

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

History of Youngstown College

Personal Experience

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WILLARD I. WEBSTER

Interviewed

by

James C. Dunn

on

September 4, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLARD I. WEBSTER

INTERVIEWER: James C. Dunn

SUBJECT: the history of Youngstown College, in particular, the growth of the athletic program

DATE: September 4, 1974

D: This is an interview with Mr. Willard Webster for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Janice Dunn, at Beehley Center, on March 20, at 4:30 p.m.

To begin this interview, Mr. Webster, I'd like to ask you what was the purpose of the sports program at the time of your appointment as Athletic Director?

W: If I may answer that question backwards. . . . My appointment as Athletic Director was in 1945, and the purpose was to reestablish the sports program, which had been discontinued in the war years of 1943, 1944, and 1945. Prior to that time, the inter-collegiate programs consisted of basketball and football.

D: Has the role of the sports program changed in regards to this importance to the university?

W: I do not believe that there has been change. In 1945, I wrote the first athletic policy for the university, in which I incorporated three thoughts into the objectives and aims of inter-collegiate athletics. These thoughts were: 1.) It was to be a vital part in the life of the institution; 2.) It was to have institutional control through the president; and 3.) A proper subordination into the academic game. Now, for the

record, I shall read the objectives and aims of the inter-collegiate athletic in its entirety. I quote, "Inter-collegiate athletics, at Youngstown State University, are designed to be a vital part in the life of the university and an integral part of its total educational process. By upholding the principles of institutional control, the university, through its president, accepts the responsibility of administering the inter-collegiate program in such a way as to retain a line of demarcation between inter-collegiate sports and professional sports and maintain a proper subordination of athletics to the academic aims and objectives of the university."

D: What has been the attitude of the administration towards the sports program?

W: I believe the attitude has been good. I have served under three administrators: Dr. Howard Jones, Dr. Albert Pugsley, and Dr. John Coffelt. Each has expressed their interest in the program and has assisted in every way possible, lending their support without expense to other programs in the university.

D: Has the attitude of faculty members towards the sports program had any effect concerning the success or failure of the program?

W: At the present time, I do not feel there has been any failure on the part of the program brought on by any attitude of faculty members. I will say there was a recommendation by some faculty to discontinue football because of the cost in relation to the number of victories. But, we are still playing football. In most part, I believe there has been a positive attitude over the years, which lends, to some degree, to the success we have had.

D: How would you measure the success of the sports program in relation to its purpose or ideals?

W: It's rather hard to put a figure or measurement on the success, but I will say that we have always upheld the ideals that I have mentioned before in the aims of athletics. To that end, I would say that we have had a great deal of success.

D: What significance has the sports program played in the growth of the university?

W: I honestly believe that the growth of the university would have occurred even without the sports program. In fact, I would say that our sports program has grown because the university itself has grown. I'd like to think that we were part of the well-rounded program as

it was being developed. But, I would not put too much significance on this.

D: Do you think, at the outset, that maybe they did use the sports programs to attract people's interest in the university? Maybe, for fund-raising possibilities?

W: Yes. We were instrumental in carrying the name of [what was] at that time, Youngstown College, into the outlying areas. I know I graduated from Geneva College and prior to the time when I came here, in 1938, I didn't even know that there was such a thing as Youngstown College. We, at that time, were starting football. As we moved out into the areas, people in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, and farther out in Ohio were beginning to know who and where Youngstown College was.

D: Have students' attitudes towards the sports program changed during your tenure at the university?

W: Yes. [They have changed] quite a bit, I would say, but only recently. There was a time, in our program, when various organizations within the institution would compete against each other to see who could cheer the loudest and who could follow us the most, but in the last few years, I find that there's an air of apathy in the students. Some of them could care less whether we have a program or not.

D: Do you have any thoughts as to the reasoning behind the change in the attitude of the students?

W: I think the whole thing goes back to the last war. We're finished, [and] students begin to think about other things, things that are more worldly than things that are concerned indirectly. Those who are interested in ecology, the environment, those who have gotten into government, protesters, if you will, seem to have other things that they want to do.

D: Can you see any marked change in a return to what college life was, maybe, during the early 1950's? During the Vietnam War, many students got involved in demonstrations and so forth, and they got concerned with politics. But now, you know, with the new trend beginning with this streaking. . . . Do you think it's a return to the nostalgic period where college life, once again, is going to be something where it's going to be fun for the students? You know, they won't get concerned with the more serious aspects of life.

