic events and we basically just had to put our names in and get the tickets. So we got a lot of frivolities there that we didn't have to pay for, but we were really on our own. We weren't being supported at the time by the Olympic Committee as they are now, or even by the AAU in those days.

[1:35:23]

So for me, I competed all the way up until 1980. I made a world team in 1978, went to Mexico City. I finished in a three-way tie for third in kind of a strange system. I beat the guy – we had a three-way tie for third, it was a difficult system in those days called a bad mark tournament, and you could beat somebody and he could finish ahead of you. It's strange; it's not like the bracketed tournaments. But any rate, I beat a kid from Turkey and a kid from Iran that placed ahead of me. We were in a three-way tie for third, I had beat them, so you would think, "ok, you're the third," but that isn't how they did it. They flipped a coin, I ended up fifth. [laughs] And the two guys I had beaten – and, of course, in that particular tournament I was beaten by the defending champion and the guy that won it, who was from East Germany, and the champion from the year before from Russia. So I had the top two guys in the world at my weight and I lost to – the guy that won the tournament, I lost 13-11. So I was that close.

I was right there in '78 and '79. I got a shoulder injury in training camp actually right before that world championship that really kind of slowed me down. And it hurt my career because, in those days, they didn't have the repair surgeries they have on rotary cuffs now. In those days, they just would go in and they removed the muscles that was torn because it was being aggravated under, like your deltoid sheath. I lost a lot of strength and power that I had and I had to kind of change my style and it hurt me a little bit. But I was gaining confidence and learning to wrestle and, by 1980, I had wrestled the defending Olympic champion from Russia, Ivan Yarygin. And he had beaten me three times, I think, previously, either in world competition or international duals that we would wrestle against Russia. And both Howard Harris, who was the heavyweight national champion in 1984 at Oregon State that I helped train, Howard and myself both beat Ivan Yarygin that year in 1980, right before the Olympic trials.

So at the time, I was ranked probably second or third in the world. Unfortunately, I was behind Russ Hellickson from the U.S. Russ had taken a silver in '76 and he never had beaten Yarygin, and that was his nemesis, was Yarygin. And we showed that Yarygin could be beaten. But the Russians had a lot of good guys. And then with the boycott of 1980, I basically had to make a decision, a career decision. In '79, I started working part time for a local business in Albany and I was going to grad school, working out, working part time, and I really had no funds. And we weren't supported in those days. I was a member of a wrestling club that just got started up out of Arizona called the Sunkist Kids, and they would actually sponsor you to a tournament. Like if I wanted to go to the World Cup or the Olympic trials, they would buy me a ticket.

But other than that, you were pretty much unsupported. And I just didn't come from a background with any money. I made it through school with no money and I just was kind of living on a shoestring, and I couldn't afford to keep wrestling. Now a days, if I was wrestling today, things would have been a lot different. Because if you're in the top five or six nationally, or even top ten, you're fully funded by the Olympic Committee. They pay all your life expenses so that you can keep working out. '80 would have been a good year for me, '84 would have been even better, but I simply had to quit wrestling.

MD: Because '80 was in Moscow, which we boycotted. And then '84, back to the United States.

[1:39:59]

LB: I was actually in Russia in 1979, they have a big tournament there called the Tblisi Tournament, and we were in Russia when President Carter announced the boycott. And it was a nightmare experience because the Russian people were very upset, because that was a big deal. Sports were a big deal. That was the one thing they could show the world that they were better than other people at. And we had a particularly tight relationship in wrestling with Russia. Even with all the political things that were going on world-wide and the Cold War between the two countries, wrestling always survived and we always exchanged tournaments. They would come over here, we'd wrestle them, and we would go over there, despite what was happening politically. And that boycott just crushed that. It didn't destroy it, but it just crushed that relationship that year. And like I said, we were over there at that time.

And, at the same time – this is 1979 – Russia is in Afghanistan, they're fighting a war with Afghanistan. Iran had kidnapped our hostages – we've got Iranian hostages and we're wrestling Iranians in the Tblisi Tournament. We're wrestling down by Tashkent, which is right on the border of Iran. We're under armed guard walking into those wrestling venues because of that Iranian hostage situation. It was very intimidating. You expected – Russia was the third Communist Bloc country that I traveled to – and you always saw military and military police with Kalashnikov and rifles. That was a way of life for those people. And even as wrestlers, we got used to that. But it was taken to a whole new level

in '79 during that crisis. And when Carter announced that boycott, we were literally, they had to have guards to get us into the venues. Russia, at that time, was made up of all these different ethnic groups, and down in that Tashkent/Tblisi area, there were a lot of Iranian people or descendants. I mean, the borders had cut through the middles of these countries, and they didn't think of themselves as Russian. They thought of themselves as whatever sect that was in that area at the time. And I was not up on history or even geography that much, but we were extremely vigilant. They took good care of us – the Russian people took good care of us – but we were on heightened alert the whole time.

The worst was actually in the venue itself. The Iranian team which, up to that point – like, I wrestled an Iranian and he ended up third in the world in 1978 in Mexico City – they were very competitive and they still are, in wrestling. They took a tremendous drop in the wrestling program, and in all their sports programs, when the ayatollah took over and that whole thing started. And even in that one year, from '78 to '79, their wrestlers were nothing comparatively. There were two of us that wrestled Iranians the very first round of that Tblisi Tournament, and when we came in, the Iranian team had a big banner of Khomeini, Ayatollah Khomeini, and just taunted us, walked by. And you know, I was a level-headed guy, but we had a lot of guys on the team that were very hot-headed and I didn't know what was going to happen. I'm just sitting there, "I can't believe this is happening." And I can honestly say, we wrestled two of the Iranians that first round, and they paid for it. [laughs] I pinned my guy in twenty seconds and I was merciful on my guy. Our little 114-pounder, who ended up winning the World Championships that year – a little guy from Syracuse, New York, Gene Mills – he just absolutely destroyed everybody in his weight class. The Iranian really paid for that taunting; they thought better of it afterwards.

MD: Internationally, you must have had a passport that looked like Swiss cheese.

[1:45:00]

LB: All the way back in high school, my first trip my junior year in high school, we went to South Africa. And that was actually Oregon High School Culture Exchange was something that Dale Thomas started; he started it here in Oregon. And many years later, almost every state in the country started following his program. Dale started Culture Exchange. And one of the first countries that he made contact with was South Africa, but we also went to Germany, we went to Japan; there were four or five countries that we would rotate. One of my younger brothers went to Germany on his Culture Exchange, and one of my other brothers also went to South Africa.

But in '72, it was ok. Dale had arranged that back before the U.S. – I think it was the AAU started banning teams from traveling to South Africa. Dale had arranged, he was doing this with South Africa before the boycott because of the apartheid system that they had. So it was real eye-opening; heartbreaking. We got to see first-hand how they treated the black population in South Africa, it was just unbelievable to us. Like I said, I was a fairly uneducated high school junior at the time, and we spent five weeks in South Africa. And we stayed – the people that ran the wrestling in the country were all white and, ironically, it was mostly military and police that had the wrestling clubs. So what it was, they didn't have high school wrestling like we do, it was all a club sport. And the clubs were developed kind of, I think, as a self-defense thing within the country. So we would wrestle police academies or military academy-type clubs throughout the country.

But we stayed in the homes of white people and they were all very wealthy, and so we were treated very well. But we actually did see the negative. We went into Soweto and some of those black encampments that, I mean, it was just night and day. You go to Johannesburg and you see these high rise office buildings, and then just like a line, you would see a place like Soweto which is just shacks and just unbelievable eye-opening. And of course, it was after we came back from that as a high school junior that we were made aware that they were not letting teams travel in South Africa. And Dale fought that because he felt like – and he sent teams in even after they were not supposed to travel to South Africa, because he felt like, "what better way to force change in a country like that than to go in there and be able to show." And we took lots of pictures – there was no way of hiding the good and the bad. We brought lots of pictures back and Dale felt, philosophically, if you isolate this country...it's kind of a little bit like what Obama's doing now with Cuba, whether or not we agree with that, it's like sometimes you can force a change faster by interacting.

And in fact, to give you an example, in 1981 Dale actually took a college team to South Africa. And I went on that team and I was already retired – I was still in pretty good shape, but I was retired. And we went through and Dale told them, if there were not black guys on the team, we wouldn't wrestle them. So every place we stopped – there were clubs with black wrestling, but we never wrestled against them. But they were pulling individual black South Africans out of those clubs and putting them on the teams, or Dale said we wouldn't wrestle them. Dale did a couple of those trips like that and

he actually brought – at the time, we had, I don't know if Howard Harris, who was an African American on our team and was the national champion in 1980, I don't know if Howard went. But we did have, I think it was Rodney Hawthorne who was actually from La Grande or Pendleton high school, and he was on the OSU team, and he went with my brother Chris as an African American and wrestled against them. And Dale thought this was very enlightening, where they were trying to keep that population down and say they're not as good, but we could show them some guys that were better than any of their white wrestlers.

[1:50:09]

Everything was an educational experience for Dale and there was a reason for everything he did. He would fight people like the AAU that wanted to ban us from going there. He said, "we'll get further, we'll change that system faster with interaction and going in there and dealing with people and saying, 'hey, this isn't right.'" And he was right. And of course, since then, apartheid has been put down and their world has changed. And we saw the same thing in all the Communist bloc countries – wrestling always had the philosophy that we go in and have exchanges with these people, hey, if we can get along like that why can't the countries get along like that? And we did. We may have not had the effect that Ronald Reagan did on the Cold War, but we certainly didn't hurt it.

MD: And wrestling is such an international language almost, because it's the same in Russia as it is in the United States.

LB: Yeah, you don't have to be able to speak to each other to wrestle. And the fact of the matter is, wrestling in Russia, in Iraq, in Iran, a lot of the Middle East countries, a lot of the old Soviet bloc countries, that was their national sport. That was as big as football to them. So you were going into an element where they filled the gyms; I mean, they were rabid fans, and they still are. When they travel to the World Championships – I had shoulder surgery in '79, so I didn't get to...at the end of '79, after the summer, and I went down and watched the World Championships at San Diego, and the Iranians had as big a crowd there as the Americans had. It was unbelievable; rabid fans, they love their wrestling.

Dale named it Culture Exchange for a reason. He wanted us to interact with the different cultures of the world. He always used to say, especially a lot of us guys on the team were farming kids or logging kids, you know, "I'm going to give you guys some culture down here." He always fancied himself the educator and he was going to give us culture by introducing us to things that we never experienced, and he did. He absolutely did. He taught us to stand in front of crowds and speak; he forced us to go to high school banquets and give speeches or commencement exercises at your old high school. He made you do those things so you could stand in front of people and speak. He forced you into – the old Beaver Clubs when they were first getting started up, we would go down and talk about the upcoming road trip or whatever. He wanted the exchange.