W: [That] could be, but my way of thinking is still that attitude, and I go back now to the new curriculums that are coming out in the university, where instead of a

student being advised to follow a certain pattern in a certain discipline, a number of schools are going to permit students to take the courses that they want. In my way of thinking, this is the accumulation of a lot of things that they want and, they want nothing else. Until that attitude changes, I think, we will still have that attitude and so on.

D: Has there been any student pressure to the point of view that they should be more or less consulted in the running of the sports program?

W: No, except that we do have, within the university, students on certain committees. We do have four student members on the Athletic Council. For the record, over the last two years at the council meetings, there has been less than three percent of the students showing up for these meetings. They want to be in on something, but when the time comes for them to participate, they're not really there.

D: Do you think that the sports program here, at the university, stimulates students to participate in athletics?

W: I do, and I think it's the reverse there. I think that students wanting to participate have brought about growth in our program. As I mentioned before, we started out with football and basketball, and then [we] went into golf and baseball. At one time, we had track. We now have riflmg, swimming, soccer, tennis, and wrestling. All these newer programs were brought about because students wanted them. The administration felt and assumed that, since the students wanted them, they would do what they could to put these sports into the program. This is the way that our program has really grown; not because we simply said this is what we're going to have and went out looking for them. The students brought this, really.

D: Has there been an increasing number of students to participate in intramural athletics being offered over your years?

W: I can't answer that, because I was not involved in intramural athletics, but I understand that Bob Chuey, our intramural director, can hardly find enough time and enough space to hold the intramural programs that are being instituted.

D: How has your role, as athletic director, changed since your first year, besides being busier?

W: I really don't know. It seems to me that I've worked night and day ever since I became Athletic Director.

The role changes all of the time, but what it is, I really could not say. I am busier, but in the process of being busier, I also have some help from other areas, which I didn't have in the beginning.

D: Do you think it's been increasingly difficult, as you pointed out, with the increasing number of inter-collegiate athletics that have recently been brought to the university? The roles of being, maybe, between all of the coaches. . . .

W: That's not my problem. The problem I have is trying to schedule the events [to] not conflict with other events. We have two women's programs; the one is volley ball and the other one is woman's basketball. We have men's basketball. All three of these are conducted in the same season; that is, during the months of December, January, and February. We have one basketball floor and all three want equal time on that floor. It makes it a little rough in trying to schedule the things when everybody wants the same floor at the same time.

D: Do you think that there is an increasing pressure within the university to have more [women's] sports?

W: That is nationwide. There was a time, in our catalog, when we talked about "Men's Athletics." That no longer is there. It is "Athletics." We used to say that any male student who is a full-time student in the university is eligible to participate in athletics. It doesn't say that anymore. It says that any student who is a full-time student is eligible to participate in athletics. And, I look for my job and my position here to, in time, not only an athletic director in men's athletics, but an athletic director in women's athletics.

D: That should be very stimulating on your part.

W: Well, I don't know. Did you ever get two women's coaches that didn't like each other? (laughter)

D: Have you noticed any changes in the student athlete over the span of your athletic directorship?

W: Yes, I have. Not much, but I've been able to detect a difference between the athlete who is dedicated because he wants to participate in the sport and who has the attitude: "What can I do for the sport," and that athlete who takes the attitude: "What can the sport do for me?" I find that true in our football, but not so much in our basketball, because we don't get that caliber of athletes. But, in football, we find that a number of our football players are oriented towards

going into the pros. We have soccer players, swimmers, tennis players, baseball players, and wrestlers who participate for the love of the sport. In my way of thinking, they're the ones that get the most out of it.

Going back to football, there is an area now in which you make both ways; you play it offense and defense. I can remember some years ago, playing at Scranton, Pennsylvania. That's the Scranton University football team. All of the football players came out, and one had cracked two ribs. He asked me to tape those two ribs and to not tell the coach, because he wanted to play. He would have been out of the ball game and in the hospital under x-ray, and [he would have] come back all taped up and sat on the bench. There is that lack of dedication.

D: Do you feel that, as you pointed out earlier, many students who are going to enter the university, look upon it as "what you can do for me" instead of vice versa?

W: That's the fault of the university, because you wine and bind these boys in their senior year of high school. They're really put on a pedestal. The boy may have as many as twenty-five or thirty offers given [to] him as a student. Naturally, he's going to pick out the best one and the one that gives him the most. I think he is in a hard sense of value. I feel that.

D: What do you attribute that to? The university's more and more apt to . . . they're competing with one another on the field. The recruitment aspect of it. . . . Where is the pressure coming from that they have to go out and get the better athlete?

W: The pressure is coming from within. A coach's success is not based on what he can do in the way of coaching football, but what he can do in the way of recruiting. A famous coach, right here in Ohio, has said, "You give me good football players, or any football player, and I'll give you a winning season." It's that simple. If you got the horses, you can win. And, the more you get those horses, they put all kinds of pressure on those kids, not only through coaches themselves, but through parents and alumni, through the high school coach. There's invariably many high school coaches that have moved into university areas or into the college level of coaching, simply because he was able to take one or two of his good pullers with him. He would become an assistant coach. With the experience as an assistant coach, he could go on and get himself a good job as a head coach. But actually, they use these kids. They don't realize that it takes time.

- D: Do you think within the realm of the faculty members here, that they are somewhat upset at the amount of recruitment that may be going on? What is being offered to a student?
- W: You know, very little is being offered. We do some recruiting. Our recruiting budget is. . . . Well, at the present time, it's only two thousand dollars as compared to another school of our size, say Dayton University, which has ten thousand dollars. The amount that we can give a boy to come to this university, in a way of a grant-in-aid, is also limited. If anyone wants to examine our records, they can see that a number of our boys are here on parents' confidential, where they are able to get some equal opportunity grants, some Ohio Institutional Grants, and some grants from the university. That, combined in a package of three or four different areas, permits a boy to come to the university. You know, we cannot afford to give full grants, as we know them, \$1,630 in state and \$2,200 for out of state. Very few of those are given out.
- D: Do you think that the amount of athletes that attended here. . . . What would you give as the percentage of those who have graduated that you have had here on some type of grant? Could you give some type of estimation?
- W: A group of freshmen coming in. . . . That group will, a group of say twenty, graduate nine and a half in a four-year period. Now, some of those dropped out of school because they got married. Some have dropped out of school to go to work. Some have failed. They might come back or go back up to the next class.
- D: Would you say that has been an increasing percentage as the years have gone on, that they don't finish. Or, is it getting better that the student athlete. . . ?
- W: It's getting better. It's getting better because you know, a kid realized the value of an education. You'd be surprised whenever these kids come here on equal opportunity grants, they're well aware of their parents' financial status. They know if they are going to get an education, then they would have to get it some other way than from their parents. Those, really, are the ones that buckle down and graduate with a four-year degree. As I mentioned before, the ones that don't graduate are usually the ones who have dreams of going on into the pros and making large amounts of money. They really don't care whether they graduate or not. Nine times out of ten, they wind up with nothing anyway.



- D: Have you found that faculty members have been very cooperative in establishing a tutor program for athletes and a study program?
- W: Oh, yes. We have one department, the school of business, that has two fraternities. Both fraternities have offered a tutor service. For my own part, I have been a little reluctant to go to tutoring services because I've always felt that tutoring is nothing more than a spring fever. When a student comes in here, he's supposed to be able to do "C" work. That's the only way he's permitted to get in on a scholarship. He's supposed to have a 2.0 average. He can't do average work only because he doesn't want to or he's too lazy.
- D: What has been the attitude of the administration that you have served under, concerning the sports program budget, over the years? As you pointed out, you've served now under three presidents?
- W: They've always been cooperative. I have not always gotten what I wanted, but I have gotten what has been within consideration by the budget committee. There have been years that I have gone in with my budget, and that has been accepted. There have been years that I have gone into meetings and it has been sent back two different times, within the same year, to reevaluate my budget and to come up with a smaller budget. But, I will say that I've always been able to offer a limited budget that they have given me. Now, as you may well know, in the last three years, there has been a decline in the student body. Yet, there is going to [be an] increase in salaries. It's going to increase in the cost of equipment and increase in the cost of transportation. The longer there are trends to. . . . I find this year, the year for the 1974-75 budget, that I have to operate on a budget that is equivalent to the same budget as I had last year. What this is going to do to some of our programs, I don't know? We are going to do our best to work within what we are going to get and do it without harming any of our important programs. I'm very much against doing that.
- D: Have you experienced undue pressure regarding the subject of winning, whether it be from within the university circle or community, or. . . ?
- W: You may well know that during the years of 1970, 1971, and 1972, we had losing seasons in football. This was primarily due to over scheduling. Our schedules are made five and six years in advance. Our problem was that we didn't or were not permitted to grow as rapidly as the school that we had scheduled, so actually, we were over scheduled. We did get some bad lickings.