Instead of staying at a hotel, we stayed with people. Even in town here. Now a lot of that's not legal anymore, but in those days you would go have dinner with a family on a Sunday night, and he encouraged that so that you met your fans. And the fans were dying to have you in their home and give you a meal and you would interact with them. They adopted us. Like, when I was a freshman, when I came down to Corvallis, I don't know if you've ever heard the name of Gene Hansen – Gene was a big insurance salesman in town here, very successful, and he was instrumental in a lot of the...oh, what's the summer league baseball?

MD: The Knights? [**ed note:** actually the Corvallis American Legion baseball program]

LB: Yeah. I think he donated just tons of hours to the baseball team, the summer league teams and stuff. He was a very instrumental and important person in the town of Corvallis. Well, when I came down as a freshman, Gene Hansen and his wife adopted me and every month or so they'd have me out to the house for dinner. Now, I don't think those things they can do anymore, but in those days they were ok with doing that. And they were doing it with the football players too. In fact, there was a football player here at the time, Scott...what was his name? Overton? Anyway, his last name was Overton. Him and I were both adopted by the Hansen family and brought into their house. They would invite us out once or month or every couple of months, big fans, they'd go to wrestling, they'd go to football, basketball, you name it. They were just huge OSU fans. And there were a lot of people in the community doing that, and Dale loved that. Number one, it saved him money; it was always a way to save money. But he thought that's what education was about – bring this kid from the hills down and show you another side of life.

[1:55:25]

MD: It seems to have worked because, even this many years later, it's had an effect on you.

LB: Oh yeah. That's why I say, when you went through that program, even if you didn't appreciate it at the time – kind of like your parents – later on you figured out, "man, they knew what they were talking about." It's a big part. Now, I consider myself lucky to have had a father that had no choice but to be a disciplinarian and a very hard worker himself, and my mom was a hard worker. We were taught work ethic from day one; that was never an issue. So every step of my life, whether it was high school sports, college sports, and then even international – I wrestled on teams where Dan Gable was our coach and he was famous for running these unbelievable practices that people would just walk off the mats crying. And yeah it was tough, I remember it being tough, but I remember being able to take it. And it was just because the program I came through was right there.

So I took that into everything I've done in life. Whether it was raising my own family, my work, my play. When I go hunting, I can't do the things I used to do obviously, but everything I did, as my body has deteriorated from an accumulation of injuries and just age, I would find – I had to quit wrestling, because the last time I did that I was fifty years old and tore my knee out giving a clinic. So I had to quit doing that. So I would find swimming or I would find, I really got into bicycling and we would put in thousands of miles a year. My wife thought I was nuts, everybody was, "what the heck are you doing?" But everything I did, I attacked, just like we did wrestling. To my detriment. [laughs] There was a time when you should kind of back off a little bit physically, to kind of preserve what you have left and I never really figured that out. Up until now when I can't do it anymore; it just won't let me do it anymore.

MD: The body says, "I'm shutting down."

LB: Yep, and it has. It pretty much has.

MD: So let's kind of catch up a little bit with your career. After wrestling – there was life after wrestling – what did you spend the past career at?

LB: Well, as I said, in the late '70s after I got my undergraduate degree, I kept working on my master's while I was working out. In '80, after the boycott – I went to the Olympic trials in '80 and I took second again to Hellickson at 220. My plan was then to go up to heavyweight and challenge heavyweights, and my feeling was that I wouldn't make the Olympic team at heavyweight that year. But when they announced the boycott, many of us that were in kind of the same situation monetarily decided, "I can't afford to just be doing this to do it." There was not going to be any support, because the games had been cancelled, so I made the decision to come back and just start working full-time.

While I was in grad school, I mentioned I started working for – a friend of a friend was starting up a business in Albany, and it was a small pharmaceutical laboratory. I didn't know anything about it. He hired me as part-time help when he was actually building the building and I helped him. The first thing I did with him was put a Cyclone fence around the property. And then he moved me inside and we started putting together this building. And I was doing this part-time while I was going to grad school. One thing led to another and he built this up into a business and, during the process, he taught me, by the school of hard knocks, how to do plumbing and electrical and all kinds of things that I had seen my dad – my dad was a Jack of all trades, so I kind of became a Jack of all trades for him. And the next thing I know, I'm running his production facility but I'm also – I hired my brother, who wrestled here at Oregon State, my brother Chris. Chris was just about graduating from OSU and he was in a transition, so I hired him and he did a lot of my maintenance work for me and I was running the production crew.

[2:00:17]

And we were making pharmaceutical intermediates; compounds that would go into medications. Very unique chemistry, and this is what's so ironic is, had I gone into the Fish and Wildlife or even the Forestry, I would have picked up a lot of science courses that would have helped me. I hadn't had any science since high school, I didn't have any chemistry, and yet here I end up getting thrown into this. I was there on a part-time basis and then it grew into a full-time, and I just kept kind of moving up through the company. And it was a start-up company, so I had every opportunity to, wherever it went, to go with it. And I ran the production crew but I also moved into the lab and I actually was synthesizing a lot of

these intermediates and trying to figure out how to transition from a 1,200 ml beaker up into a thousand-gallon glass-lined vessel. The equipment was all unique; it was all glass-lined equipment, glass plumbing, and I taught myself how to do all that kind of plumbing, not to mention the chemistry. It was functional chemistry. I never had chemistry courses but I was learning the basics of chemistry, but then actual functional chemistry of synthesizing compounds. And some of these compounds would have thirty-six step synthesis to get to your end product which, the end product was a white powder and everybody was, "oh, what are you making?" you know.

MD: Yeah. [laughs]

LB: We made intermediates for insulin. There was a lot of physical extractions using biological products like salmon melt, which is salmon sperm, and extracting proteins out of that salmon melt and then reducing it and purifying it. And that was actually sold to universities as a protein that they were – let's see, I'm trying to remember now. That one, I think we were selling as a feed to universities in some of the testing labs. We would extract glycogen from oysters and we'd actually take the oysters, masticate them up and extract the glycogen, which was an energy molecule, out of the glycogen. And that we would sell to universities – they were feeding fruit flies in some of the research laboratories. So it was just a unique thing I knew nothing about, but I got in on the ground floor and I got to learn some of the chemistry. And not to this day, I don't understand chemistry to the point of appearing in 101 and taking basic chemistry, but I could synthesize a product from scratch and turn out a compound that could be used. And that's what we did. We'd sell them to the pharmaceutical companies like Johnson & Johnson, Ciba-Geigy and things like that, and they would put it as an intermediate into finished medicines.

So that was the first place I got my start. And my boss that actually built that up – we had about twenty-five employees and we had just done a major expansion, we had a cash flow problem in the company. That kind of chemistry takes very expensive equipment and my boss started that company with \$10,000, it was a pure start-up, and he always struggled for capital. So he had to end up selling a controlling interest of that company, because he could never generate enough capital.

And then he started another business and I went with him to that business, and this was similar but – it was also chemical manufacturing, but a different type of chemicals. So the new place we called Hopton Technology and, once again, started it – we had bought a building and we were manufacturing coatings for the pulp and paper industry. So a lot of your coatings that are on a lot of your glossy prints – beverage containers, cereal boxes or beer cartons – we made the coatings there that give them water resistancy. The really big hit for us which made this company a success was we developed a product that HP used on their inkjet paper. And basically, this coating would impregnate the paper and stop the ink from defusing. Like, have you ever seen writing on a piece of toilet paper or a napkin or something and you watch the ink spread? Well, that's a no-no on inkjet or any kind of printable papers.

[2:05:31]

So he developed a formulation that was actually used in the textile industry and we took that chemistry and refined it for paper, and HP was using that on their HP paper. And it just kept their print nice and crisp and clear. And then there were many different uses. We had a use patent on that and then that same coating was used in beer cartons and other things, and we made a very big success with that company. Just ten years ago, my boss sold that and retired, and I went on to work for the company that bought it basically until I retired. I had a couple years off; took a hiatus. But I just retired with them last April, and I was working with them up in the Salem plant.

But it was a nice career. It was not what I went to school for. I had to learn not only – I can say my educational classes and a lot of the psychology and sociology classes helped me because, at the end of the day, I was the plant manager at three different plants for him. And I ran crews, I personally supervised individuals to begin with, and then later on I ran the whole operation. And you're constantly dealing with personnel issues and people. And people have lives and they have families and I can say that my educational background helped me in some of that, just dealing with people. Some of it was life experience and some of it was taking a class that you had that you were going to use in education for sure, but that's what you spend your time doing. I educated my workforce.

MD: Yeah, that's one of the things that I always ask people – has OSU affected your career? Did it do something for you thirty years down the road?

LB: And the reality – the big motivator for me, as I said, which drove me academically as well as wrestling, was if I hadn't gotten this opportunity and the scholarship and had this world opened up to me, I was going to be home. I was going to work on the farm or I was going to work in the logging industry. Everybody knows what's happened in the logging industry. My dad was fortunate to continue working and retire in the logging industry, but he had to work until he was seventy-two years old. I have a brother right now that's in the logging industry and he's fought a lot of the things that have occurred in that industry but been fortunate to stay working out in the forests. I mean, he hasn't been in the mill situation, he's been out actively logging and they've got a situation that's kept him employed for forty-some years. So he's very lucky in that regard but it hasn't been that way for most people.

And it's a hard life. I mean, as bad as I am busted up from wrestling, his body is as bad or worse. And so it wasn't an easy life, and I recognized that when I was in high school. I go, "you know, this is an opportunity that he didn't have," my older brother and sisters didn't have, "I can't lose this; I can't waste this." And that was the motivator. Right on down the line, out of my ten brothers and sisters, six of us ended up getting four-year degrees and it was the same with every one of us: all had the work ethic to do it, but every one of them was motivated by, "what is there for me?" and "this is a whole new world." And I've got sisters that are teachers, I've got sisters that own their own hair salon, and my oldest sister got her nursing degree and worked thirty-six years at the neonatal center at OHSU, and just retired about two years ago from there. And so, very successful careers for everyone in the family, and the work ethic drove that, but the desire for something else than what we had grown up with, because it was hard work. It was very hard work. And we were basically lazy; we wanted it easy. [laughs] So that's what we do.

[2:10:14]

MD: That's a theme that I've run into in a number of the people I've interviewed.

You and a number of your colleagues from the OSU wrestling program were recently named as part of the Pac-12 All Century Wrestling Team, a huge honor after a hundred years of the conference. Tell us about the festivities around that induction – what's that honor mean to you?

LB: Well, a hundred years of all sports, they're going through all the sports. And uniquely for wrestling, what's so cool is I actually was watching some of the NCAA basketball last night and I switched to the Pac-12 channel and they were introducing – and I don't know if this was a re-run – but they were introducing the All Century team for basketball. And we had Gary Payton and we had Mel Counts on that team and I'm going, "UCLA dominated that team." Well, in wrestling, the Beavers dominated that team for obvious reasons. We've had the last five conference championships here with Jim Zalesky. And with Dale, I think he had over twenty conference championships. And so, rightly so, OSU dominated the team and it was a huge honor.