But, in all of those lickings that we took, we never were disgraced, as far as our performance was concerned. We were outmanned, outnumbered, and we lost. Our administration was always satisfied with its line as we did not disgrace ourselves on the field, and they would come up to greet me.

D: Have you heard any comments referring. . . . What problems do you have in scheduling? Let's say the university size is, what, twelve thousand, thirteen thousand?

W: The problem we have is that we have always been in industry. And, as an independent, we see your schedule after all the other schedules are made. We have conferences for scheduling ourselves within them, so that we would have games before the conference schedule would begin or we'd have games left over after the conference. That was the period in which we can schedule those schools. The other thing is that we can schedule independent schools. That has been our problem in forcing us to travel. We've gone to Texas, Colorado, Florida, and Louisiana. We don't go there because we want to, we go there because we have to. That's our greatest thing.

D: What were the circumstances concerning your selection as athletic director?

W: I graduated from Geneva College in 1937. The coach at Geneva College, at that time, was Dike Beede. I had worked with Dike as a student trainer, and when they started football here at Youngstown, Dike asked me to come and work with him for a period of three weeks until he could get the first full-time college squad into shape. I came three weeks and stayed thirty-five years. I had a degree in chemistry and biology from Geneva College and fortunately, for me, the Youngstown College was looking for a biology teacher. I went back and went to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh and I worked in biology and chemistry, and then I came back to Youngstown College to become part of the biology department. At that time, there were only three courses in biology, and they were interested in setting up a premedical and dental school. I had all the courses that were required to teach premedical students, and so I literally headed up the premedical department. After a period of two years, I became a chairman of the biology department as well as athletic trainer. I was here during the war period, and Dr. Jones knew of my background in athletics at Geneva, so he asked me to head up the athletic department. And, it was in 1945 when I took over and I've been here ever since.

D: What was Youngstown College like when you first came here?

W: We had one building, on the corner of Lincoln and Wick, and all of the administration and all of the courses were taught there in that one building. I tell the story that we had to count the janitor--he was a part-time student--in order to have an even six hundred students for our student body. There was an old barn that was behind the main building that had been a stable for the Wick barn. During the war, it was used as the engineering school. It had to do a number of missile tests in there for one of the mills here in Youngstown. After the war, we were able to get a number of barrack buildings that we erected. When the fellows started coming back from World War II, we couldn't find enough space for everybody. We were teaching classes in churches and the bottom of the basement of Lincoln Hotel. We were using the parochial schools at night, churches. We were using any place that we could put in classrooms. And, we've been here ever since.

D: As you've mentioned, you are the athletic director, you were the head of the biology department, you also were the athletic trainer and so forth. Do you mind commenting on what your salary was at the beginning of all of this, for all those duties that you performed?

W: Would you believe that I started at one hundred dollars a month? I started at one hundred dollars a month and each year after that, I got a raise. At the time, I was single. In 1942, I was married and I got a raise to one hundred and fifty dollars a month. There again, there was more dedication than there was anything else. Of course, at that time, you could still buy a loaf of bread and a pound of butter for fifty cents. But, the university's been good to me, and I hope that I've been good to it.

D: What has been your most frustrating experience with relationship to the sports program?

W: Even though I wrote that aims and objectives, and I said that the athletics should be subordinate, I always felt a certain frustration in that the athletic department really never had a home until we moved into the Beeghley building two years ago. We started out as in the sub-basement of the YMCA. The athletic director, at that time. . . . Well, that position was divided between the business manager, who handled all the trips, and a professor in physics, Dr. Ford, who did the scheduling. So that there was really no place in the way of shade where we had an office. When we divorced ourselves from the YMCA, we came to the

college, an independent college, we used the old Newport club as an athletic department. The girls chased us out of there and we wound up in the basement of Todd Hall. And all our athletics were conducted out of the basement of Todd Hall. We never had a place to play or practice basketball that we could call our own. We practiced at South High School. We played some of our games at South High School. We also played at Struthers. We played at Austintown Fitch and I think that my biggest frustration is on two different occasions. I tried to get some interest going on the building of a stadium for football, but I was told that there are other buildings on the campus that needed the attention of the university much more than that of a stadium. Here is it, thirty-five years later, and we still do not have a stadium. But, we do have a building.