Dale was named Coach of the Century. Les Gutches, there was a tie – they actually had, I saw the results of the voting, and the kid that was named Co-Athlete of the Century with Les Gutches was Stephen Neal, who was a heavyweight wrestler from Cal-State Bakersfield. They voted like three times on that to find out who was going to be number one, because they wanted to pick a number one, and it ended up tied. And Stephen Neal was a fantastic wrestler that went on. Les Gutches became a world champion and he was an Olympian and had a fantastic career. Stephen Neal likewise, great college career, went on to win world medals. And then, kind of uniquely, because he didn't play football in college, he went as, I believe, a free agent tryout in the NFL and got picked up by the New England Patriots, and he's sitting there with three Super Bowl rings. And he didn't play football in college, he wrestled, but he was a fantastic wrestler and somebody recognized – he was a very awesome heavyweight. He's a big kid, powerful, just – it was so unusual in my day to have a heavyweight like that. Most of them were very large and I was very small. Stephen Neal was 255 pounds. But just a great co-owner for Les because he was really an outstanding athlete. And for Les and him to get co-owners on that, it was a fantastic deal and well-deserved.

And everyone on the team, well-deserved. In fact, [laughs] everybody's going, "how come so and so didn't?" You know, there were twenty other OSU wrestlers that could have made it; we've had so many All Americans, it was almost a shame that, when I looked how the selection went, you were either a national champion or a four-time All American, or both. And so there were an awful lot of people left off of that list from OSU, and I'm sure other schools, that could have been on it. But it was just a great honor. We went down and Greg Strobel came in from Pennsylvania, and we sat together and watched – it was a thrill to get to watch the Beavers, not in our venue but in another venue, win the Pac-12, and it was a

close race. My wife went down with us and we just had a blast; got to meet a lot of old friends. I ran into a couple of guys that were on the Olympic team with us in '76 who I hadn't seen for thirty years. One of them lives in Las Vegas and he came over, and so we just had a great visit.

The beauty of wrestling too is that you never lose connection totally. I mean, even if you do, even if you haven't been corresponding with somebody for the last forty years, when you see them, we hit it off just like forty years ago when we were running around and they were really the good old days. But every one of those guys I was on a team with, we're still, if I run into them tomorrow, it's like they've been in my family my whole life. Wrestling, I think – I can't speak for football because I didn't take it to that level, or basketball – but it truly, the guys that have wrestled and gone through that pain and rigor, it is such a unique fraternity. You never really lose contact.

[2:15:29]

And that's the other thing is, we all know what everybody's doing, even if you haven't been in correspondence. I know who's coaching where throughout the country. I don't know what everybody's doing, but you hear about it and you follow it. I doubt that every football player that's gone through OSU keeps track. He's got his close friends for sure, but that's just kind of the nature of wrestling. And that's true at every level of wrestling. You don't have the support, necessarily, of even the athletic community, like football and basketball, but within your own community of wrestling, it's very strong. A tight family. I still go to all the wrestling matches. I live close so I can do that, and I go religiously.

MD: So since Coach Thomas was recognized as the Pac-12 Coach of the Century, was there anybody else who would even come close to him? That could have been considered?

LB: Honestly, not in this conference. I just mentioned about the basketball and, of course, John Wooden was the equivalent. If you look around the country, there are other coaches in the country that have won national titles and done more at the national level than Dale. But no one has done what he did in the Pac-8, Pac-10, Pac-12 level. I mean, it's not even close. Over that thirty years, I don't know the exact number-

MD: 616.

LB: 616 wins. He had fifteen straight conference championships, but then he had six or seven others, so twenty-some out of the thirty years. There were some awfully good coaches but none of them had that. Ron Finley was at Oregon for a long time and then retired, and he had some Pac-12 championships, and he was a Dale Thomas product. Ron Finley wrestled for Dale. As I said, most of the coaches in the – even the Portland State coaches, two before the last coach, were Oregon State products. So not only did Dale turn out wrestlers, he turned out coaches. So it's not even close on that. You have to compare him with what John Wooden did for basketball; at least in the conference. I don't know in football – maybe John McKay or something – but none of them had the longevity that Dale had.

MD: Well you, in 1994, were inducted into the OSU Sports Hall of Fame. And more recently, you were actually inducted into the Silverton – basically they have a sports hall of fame as well. What do these honors mean to you? Especially this local one in 2009?

LB: Well honestly, when you're wrestling and if you have some success, you get a trophy for being a national champion or a plaque if you didn't win – you get a little resin plaque about that big [forms a small circle with his hands], that's it. That's all the NCAA would allow. And those honors, you stuff those things in a cupboard somewhere and it's all over. But these hall of fames, when OSU started the hall of fame, I thought, "this is cool." Because I'd been out for twenty years and people forget about you and stuff, and just the opposite of opening old wounds is it opens old contacts; you run into people. And that's what's been the best about the All Century team.

My high school, I got together with – in the high school hall of fame, we got inducted as a team from 1972 who won the state championship. And for Silverton, it was the first ever state championship in any sport. So it's still pretty special. Now, they've won several football and several girls basketball titles and several other state titles since then, but for us being the first, we had a big plaque up in the gym. Actually, we made it in woodshop with a big "State of Oregon" and "#1, state championship," and all the guys who were on the team. And that was a unique experience when they inducted

that whole team in. And then they inducted a couple of us, like Hank Schenk who was an Oregon Stater. Hank and I were inducted in the same year at the Silverton Hall of Fame. So it was fun.

[2:20:28]

I run into Hank all the time and you run into a lot of the local guys here. But then you get outside of that and, like the All Century Team, I just mentioned, you get to talk with guys you haven't seen in thirty or forty years and it's just fun. But it's a great honor. And Silverton, that was the first or second year, and they inducted – Silverton had a player from the National Football League inducted in. And that was kind of neat because wrestling doesn't always get the attention and the PR that other sports do, so when you get included in that with a hall of fame, like the OSU Hall of Fame – and honestly, wrestling's had so many All Americans, it's going to take a while to catch up. They don't want to bring ten wrestlers in every year but honestly they would have to get everybody in. But it's great because it puts us on the same level with sports that get a lot of coverage and brings us into that same platform. So it's neat; it's a great honor. I was fortunate that my mom and dad were still alive and got to see that. They're no longer with me, but that happened early enough that they got to see it. A lot of these things, that doesn't happen.

MD: One of the things we always like to do is catch up with our alumni and learn a little bit about where their families are at, children, grandchildren, what's your wife doing now. Kind of catch us up.

LB: OK. Well, I'll go back to the beginning. When I got back from Russia in 1979, actually the following summer I was asked to coach a girls' softball team. And I'd taken a lot of coaching classes here at OSU, I could coach anything. I could coach swimming, golf, you name it. So I got named to ask a softball team. Well, it was a group of ladies here from Corvallis and it was actually myself and an old college roommate, another wrestler, Dick Knorr from Oregon State. So we were coaching these girls and one thing led to another, and I ended up dating one of these girls. It was actually a local girl; her name was Vicki Schweitz. She graduated from Corvallis in 1972; she's eleven months older than I am.

And it was ironic because the first day I started coaching I said, "I think I know you." And she goes, "well, you don't know me but I know you." She had been a mat maid for Corvallis High School, worked with Phil Luarca who was their head coach, and she had travelled all over the state with the team. Corvallis had a very competitive wrestling team back in the late '60s and early '70s. In fact, they were state champions, I think, like '68. So she was working with that team and I remember her working at the mat. The first tournament of my life was in Corvallis, it was the Corvallis High School novice tournament, and I remember seeing her there. Then over the years, she would come to – she was always a wrestling fan and would come to OSU matches, but I never knew who she was, never dated or anything. And I ran into her during this coaching situation, one thing led to another, and we started dating. Four years later – it was after I retired from wrestling and I kind of came out for a short stint and went to South Africa – we got engaged and got married.

When I first met her she was working at OSU in the Forestry department. And she had kind of exhausted where she could go within that department, so she transferred and one of the professors in the department had started his own engineering company, Ed Aulerich Forest Engineering, Inc. downtown here in Corvallis. And she went to work with Ed – he asked her to be his office manager, so she went with him. And that was about the time that we got married and we were living in a little trailer house on 53rd out at the trailer park. And like I said, neither one of us came from any money, just broke as could be, but hard working. She came from a family, there were five girls in the family and the first, 1983, when she was pregnant with our first child, all five sisters were pregnant. And they were all scheduled to deliver within a couple of months. So that Christmas, we had five brand new babies at Christmas. It was a pretty neat deal. So we had our first daughter, Danielle, in January 1983. And then we followed that up with our second child, Stacy, in 1984.

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And at the time, we were just kind of – I was just in the beginning of my career starting to build up. We had our first child on the way and we had bought a house in Corvallis; our first house. Dale asked me – Greg Strobel was his assistant then and he left to go work for USA Wrestling – and he asked me to be his assistant coach, but he could pay any money per se. I wasn't making anything but I would still have had to take a cut in pay to be his assistant, and that was basically 1982 or '83, in that period of time. And that's when I had to make a career decision, whether I was going to do what I had trained to do and become a coach and a teacher. And my dream was, once I made the decision, was to be a college coach. I had the credentials and the backing of Dale to do that, and then he asked me to be his assistant and that would have been a

great job. And he was very forthright about, "if this works out, you'll take over for me when I step down." Of course, nobody knew Dale wasn't going to step down for another twenty years. [laughs] So in that respect – one of the reasons Dale coached as long as he did is because he didn't feel like he had the assistant there that-

MD: -he could hand off to.

LB: He could hand it off to. So he stayed a little longer, I think, than he originally planned to. But at any rate, I made a decision. So I went into the chemical field in the start-up situation. We ended up having two girls that – and, of course, the history of my wife coming from five sisters, and almost everybody I wrestled with had girls. And of course all of us wanted to have a boy to get into wrestling. And even on a national level – in fact, when I was in grad school, this phenomenon had already been very clear to me that all these guys that were real intense wrestlers, they were all having girls. And I was going to do my thesis on and study that. I had some theories about elevated temperatures [laughs] in the male area that maybe, for whatever reason, most of us were having girls. And to this day, that seems to be the case.

Now, there's exceptions; there's a lot of wrestlers that had boys. But when I look at guys at the highest level – and not just at the highest level but how did they get there, how intense of a program they went through – we all seemed to have girls. Greg Strobel, two girls. Doug Ziebart who wrestled with me here, two girls. There had to have been some differences but almost, I can go right down the list and go, "yeah, but you weren't quite as hard a worker as you could have been." [laughs] So it was funny.

We had girls and so I evolved into a father that got involved coaching the girls and we got into soccer and basketball and all the sports that I had very little knowledge of. But I learned and, as we do now-a-days, all of us parents have to coach our kids. They don't have the middle school and the grade school programs that we used to have. So I got involved with coaching the girls and I was lucky enough, my youngest daughter – both kids, very good athletes, brilliant students, way, way above me. They got that from their mother, absolutely. My oldest graduated as the valedictorian at West Albany and the second daughter not quite that good, but a very good student. But both outstanding students, outstanding athletes.

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And I actually wanted my older daughter to wrestle but, she's now thirty-two years old, back in those days they didn't have the women's programs, which is a big thing now; really coming on.

MD: It was just beginning back then.

LB: Yeah, there were a few girls in wrestling, but they were wrestling against boys. And my wife said, "no. No way." She just wasn't going to have that. And I knew that, clear back when Dale was teaching here, every once in a while we would take over his P.E. class and he was teaching a self-defense course, and it would be full of female co-eds. And we were teaching them wrestling as a self-defense. And I tried to tell my wife, I said, "Vicki, you know, this is a very good," and my oldest daughter was a very powerful girl. She was an All American in discus and shotput at Linfield, and just a big powerful girl. And I said, "Gee, she's got the intensity, she's got the drive, she's got the power, I think I can make a wrestler out of that girl." [laughs] My wife, "no," she wouldn't let me. So she ended up playing volleyball and at Linfield did track. She was a basketball player in high school.

I would not let the girls just mono-focus on a sport. My youngest daughter was a very good soccer player. In fact, right towards the end of her senior year she had an opportunity to come to Oregon State, but by then we had already made a decision, she was going to do track and field, and she was one of the best 800 meter runners in the state. And, of course, Oregon State didn't have a program. We would have loved to end up here and, in fact, Coach Kelly was the coach at Willamette, and he had recruited her to Willamette, but Stacy ended up going to Portland State and ran for Portland State. She's still got a lot of the school records up there – or she had, I haven't followed it recently. But when Coach Sullivan, Kelly Sullivan, was hired here, it was like one year after she'd signed her letter to Portland State. And he called me up and said, "do you think Stacy would be interested in transferring?" He says, "I can't talk to her." And I said, "I don't know that she would. I'd love her to."

But there were a couple of things at the time. They were just starting up the cross country; well, that she well in cross country but that wasn't her forte. She could have been a great heptathlete and very good at intermediate distances. Just a

good overall athlete. In high school, she played four sports. She did soccer and cross country at the same time. And she was the first kid that I know of, she was a four-time four sport letterman at West Albany. So all four years, she got a letter in all four sports. I think she's the only one that's ever done that. But just a super athlete. Not fast enough, quite – she ran competitively at the national level, but just not quite good enough to place at the national level. And her conference – Portland State was not known for the track and field, but the Big Sky conference is outstanding in the middle distances. In fact, during her period, the gal that she ran against was the national champion in both the 1500 and the 800 meters, that's Stacy's events, so that's who she was competing against. So unfortunately for her, she never finished higher than second in the conference because she was running against a very outstanding runner. And Stacy wasn't that, but still a very good athlete and had a good career.

Now both of them – my oldest daughter is married, has a four-year-old son, and just had twin girls that we're just having a blast with. Her husband is a stay at home dad and has a graphic arts business out of his house; he owns that out of his house. And she's a clinical psychologist for the federal prison in Sheridan, so she works for them. Doing very, very well.

And my youngest daughter Stacy, after she graduated from Portland State she took a few years off and –she was in pre-med, but struggled a little bit with her curriculum. So when she graduated, she really didn't have good enough grades to go into med school. So she took a few years off, kind of reexamined her goals, and then she started applying for grad school in occupational therapy. And specifically she likes pediatric occupational therapy. And she just got accepted a year ago into the program, and there's only like thirty students in this program and it's the only program – like, there's one down in Loma Linda, California – very few programs.

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Anyway, she finally got into this program after four years of applying and so now she's in her graduate program. It's actually a three year – they call it a graduate program, but she'll actually graduate with a Ph.D., and she's one year into that. She's just been working and she continues to run. She runs with a lot of girls – I watched just yesterday, one of her friends just won, I think it was the 1500 meter at the indoor track and field meet. She has a good friend that she has worked out with and run with that won either the 1500 meter or placed in the 3000, I can't remember. Anyways, she's still connected to that sport and runs every day.

Both the girls are still competing. Danielle competes in CrossFit; very much into CrossFit, loves it. My wife and I both just retired – Vicki retired a year ago and then I retired about eight months ago – and we're just enjoying...we had a small little four-and-a-half-acre place out in Millersburg/North Albany, and before we retired, we decided we're going to split off an acre, build a new house. I always promised here a new house, so we built a brand new house over the back three-and-a-half, and paid for everything, the house is all paid for. And we said, "ok, now we can retire." We made that decision not so much because we didn't like to work, we enjoyed our work, but we just figured with my structural back problems and things, that if we still wanted to do some of the things we want to do, we want to do it now.

When this All Century team thing came up, they didn't tell anybody until the last moment and we called on plane tickets and it was like, "wow, this is just way too expensive of a last minute." So we decided, "you know what? We can drive." So we just hopped in the car and drove down, and we made a five-day trip out of it, stayed with some family in Sacramento and L.A., and drove all the way to Arizona, actually stayed with a friend there and made a trip out of it. Now you can do those things and it's kind of fun.

And we're planning on doing, or we're actually taking another trip in a couple of weeks down south. My wife is a huge country and western fan; huge. And she has been like that Barbara Mandrell song, "I Was Country Before Country Was Cool," that's my wife. And we're going to take a trip down through the South down to Nashville, going up into Branson, and so we're looking forward to that. We're going to take her mom, who is eighty-seven, we're going to take her with us and we're going to fly to Oklahoma, we've got family there. We've got family all over but predominantly, like I said, I had ten brothers and sisters, my family is all in this area except I have one sister in Port Townsend, Washington. And my wife's family is all right here in the Albany area, except for one sister that lives in Oklahoma.

So our lives are all about family now and it always has been, but it is more so now with my daughters and we're going up every other week and helping with the twins so my son-in-law can get some work done. We babysit the twins during the day. And then there's always a family activity. One of the things, both sides of the family – hers and mine – have both

stayed tight. I mean, all ten of my brothers and sisters, we fought like cats and dogs growing up but we're all very close and we still celebrate Christmases, the whole group. When we finished the new house, we did a real big open floor plan. Not a huge house but an open floor plan, just so we could host family activities. We hosted Easter the first year we got into the house and we had, I think it was sixty-two people in the house. And that was a small event for us. We actually have to rent a lodge or like a grange hall for our Christmas, because the families are so big now. No one has ten kids like we came from but if you've got two to five, it's huge. And that's fun; we really enjoy family.

[2:40:09]

MD: Well, one of the things that I always like to do is allow our Beavers to address the Beaver Nation, because that's who this is for, and if you have any final words of wisdom to the Beaver Nation that you could think of.

LB: Well, I wish I had much wisdom period. [laughs] You know, the problem when you get to be this age is a lot of what you had, you've lost, both physically and mentally. It's kind of a sad commentary that you spend so much time – I mean, if you look at it, if you go through grad school, you've spent sixteen to eighteen years of your life studying and bringing all this knowledge in. You get to a certain age and a lot of it's gone, and some of us have a hard time retaining anything.

But I think the main message is: take advantage of the opportunity, however it's presented. When I raised my girls, I said, "you know, I'm not going to pay for your education. It's very expensive anymore. Even though I can afford it, you're going to find a way, one way or the other, to get into school and to take care of at least half of your school." That was kind of the agreement that we had and I was lucky enough that both of them earned either academic or athletic scholarships that paid for at least half or all. And I think that's important; I think that's one of the things we're missing now. College should not be free. I don't agree with some of the politicians now. I think if a kid is going to be serious, like I was, you have to work for it. You can be a brilliant student, come down here, and not learn that work ethic to get through an academic course. But if you have to work for it, if you've got a stake in the game, if you're pulling out of your pocket and not just your parents' pocket, I guarantee you'll be more motivated to get through school.

And I think that's important for anybody, I don't care where you're going to school. Obviously I would have loved it if my kids could have come to Oregon State; that was always my plan. They come to all the games with me and the wrestling matches, they're full of Beaver paraphernalia now, and they are Beaver Believers. Neither one of them had the opportunity to come here because of the sports or the academics and what they were looking for, but I guarantee you my grandson lives Oregon State already. And any influence that I have on my grandkids and relatives, it's to become a Beaver, because I know what a great school this is both academically and – specifically academically, we have such a good Engineering program and Forestry programs and a lot of programs that this school was designed for, and they're still tops in the country. Emphasized for me specifically, of course, was a great wrestling program; one of the best in the country, and it still is. It's why I came here, I'll be honest. I didn't come here for the academics, but I sure benefited from the gift being lucky enough to be a good enough wrestler to come here to Oregon State, because that's where it was at the time, and still is, that I got to take advantage and I got a great education.

And obviously, most of us know, at this age, it's not the academic portion of it as much as the life experience here and the people that you meet, the connections that you make. I have so many friends that went through OSU here, whether they were in fraternities or other housing situations, and they met people that have been life-long friends, that they're still in contact with. Or they've started businesses together. I was lucky enough, when I was here as a senior, to be on Blue Key, which was a men's senior honorary. And some of the guys in there, academically, were just brilliant and have started all kinds of wonderful businesses and have gone on. One of our most successful alumni from our era was Jay Locey who coached my son-in-law at Linfield. My son-in-law was a national champion the year that Jay Locey won the national championships. And then he came down here with Riley and coached. Jay and I had our student teaching together at Lebanon – we rode in this little Volkswagen to Lebanon every day to do our student teaching together.

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So those experiences, besides the education and the academic portion of it, which, you may be in a profession that you have to have these classes. I had a lot of different classes because I didn't know what I was going to do, and just that broad range helped me in what I did. Even though I didn't specifically get Chemistry, which I could have used, I didn't get, but I got confidence, I got teaching skills and frankly the guy that I worked for was an Oregon State graduate. He graduated in

Chemical Engineering here and he taught me everything I needed to know for chemistry. So I made connections through OSU in my lifetime career as well. And my best friend to this day graduated in Electrical Engineering here, lives up in Forest Grove, we get season football tickets together and we love to tailgate, we just have a blast. And we hunt together and just a lot of things.

MD: It's the connections. That's an on-going theme.

LB: It is the connections. That's the number one thing – you come down here with something in mind but you come away with friends and connections that, if you use it right, it can take you wherever you want to go at every level, as we've seen. One of my high school classmates who was an OSU graduate, Don Pettit, astronaut. I don't know if you've talked with him.

MD: Yes, we have an interview with him.

LB: Oh you do? OK. He was the top of our high school class. He was so far above the rest of us academically, just brilliant kid. He would teach the teachers at Silverton. And, you know, OSU alum. Look where he ended up.

MD: In space.

LB: In space. So there is just no limit.

MD: Well, on behalf of the Sesquicentennial Oral History Project, Larry, you've been fantastic.

LB: Thank you.

MD: We really thank you for your involvement and congratulations on representing Oregon State as a Pac-12 All Century Wrestling Team member, and we thank you for your participation.

LB: My honor. This is a great honor in itself, sitting through this too. Thank you very much.

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