D: Have you ever entertained any ideas about resigning your post for any reason?

W: Not really. I've been dedicated to this job. It's the only job I've had since I graduated from college. I've often thought about doing something else for a change, but I've really never gotten to the point where I couldn't work something out or work something out with the administration to the point where I've felt that I want to chuck the whole thing. Of course, I've always felt that this is where I belong and this is where I'm supposed to be.

D: How long did you remain a teacher in the biology department?

W: I still am. I was chairman of the biology department as well as athletic director at the time that we went state. I knew that when Dr. Fletcher came up to see me, that as a state university, this institution was really going to grow and grow fast. I didn't feel that I could do justice to both positions. Since I've been in athletics a long time, I knew my way around, so to speak. I resigned to remain as athletic director and give up the chairmanship of the biology department. I do retain my associate professorship and in so doing, I teach a class in embryology in the fall and a class in mammalian anatomy in the spring.

D: Do you recall when the merger or the transaction occurred from being the YMCA school to Youngstown College? Do you have any recollections of how smoothly that transaction went or whether there were some type of problems with members that were close by the frolic at the time?

W: I don't recall that there was any conflict at the time. You know as an instructor in the YMCA school, you are

also the YMCA secretary, with voting powers within the institution. We met, those of us who were with me, and voted that we should divorce ourselves from the YMCA. Unless I have forgotten or I didn't learn anything, I would have to say that this is truly a separation.

D: Who or what has proved to be the greatest influence on your career?

W: It would have to be Dike Beede. He was like a father to me. We were together at Geneva. I've been under a lot of coaches at Geneva, but I've never met a man like him. I came here with Dike, and he helped me a lot in scheduling the games. He showed me a number of things that I never really thought existed. I had some knowledge of the operation of the athletic department at Geneva College, I was a student manager, but it was only through him that I was able to learn as much as I have. I'll always be grateful for what he's done.

D: What do you consider to be the future of the sports program at Youngstown State University?

W: I think the future of the sports at Youngstown can only go one way, and that is up. I don't mean that we're going to become a power. I don't think that they'll ever become a power. Not because this is the will of the administration, but our program here is not here for that high-powered type of athletics. I do believe that, within the very near future, the women's sports are going to have quite an impact on the total sports program at the university. Their programs are increasing and I know that there is now a rule, within the National Collegiate Athletic Association, that women cannot be barred from athletic teams because of sex. There is one stipulation there, however. In the sport of swimming, if a men's swimming team was competing against another team, and that team has a woman on their squad, you must accept her and you must provide for her when she comes here. Now, the only way that women can compete on a man's team is because there is no women's team in that institution. At the university, women swam against us this year, a woman diver. We decided to investigate at the time, that women at the university do not have a swimming program themselves. It seems that it is true that a cue columns. Now, whether the football coach is going to permit women to participate on the football team because we've not a women's football team, I'm not so sure that that's inevitable. But, they're here and they're here to stay. And, I know that a number of schools now give athletic scholarships to women; equal opportunity.

D: Would you consider the highlight of your tenure here as the athletic director? Do you have any reminiscences of any highlights?

W: You mean like a game?

D: Anything.

W: Oh, I suppose the basketball . . . the one year that we were in. . . . We belonged to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, but we were coming to the play-off games to see who would be the team. We had a game with Steubenville College and we beat them in the last two seconds of play.

As far as the football team is concerned, it happened many years ago when we were playing Baldwin-Wallace College. Baldwin-Wallace had a real good football team and we were playing them at Rayen Stadium in the mud--but the score at the half-time was twenty-six to nothing in favor of Baldwin-Wallace College. We came out of the half, and we started the second half. Baldwin-Wallace scored another touchdown and made it thirty-two to nothing. But, the game ended thirty-two to thirty-three. I'll never forget that game in my life.

The other highlight is moving into Beeghley Center. It is still in the basement, but at least we've got a home. We're grateful for all of those who helped to give us this place.

D: Thank you very much.

W: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW