

1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project: Transcript of Interview

Interviewer: Brennan Berg

Narrator: Madeline Manning, 1968 Olympic Games, Track and Field

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[begin recording]

[Brennan Berg:] Okay. Today is Monday, April 4, 2011. This is Brennan Berg; University of Texas at Austin and I am interviewing Olympic track and field athlete Madeline Mims over the phone today in order to record her experiences and reflections of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. So Madeline, to start out, we just want to get some basic biographical information from you so can you tell us when and where you were born and just your experiences growing up and what you were doing leading up to the '68 Olympics?

[Madeline Manning:] Okay. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio under Madeline Manning. And that's really the way I say my full name is Madeline Manning-Mims 'cause I never dropped my maiden name. I was—actually, at the age of three years old, had a really bad disease known as spinal meningitis and I almost died from it. In fact, the doctors had told my mother that I would not live and if I did, I would be a vegetable. Things didn't look too good for me. I also grew up in the inner city, down in the projects of Cleveland, Ohio off of Cedar Avenue next to the detention hall—which is always interesting. [laughs]

And had opportunity to develop through a lot of struggles, in that, the sickness itself caused me to be anemic and miss a lot of days of school because I would just get sick just at the drop of a hat and just couldn't make it. And the doctor would have to come to my home and give me shots and of course I was too young to really know at that time what all was happening and how close I had been to death at the age of three. Actually what brought me out of death was my mother's prayers. My mother had prayed and asked God to give me back to her and that she would raise me up in the ways of the Lord the best way she knew how. And she kept her vow and God kept His. I mean, the next day when they came back in to see if I was still living or if I had passed away during the night, I was doing a lot better. They told her they didn't know what happened but she seems to be doing a little better but if she makes it she is going to be mentally retarded and physically never do what the younger, her age group, does.

But my mother was a woman of great faith. Her name was Queen and that was what she was to the family. That she just told me later on as we talked about this when I was old enough to understand that she believed that if God had kept me alive through the night and turned things around (telephone beeps) beginning to take a whole different road than it was before that He

apparently had something for me to do. And she just said, “God’s going to do some great things through you but you must stay humble and obedient to His word.” It’s funny because even at a young age, I understood exactly what she was talking about. In fact, I gave my life to Christ when I was six years old; I knew exactly what I was doing. And through those experiences in my life as a young girl, having Christ in my life made some interesting things happen around me. As I would read my little Bible stories and everything and learn about the life of Christ—I just believed—ultimately believed that Okay, if He healed a sick kid or He delivered people and did all this stuff and He’s still alive, then He must still can do it. So when I would go outside to play, one of the things that I didn’t realize is that the mothers around the projects when I would come out, they would send their kids out there. You know, free babysitting. Because I would take care of the children and set up times of play. And we would—oh we would do a lot of different things with me administrating. And it was just that the care and compassion I had for them was in activation(?) even as a young girl. And I can remember one time, I was about ten and I went outside to play and all these kids came out and you know, their hair was all matted up and they were dirty and hungry. And so I didn’t know what else to do except for bring them in my house.

My mother had cooked some beans, some black-eyed peas in fact, and some cornbread. And I took them in, marched them in the bathroom, washed their hairs and their little faces and messed up the bathroom of course. But came back out, sat them all down around the table, and served them up some black-eyed peas and cut the bread up and I had them—I said, “Now you have to say your blessings. And thank the Lord for what you have”—and nobody knew what that was and nobody knew anything to say. So I said, “Well, say Jesus wept(?)” ’cause that’s the only verse I could remember at the time and everybody said Jesus wept(?) around the table. And then they chowed down. I mean, and those kids must have eaten like two or three plates of food.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] And so they were quite full when they left. Me unknowingly, realizing, that we did not have that much in that pot to feed those kids like that. And definitely, with one pan of cornbread, I don’t know how we served those kids. Yes, I do know how. I mean, it was by the Lord making a miracle. We had enough leftover to feed our family as well after that and then have some to put away. It wasn’t until much later in my life when I look back on that, that I realize that God was doing a miracle in our life—out of my being compassionate and loving to those children. The same Jesus that fed the 5,000 plus fed all those kids in my little apartment with black-eyed peas and cornbread.

[BB:] Mmm.

[MM:] And so I experienced at a very young age a very close relationship with Jesus Christ and so that’s why I grew up believing, not because somebody told me, but because of things that

would happen in my life that would prove to me that He was real and very much alive. And so my life growing up in Cleveland and inner city—my dad was an alcoholic—I loved him very much. He loved me; but he could not father me and our roles switched where I was basically helping to take care of him instead of him taking care of me. My mom had a fourth grade education and she cleaned houses to make money—to make extra money—and I would go with her to help clean. So I learned how to work at a very young age. And I would get a little money for cleaning people’s silver or ironing their sheets and pillowcases—little things like that. And my mother was teaching me how to do that. And then how to tithe from what I worked with. And I’m glad she did ‘cause that stuck with me throughout my lifetime. And I’ve just seen real miracles come from being obedient in the area of tithing but that started when I was a little girl.

At the time I did not realize that I was an athlete. I just loved—I was (telephone beeps) I loved to play as long as I could. Many times I would get sick while I was playing and I would go inside and after awhile I figured it out; that was not good to do. ‘Cause when I would go inside, my mother would put me in the bed; call the doctor, the doctor would come and give me a shot. So I figured I’m not going to tell anymore. I’m just going to stay out there. So I would get sick and need to vomit and so I would run off somewhere—behind a building or whatever—throw up, clean up, and come back and play. And what I did not realize is that was developing inside of me a fight and a drive and a never giving up type spirit that a champion would need. And in that happening over and over in my young life, I learned how to go beyond pain and beyond discomfort and I was always so competitive that I always wanted to beat the guys—you know, beat the boys—‘cause the girls weren’t in any competitions really but some of the guys were. So that was my competition when I was little.

I was not discovered in athletics until my tenth grade in high school where I had the opportunity, through the physical fitness plan that came out under Kennedy, to do the physical fitness program that all the high school kids had to take. And through that, that’s when my gym teacher, Miss Marilyn West, noticed that I was making some high scores. And um, I went—I actually made the highest score in the school and one of the girls that ran track came in and beat all my scores. So although I was very quiet, very introverted at the time, I realized I did not like that. And I asked Miss West if I could take the test again and she said, “Sure. You can take it as many times as you want.” So I started taking the test over and over again until they finally told me it’s over and you can’t take it anymore. I was like, “Okay”. So what happened is they calculated my scores and found out that not only was I the most physically fit kid in the school but that I had set some national standards. And that’s when she looked at me, she said, “You know, you really need to into some type of sport.” And I was like, “Well, what do you have?” And she said, “Well, we have basketball, volleyball and track for girls.” So I went into all three of those and by the next year we were state champions in basketball, volleyball, and track. And through track is where I was actually discovered by Mr. Alex _____ (??) who was a Hungarian coach for the women’s track team in Cleveland. He saw me running and my coach had put me in as a last minute thing to run the 400—well, it was the 440 yard dash then—and asked me if I would run

that because we were running neck and neck with one of our rival schools for the championship. I was like, “I don’t know if I can do that because that was pretty far.” I hadn’t run a 440 before. And she said, “Well, just you know, kind of stride it. You know, you don’t have to run very fast.” (telephone beeps; intelligible) broke the school record and won by over a hundred meters. And he saw me do that and asked if he could work with me. And he talked with my mom; I finally got a chance to start working out with him. And within the next year, I had set a new world record in the girl’s 440-yard dash with fifty-five seconds flat. And was hitting very close to what the women ran which was, I think at that time, was fifty-four or something.

So they took me off the girl’s team and put me on the women’s team and there I went over to Russia, Poland, and West Germany. For the first time in my life, ever out of Cleveland, I went overseas to Russia; that was a major experience. And was winning races over there—became known among the Europeans as the young, high school girl that’s beating all our women. So that’s kind of how everything got started for me from being a little girl in the inner city—actually at nine years old, my mother remarried. She and my father divorced when I was six which was very traumatic for me. At nine years old, she had met this preacher, and uh—he wasn’t too cool on kids. He had never—well, I think at one point when he was in the Army, he was married and when he came back, he came back to a wife who was married to somebody else with children and he had a real bitter feeling towards women and children actually.

[BB:]Mmm.

[MM:]But anyway, this was the man that mom married. And I felt very rejected by him. I was not close to him until almost his death. I tried to be loving, and uh, respectful of course. But we were never really that close; not until close to the end of his life when we had a real deep talk and there was a lot of forgiveness and repentance that came forth out of that. But aside from that, my siblings—my dad actually was married before—his wife died—Mrs. Cecil Manning. And he had a son that was Cecil Manning Jr. so he was twenty years older than I was. And it wasn’t until much later that I actually found out that I had more sisters and brothers on that side of the family that I’ve never met. But that was my oldest. And then my mother had four children and that was my oldest brother on her side, James, who is ten years older than me; then my sister who is seven years older than me; and then my older brother who is five years older than me. And it went my oldest brother on my father’s side, Cecil Manning Jr., the oldest brother, James Scott, which actually mom had him when she was still in the south. And then when she came to Cleveland, she married a man named Mr. Jackson—Myrtle—actually her name now is _____ (??), she changed it; she hates Myrtle so don’t even write that down. (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] (Telephone beeps; intelligible) N. Jackson who married and became Mrs. Walker. And

then my other brother, which is Robert Jackson. And then my mother remarried my dad and became Manning. So I'm the baby in the family. And then when that marriage dissolved, she later married Mr. Preston Salisbury(?); she was Queen Salisbury(?). I think that's about all as far as my relations—oh, one other thing you can share as far as my maternal side of my family. I didn't realize it but I had some very strong women in my family. We had a family reunion where I got this book and looked at it and in the 1800s, (telephone beeps; intelligible) mother's grandmother was a traveling evangelist in the United States and I saw a picture of her. And my great-grandmother, Grandma Rose we use to call her, was Cherokee and black and had twenty-one children—very small, tiny lady but strong as all get out.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] I knew her when I was, I think about ten or eleven years old, she passed away. So I did have a chance to meet her and see her with her beautiful silver-gray hair that was down her back. In fact, I tried to brush it one time and she was agitated like, "Who's that brushing my hair?" And I threw the brush back at my grandmother. She knew that somebody different was brushing her hair. But she was amazing. But my grandmother was one of the women that helped women suffrage back in the 1800s, 1900s early, and marched in the crusades for women's rights to vote. And then my mother was a very strong, _____(?) minister who ministered to the sick and the shut-in and the bereaved and I often went with her on those visits. And I think too, that's one of the things that began to develop the desire for me to minister in my own life, just being on my mom's coattails when she would sit and share and love on and clean people's houses who were sick and those who were _____(?) and go to funeral homes and sit there with those who were grieving. I saw a great heart of compassion and action. And um, loved what it was doing—and really fed off of that. So there it is. That was a long story.

[BB:] No, it was great.

[MM:] Probably answered about fifteen—twenty—questions in one.

[BB:] Well, okay. No, that's great. Just moving forward. In the few years leading up to the '68 Olympics, where were you at and what were you doing in those years leading up to the '68 Games?

[MM:] Well, in 1965, I ran up in Toronto, Canada in the Maple Leaf Indoor Games. And they had invited me to run up there and I was, uh let's see, I was coming into my senior year at that point—in high school—and ended up running the 800 meters indoors after they changed it from the 400—at my surprise.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] But just ran it to be ran in it and ran a world record. Well, of course, that changed everything you know, 'cause I was a 200, 400 girl and all of the sudden here I run a world record in the 800 because they switched it on me and not really knowing what I was doing. But then started running the 800 and the 400 so when I would be invited to different meets to run—I would experience doing both. Either running the 4 or the 8 or both of them—which that's what I requested to do. In '66, I won the national championships. And I received a scholarship to Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee with the famed Tigerbelles. I had known about them through my coach, who a couple of our girls on the Cleveland division of recreation, had actually gotten scholarships and gone to this school. Well, there was no way that I would be able to go to college unless I was scholar-shipped 'cause we just did not have any money. And they had, what they called back then, work scholarships -- work-study scholarships that --no female athlete was getting a full scholarship. I think at that time only two schools, Southern -- down in the south in I think Alabama or somewhere--and Tennessee State University were given women work-study scholarships to the track girls. Otherwise, there were just teams around the country who, you know, they were teams; they were not college teams like we have today in the NCAA. We were not a part of the NCAA; girls were not a part of that until much, much later. So, Mr. Temple, who was the coach for Tennessee State University, was at the nationals when I was running and was very impressed with a run that I did, actually in a relay, it was a medley relay where we had the 100, the 100, the 200, and then the 400 and I ran the 400 leg of it. But the interesting thing of it was that I got the baton dead last where our 200 girl had just decided to quit in the middle of her race and was jogging. So I got it dead last and then ended up winning by 50 meters and there were like seven clocks on me that had me running like a fifty-two eight or nine, something like that. One person had fifty-two seven. And that's when he knew, "This girl is going to be something to deal with." And talked to my coach --they were good friends--about me coming to Tennessee State University. And that's how I ended up there on a work-study scholarship. So when I got there, there was about eight of us on the team that were scholar-shipped. And two girls--one was from Costa Rica and the other was from Jamaica who was my roommate. And all of us were national champions. And a few of us were Olympians like Wyomia Tyus was an Olympian. Ashley Edith McGwire was graduating so I didn't have a chance to really see her or run with her a whole lot but she was graduating. But she had been on the team. And um, the two girls from Costa Rica and Jamaica, they were Olympians from their country and the other girls were all, um, national champions including myself. So they had that type of team put together, um, you have a --it's like when you go out to train, it's like you're training with the world best, uh, every day. And there was quite a bit of competition on our team. We were very close knit team but when it came to us competing, you can imagine national champions competing against each other in practice. It did nothing but make us better.

[BB:] Oh yeah.

[MM:] So actually all eight of us made the Olympic teams. One girl did not have a chance to go because she was on the, um, she was on the relay team but they could choose if they wanted to take somebody off the relay team and use somebody else that was already on the team. And that's what they did. They have a long jumper, Lilly White. She was from Chicago and she was pretty quick out the blocks. She was well-seasoned. And actually, she was a former Tigerbelle before she moved back to Chicago. So anyway, they wanted to use her so they left our one girl off--Madeline Render--we were sick about that and she was sick about it and we felt that it was unfair. Actually, what I think--this is a sidebar. Actually, what I think they should have done was take her and put her on the team and once we got there, they can choose whoever they want to run on the team. Yeah, they could choose a shot putter if they want too. But if they didn't want to use her, at least let her have the experience of making the team and getting an opportunity to go. But they didn't do that; they left her home. So that was unfortunate. But we had that type of team coming up to '68. We were traveling--because most of us were receiving invitations to different invitational meets by the time we wouldn't go as the whole team. Like I, being an 800/400 girl, would be requested to come to a meet where they had a specialty for 800 or 400 runners. Sometimes the sprinters would go a different place and our jumpers would go a different place. Sometimes we didn't all go together as a team. We split off into specific invitational meets, uh, which was really strengthening us. We won the national championships and then went on to make the Olympic trials and then out of the Olympic trials make the Olympic team. And so there we were in Mexico--the one thing that was happening is there were so much shoot 'em in our country at the time between--just civil battles between whites and blacks--that we would come back sometimes from being overseas, during that year of '67-'68, we went to the Pan American Games; we won so many gold medals. We'd be hailed as queens and then we would come back home and people were shooting on campus. These people who were not students would come on campus and just shoot up in the air and run through the girls' dorms. Unfortunately, we had a couple rapes happen on our campus from people coming from off the campus who ran through dormitories and would raid our dormitories. So, there was a very hairy situation as sometimes we would be coming back from the track, working out, over to where we would get our meals and then go to our dormitories, we would hear firecracker-like sounds and we knew there would be shooting going on and we would actually be ducking from one building to the next—trying to get to a place of safety. And um, a lot of people didn't realize that was going on and that's something we had to deal with. Plus, the weight of feeling what was going on in our country, between the blacks and the whites, and our team being all black women—

[BB:] Uh-huh.

[MM:] --it was a situation where we just--we're just under a lot of pressure. A lot of stress. And it was good that we were very close. And Mr. Temple kept us closely guarded and we were not allowed to go off-campus after a certain time, um, because of safety reasons. So that's all the things that was going on coming up to the Olympic Games.

[BB:] Okay. Well, let's go ahead and get to Mexico City. As far as the Olympics opening, did you march in the '68 Opening Ceremony and can you just tell me about your experiences and reflections of the Opening Ceremony and the Closing Ceremony?

[MM:] Oh boy. Oh yes we did. It's not like it is today. Our kids today are so money-oriented that they miss that. Some of them are not there for the Opening Ceremonies, but a whole lot less are there for the Closing Ceremonies. But that is part of the Olympic Games experience that I think every Olympian needs to experience at least once. Um, to get on the U.S. Team is not an easy task. You have so much competition out there that usually if you're the best—in some of the events, if you are the best in the United States, you are the best in the world. And so it was no—you know, some people think, "Oh, you made the Olympic Team"—and I had this happen to me. Somebody asked me at school when I came back, "Oh, so y'all went to the Olympic Games huh?" And I was like, "Yes." Said "Oh, well good. How did you enjoy them?" So I'm thinking they're interested in, you know, how we personally enjoyed and viewed the Olympic Games and the next question before I could even answer that was, "Well, did you win anything?" And I said, "Do you understand what it means to be a participant at an Olympic Games?" I mean even if you make the team—first of all, if you make any team, you have done something that most people in the world will never do. Secondly, if you make the United States Team, you have done a lot. You have done something at the top twenty percent of athletes in the world. Secondly, if you make the team and you participate and you make it to the finals; all of our girls made it to the finals. I'm talking about our girls here at Tennessee State University. All of us made it to the finals. And they were just like, "Well, did you win anything?" I'm like, "Uh." This is ignorance that beyond [phone beeps] responding to. (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] First of all, if you had looked in the paper, you would have realized yes, you have some gold medalists coming back to your school.

[BB:] Uh-huh.

[MM:] But anyway, I got off a little track. But anyway, the Opening Ceremonies were fantastic. I mean—you know what was funny about it to me? Was these guys—some of the basketball guys who were so cool and boxing guys who thought they had it all together—you know, Richard _____ (??) is, you know, a marchist(??). When our names were called and we were told to line it—it was time to line up to go into the stadium. Something hit us something so magnificently patriotic that it totally made the hairs stand up on the back of your head. I mean, it was—it was just an awesome, awesome experience. Because, one, as we got ready and got in our lines, you know like they had shown us to do by height, we were coming closer and closer to the mouth of the stadium. And as we did, we could hear them calling and introducing the other nations before us; and the drums playing and the loud camaraderie of the whole stadium. And all

the sudden you hear them, uh, call your nations name; you know the United States of America. Of course, they called it in Spanish, French, German, and then English. I mean, your heart just went into your mouth. And you stepped into the open—the open porthole onto the track and you're marching—I mean, your back just straighten ups and your palms get sweaty and your breathing—I mean, this whole experience is hard to put into words because it's something that you will never experience unless you are an Olympian. And you walk in there—and I don't care how many people in the world say they hate you— (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] —that stadium lights up. The decibels of sound must break the sound barrier. It is so loud. I mean, people just scream and act like crazy. And then you see your flags flying around the stadium—different people from the United States. And people are crying. And then tears were coming out of your eyes and you're walking knowing that you are a part of one of the greatest nations in the world. And people are acknowledging you as an athlete—representing your country. And I don't care how tough you think you are; that is a melting moment. It is a very humbling moment. And it's one in which enriches your life in a way that nothing else can.

[BB:] Mmm.

[MM:] Because it basically says we recognize you for who you are: a God-gifted, world-class Olympian.

[BB:] Uh-huh.

[MM:] And you know, that goes on. And when you get in there, then you're just like a kid. You're taking pictures; you're looking around. You're looking at the other suits of the other countries. All ____ (??) entertainment is being done on your behalf. Everybody waits, breathtakingly, for the torch to come in. You know, nobody knows who's gonna be the person that actually runs it upstairs. So that's always a mystery. And so you see the ____ (??) running back and forth trying to follow the torch and then it being lit. And then, the um—what do they call that? Oh, the oath that is taken on the behalf of the athletes to compete fairly and to the best of your ability; all that goes on. Then, of course, the message got out, “Duck when you see the birds coming.” (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] Course, being the first time, you never know what that means. You're like, “What do you mean duck?” Well, we learn really quick. ‘Cause what they do is they feed those birds and then they're cooped up in these cages for hours. And when they come out and fly; they're pooping everywhere. And so you duck for your life. ‘Cause you hear these splats coming at you.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] So we put our jackets over our heads. And you know, and that was a funny thing.

[BB:] Oh my. Um—

[MM:] You know of course—starch.

[BB:] Yeah. So was the Closing Ceremony—was that a similar experience to the Opening Ceremony?

[MM:] The Closing Ceremony is different, in that, you don't have to march out with your country. It's all mixed. Everybody is just mixed. You come out—actually we ran out. I mean, by the time they said, "Okay. You can go now." We were running out of those _____(??) and it was party time. We just had such great time. You know, you'd be hand-and-hand or on somebody's shoulders or somebody's back running. And they'd be from a whole 'nother country; you don't even know who they are. That one unique unity of fellowship of athletes that are swarming the stadium and having a party—that was phenomenal. And the thing is, you've done it. You've finished what you came there to do. Some people are with great joy. Some people are running around with medals on their necks. I left mine in my apartment; I didn't want to trust somebody pulling it off. But just the excitement of it all and then you see—it's like going to a memorial when you see the flag brought in. It's marched in and it's kind of—[phone beeps]—almost like a funeral procession when they bring it in. Well, actually, they're taking it down; that's right. They bring it in when you're coming in for the Opening Ceremony. They take it down and fold it up and bring it out. And that's a really sad time because you realize this time of your life has happened [phone beeps] and will never happen again.

[BB:] Mmm.

[MM:] But it was, uh, it was a party. We just really enjoyed ourselves—had a lot of fun. And I think the people in the stadium enjoyed watching us enjoy ourselves.

[BB:] Oh, I'm sure. Um, alright. Okay, well, we'll move on to the next question. What were your accommodations like in Mexico City? Can you speak to that as far as just, you know, do you remember what floor you were on in the Olympic Village; who did you room with; and what was the layout of the room?

[MM:] Well, the Mexican people had set up their dormitories like small apartments. And that was because they were going to use them as apartments once the Olympic Games were over for their people. In fact, I can remember—at the end of the Games, um, maybe a week before it was over, there were people coming up looking at our apartment. And we were like, you know, what are you doing here? And they were telling us, you know, put your stuff up; make sure you have your stuff locked up; and don't have anything out that's easy to just pick up and go out with—that there are people coming in who are going to be asking to rent out apartments after we leave so they're coming in to look at them. So it was kind of unique. Um, who was my roommate? I'm

trying to think. I think, um—I think they kept the 800 ladies together. But I don't remember rooming with Doris—Doris Brown Heritage now—and _____(??) Crocker were the other two half-milers.

[BB:] Uh-huh.

[MM:] Man, that's been so long, I don't know who I roomed with.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] But I know it was small. I mean, the complex was kind of small. And I remember that Wyomia Tyus and Edith McGuire were rooming together and they were in that complex—I do remember that—some of the Tigerbelles were still together.

[BB:] Okay. Well, you've already spoken with how many of your teammates from Tennessee State made the—

[MM:] Right.

[BB:] —Team and were there. But, in addition to them, was there anyone else you became particularly close to on the Olympic Team?

[MM:] Um. Of course, my roommate, Una Morris, who was from Jamaica, had made the Jamaican team and so even though she wasn't rooming with us because that was the U.S. dorms, she and I would meet up together and go and have some Jamaican, um, what did she have? They would have kinds of food. They would cook and so, they would have us—me and a couple of the other Tigerbelles—come over. That was fun. But really, during that time, I wasn't specifically close to a whole lot of people. My coach, Alex _____(??)—he was the coach for the middle-distance girls. And so, um, he was there; so I spent time with him. And then, other than in my training being with Doris and _____(??)—I don't remember getting really, really close to anybody else.

[BB:] Okay.

[MM:] Of course, our team was very close. The U.S. Track and Field team was extremely close—just because of what was going on and to boycott; we decided that was crazy. And that wasn't going to happen. So that put us pretty close. Lee Evans was a good friend of mine. He was a quarter-miler. In fact, he won the gold medal in the 400. And he and I use to go out and run early in the mornings—I didn't want to run by myself somewhere where I wasn't familiar with—so there were times, because we were good friends, we would go out and you know, do a workout in the morning—running some distance in the morning; he would run with me. But aside from him, I wasn't, um, I wasn't that close, you know, like close, close—

[BB:] Uh-huh.

[MM:] —to a lot of people. I was still pretty—introverted and pretty quiet at that time.

[BB:] Okay.

[MM:] As much as I talk now, you wouldn't believe how inverted I use to be. (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] I mean, I was friendly but I would not initiate in being outgoing. That just happened as I began to speak and things and you know, deal with the public a lot more.

[BB:] Okay. Um, well of course, during the '68 Games, it was the middle of the Cold War. Do you have any particular memories of the athletes from the Soviet Block while you were there?

[47:47.9]

[MM:] Most of them, I had seen them even when I was in high school I had seen some of them running. And I thought that the women looked quite manly at the time. (laughs) Some of the ladies--In fact, oh gosh, I was trying to think of the name of this sisters, one was a shotputter and one was a hurdler. And they both had like light beards. One, the hurdler sister, I remember her hair being bleached blonde and she was fast as all get out and people—I was unaware of what they were talking about but people at that time were just saying, yeah they're using something, or they're crossbreeding them, all kinds of rumors were going on about the Russians, but I knew at '68 that the Russians were going to be tough. That they were going to be really tough to beat. In the 800, they were not as strong as some of the other European girls or the—it was at that time the 800 meters in the world was not—it was the longest race at that time for women to run at the Olympic Games. So it was considered a distant run. And not many girls were running that and definitely not many black women, or ethnic women at all. I actually opened the door for women of ethnicity in the world to begin to compete at the 800 m and then it opened up that door to go 1500 mi and now they run ultra marathons. So—

[BB:] Hmm. That's good.

[MM:] Actually at that time I just didn't realize what I was doing. I was just trying to win a medal for the United States and for myself. And trying to honor God with my athleticism. Not realizing at the same time that my performance would open up the minds of a lot men around the world who would not allow their women of color to compete. And they thought that that was going to go against their health. So I just crushed that whole myth when I not only ran, was the only black female to run in the finals, but also won at such a great distance. I actually ran at 1 over 60 m, my competition. And so that crushed that myth and then they started deciding well maybe we better look at our women. (laughs)

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] See what they can do.

[BB:] (laughs) Yeah.

[MM:] And they looked at me realizing that she is not on anything. (both laugh) I was ____ (??) I was like not the one you would think would be storming the world like that(??). Its like that, that reminds me of a story, let me go back a little bit. In '65, as a senior, well coming into my senior year, I went to Mexico City to, no it wasn't, I went to Tokyo that's right, I went to Tokyo to run in the university games. And the Japanese people kept asking, "Where's Manning?" And so they pointed me out. There she is. She's walking right there. And he's like, "no, no, no! Where's Manning? 800 m." And they'd say, "Well, that's her right there." "No, no. Manager." They called me a manager! We want Manning not manager. That is Manning! That is the girl, the high school girl. So they'd ask me later on in an interview, you know, how is it that you can run? I'd say, well I train hard, you know, and I would try to give __ (??) but you was so slim, "too thin" and I said, Yeah, that's just long and tall and lanky. (both laugh) But that's the whole thing they knew that ok, if she can run, and run that well, and she is not some big hulky, man-lookin' female, then I guess our women will be alright. I think about that and I get tickled.

[BB:] (laughs) Okay, well, I'm moving on to just the next topic. What were some of the training methods you used to prepare for the altitude of Mexico City?

[MM:] The women went to Los Alamos(??), New Mexico to train and we were about 9,000 ft higher than Mexico City. Which prepared us. Training at that type of altitude and then coming down to Mexico City we were acclimated quite well for competition. It didn't really—it wouldn't have bothered(??) that much the sprinters that it would have bothered the middle distance and distance runners, so that's how we trained. Actually I remember in Los Alamos(??) when we first went there to train the first week, I thought, "what is wrong with me?" I could hardly walk anywhere without breathing hard and so we started riding bikes, then we would jog a little bit, then as our bodies acclimated to the high level, we went up, the half-milers went up even higher, to about 3 or 4 thousand more feet higher into a volcano plateau that was up in the hills. And we would run our distance up there. And so by the time we were like 2 weeks into training, we could then go on to track and do our interval workouts, our sprint workouts but we, 2 of 3 times a week we would go back up to the hills early in the morning and do our distance run so by the time we got down to Mexico City our bodies were ready to compete.

[BB:] Oh okay. That's very interesting. Ok well this is, I guess a very broad question but for you personally, looking back at the '68 Games, what was the most meaningful part of participating?

[MM:] From me, it was knowing and being very aware that in my event, in the women's 800 m run, no one had ever brought back a medal for the United States and I was really wanting to bring back two. Because two of us had made it to the final doors, Brown Heritage (??) had made it and myself. And so I was looking at gold and silver. And of course I was going after gold, but I was wanting her to be able to be close enough to me that she could get the silver medal, we could bring double medals back. That didn't happen, but in trying to make that happen, I ended up

barely not breaking that two minutes. I ran 2.00.87 and I would've been the first woman in the world to run under two minutes. Later on, I became the first woman in the United States to run under 2 minutes but during that time, I was very centered(??) and focused on trying to bring the medals for the United States in that event. The second would have been that, I didn't realize this 'til later, but being the only black female in that specific event, that I was opening doors for women of color all around the world. That has really impressed my life with how God used my life to do something that's phenomenal. And the other thing was, I was asked, after winning the gold medal, by a television commentator, who came up afterward and he said, you know, we didn't expect this. We're really proud of you, which kinda threw me cause I'm like, "What did you expect, you know, I've been top in the world for two years." So I think the myth that black women could not run that distance was just so strong that no matter what I did or who I was beating and well I was running, it was still not expected from me to win the gold medal and set a new Olympic record and world record. So I guess that's what he was attributing his comment to that we did not expect this, and we're so proud of you. He said something to me, that there was only one answer for. And he said, you know, who do you give all the glory to? And I kinda looked at him I was taken aback and I said well, I'm running for Jesus, I give all the glory to him. And he looked at me strange, and I guess at that time, not many, if any, people were sharing their faith on live television at a sports situation. And so I was one of the first but I was really answering his question(??) so he said I'm sorry we're not talking religion here. And I said, well I'm not either you asked me the question, I'm trying to answer it.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] And he said, "we'll be right back after these messages, thank you." And walked off. Course it's not likely that they would do that now, I've worked with NBC, another affiliate, that they'd(??) be at the Olympic Games and they don't do that. Because too many people share their faith now. But that was at a time when I guess no one shared their faith openly like that. But it was not that I was trying to wave some flag or banner, it was, the question that he asked me only allowed me to answer it one way.

[BB:] Sure.

[MM:] And I think I surprised him! (laughs)

[BB:] Yeah.

[MM:] But it was too late because it had gone all over the world by then.

[BB:] (laugh) Alright, well good. We've eluded to some of this earlier but the Mexico City Games were marked by several historic moments: first games at high altitude, first games to deliberately test athletes for performance-enhancing drugs, the massacre of protestors in Mexico City prior to the Games, Smith and Carlos' famous black power salute, the strong presence of the

Soviet Bloc athletes, and the first Games in Latin Americas. So what degree, while you were there, were you aware of any of these issues, and how did that affect your Olympic experience?

[MM:] I was aware of everything. I mean one of the things that would happened when we'd have our team meetings, is that these things would be discussed and shared and usually our head coaches, managers, delegates would be there to talk to the whole team and share with us. I do remember a Jesse(??) Owens, coming in to speak to the whole U.S. Olympic Team, of all sports. Just a motivational talk that just shook your boots. And got you ready for competition. And him sharing his experience in 1936 of what he experienced against the Nazi regime and that whole Adolf Hitler situation and his long jump situation(??) with the German. I was really impacted, as everybody was, by his speech. That we were there, specifically for one thing, and that was to represent our nation as one of the best athletic nations in the world and to prove that, the only way we could prove that we were the best was that we competed(??). He just really exhorted us to go out there and give it our best. They focused on the reason why we were there. I met him afterwards, actually it was my first time meeting him but I didn't realize that he knew me. So when we were going through the line and I shook hands with him, the person who was introducing the athletes to him said "and this is Madeline Manning." And he said, "I know who she is." And of course you think that, well ok, he's just being nice, you know. Because we're from the same hometown. Cleveland. Of course I knew him from Cleveland. But I figured he didn't know me! So I said, "Really?" He said, "You don't believe me, do you? I know you went to John Hay(??) High School, you graduated, went to Tennessee State University. You ran the first 55 seconds in the girls 440 yard dash and they took you, put you on the women's team. He just started, and I was like, my mouth was open. I cant believe this guy knows all this stuff!

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] He said I've followed you because you're from my hometown. You know, here you are, coming up on the Olympic team, of course I would've followed you. And I was like wow.

[BB:] Yeah!

[MM:] And so he said, "well I just want you to know that I'm really in support of what you're doing and you're ready. You are so ready. Just go out there and win the gold. That's all you have to do. Just go out there and win the gold." And that stuck with me. Of course it brought me to tears cause such a legend knowing me that well and then giving me those words of expectation and edification(??) that would just stall(??) inside of me. When I went out, knowing that all of this chaos was swarming around us, this political unrest and the civil war situation back at home__ (??). People telling us to boycott, you know, the Olympics. Then we would have are meetings in track and field that would--We made a decision, we are here to compete so nobody is going home unless you want to and whatever you do you're doing on your own and you'll deal with the reward or the consequences. However it goes. But no one is gonna pressure anybody to do anything. We're not gonna allow anybody outside to come in and tell us what to do. We are

the U.S. track and field team. And we will support each other either way it goes. And that time when we had that meeting it was not just blacks in there, it was the whole team, it was blacks and whites. And we had people who were sympathetic and we had people who thought this whole thing is just was craziness. So I myself, personally, was aware of things but I was staying very focused. Knowing that my purpose for being there was not to enhance somebody else's political agenda or personal reflection on how they were looking at things from an outside view. I just tried to be objective as far as understanding different people's feelings and what they said and whatever. Of course I was really sensitive to the black issue. I personally got hate mail from people from the United States. Who told me that you need to move out the way and let a white girl do this. Because they believed the myth also that blacks could not run. But you know the seniors, I was the best in our nation. I had beaten both of the competitors that were on a team with me. So I just did not believe the telegrams that I was getting from people that didn't know any better. It bothered me. At one point I wouldn't let it bother me just reading those things, that's crazy. But one of the things that did bother me a newspaper writer from the paper in my hometown to cut and watch to see what I was gonna do and report on it. Someway he got into—lets see, I'm trying to think, was he—I down know if he was at the semis. Anyway he got into the area where the girls warm up right before we're taken off onto the track to run. And he asked me a question that really shook me. He said we're so proud of you back home and everybody's talking about the girl from Cleveland, making the Olympic Games and the Olympic Team and you know, all the things she's done so far. And he looked at me. He said, you're gonna be coming up to your final—do you think you'll make it? And I looked at him like, wait a minute, what did you just say? (laughter) I couldn't believe—I didn't understand why he thought I would not make it. Knowing that he was a news writer that he should have had some type of research done on me to know that, woah, this girl has been undefeated for the last two years. Not only will she make it, she might win the gold. He had that question. She might, but it was, do you think you'll make it into the finals and I just said, you know what? I have learned one thing since I've been here, everybody who is here has come to be number 1. And I am no different so you just watch me. So he realized that he had kinda pertured(??) me then, which was hard to do because I was very soft spoken but I was a little straitforward on that one. And he said, okay, well best of luck! And I said, um-h. But that was the first time that I began to question myself, I actually went away to the side and prayed. And I said, you know, father I don't know who believes in my anymore. I know that my coaches, Mr Temple(??), my coach here, Mr. Ferenzi(??), know they are pulling for me but they don't know what I am capable of doing right now. They know that I have the ability and the potential to pull out something that has never been done before in the United States. But they're not sure. And I said. And my mom's here and she loves me and all she cares about is her little girl getting around those two circles and comin' home. She don't care about nothing else! ____ (??) Even me, I said, Lord, I've done everything I know to do, I've worked really hard to get here, but I don't know the outcome. So I said, ill tell you what, im just gonna run for Jesus. And that's where my first acronym came from for my first book and for my first album Running for Jesus, it came from me praying that prayer and dedicating that run and

that race for the Lord. And so I said, lord, I'm running for Jesus. And I don't know what the outcome comes but I'll just give it my best and it'll be to your glory. That's how I looked at the Games. I was running for the glory of God, giving it my best, trying to stay focused on what I was there to do, wanted the best for the United States, hopefully first and second positions. But I was not going to allow all the distractions that were coming after day after day after say to dissuade me from my goal. That's how I looked at it.

[BB:] Well you've spoken a lot on the racial aspect of everything you've experienced. Both at Tennessee State, while you were there. But I know one of the lasting images that the Olympic Games and really Olympic history is Smith and Carlos' black power salute, and given that they were on the track and field team with you, what was your thought when you first saw that and they received so much attention?

[MM:] Right. First of all, I knew that I had talked with Tommy(??) afterwards, caust to us, to the track team, what they did was a big thing. It wasn't as skyrocketing news to us as far as what they did as it was to the head of the IOC and the delegation who thought this was an abdominal thing and it got to the news and they thought they we got a story here, let's go with this. So they turned this whole thing into a negative horrible situation, embarrassing the United States and all of that stuff. Well, that was not the situation at all. When I talked to Tommy and I was like what's going on? What happened? Why'd you do that? And tommy, was one of the quietest guys on our team, he hardly a said two words! So to see him do something like that was a *huge* expression of his heart. And I didn't know Tommy—I didn't know John as well as I knew Tommy. Tommy was closer to Lee Evans who was my best friend. And that's how I knew him. John was loud and he was from the Bronx and so I stayed clear of him cause he was scary to me.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] We ended being best of friends later on(??) But at that time, what Tommy shared with me was, well I was, I was sitting and getting ready for the procession for the award ceremony and I decided I was going to wear block sock and black ___(??) and black gloves, as a sign of that this is a black man, from America, who has made it through the struggle and had made it all the way to the top as the Olympic champion of the world. It was not a negative for the United States. It was pride for I am a black American. When he was sitting there, and he said I was sitting there and putting my stuff on and John saw me and said hey man, whatchya doin? And he said well I'm gonna wear this during the ceremony and he said, well give me one! So gave him one of his gloves and he gave him his sock! And they both had these little black pants they had work before. So they went out and that's how they went out. Now the actual salute was not planned. It jus happened. When Tommy said, when I heard the national anthem I just raised my hand in the black power salute to let the world know these are two, well he was saying about himself, this is one black man, who is standing at the top of this podium having won the Olympic gold medal and I am proud of being black. We had a thing that I guess ___(??), I'm black and I'm proud? And that was kind of the theme that ran through the hearts of the black athletes. We wanted to

say it loud through performance. And acknowledge that we were black Americans and we were proud of it. It was not—if had done this thing where Tommy came from, he was picking peanuts in a field in California and they were really poor and a large family and to able to make it to the top was saying a whole lot. For anybody to put him down because he was a black man, that was not gonna happen. He was proud that he was black. And so we were. We also were proud of being black. I know that on some of the other teams, the boxers, all of us. There was a lot of negativism against black athletes on that team that came from our team, from white people. Who were just like, not giving us credit for being Americans and going through the craziness of thinking, you know, that we were less citizens because we were black. And we were there to really show that that is not true. We are not less citizens. We are the best citizens, representing you right now. In doing so, we want the world to know that we're not gonna change and go back to Africa. We were born in America. And we live in America, with all of its problems and everything that it faces and in the whole thing we are still United States citizens representing this team. So it was not a negativism for me, at the time. And was actually surprised that it came out that way. And it really hurt me when they wanted to take their medals away from them, send them home, and everything. Actually they, the Mexican governing body for the Olympics said, no they are our guests, they can stay however long they want to. And out of respect for the rest of the team members for the United States, Tommy and John left, not to cause anymore attention at that time by them being there. So that's how that ____ (??)

[BB:] Yeah! That's quite a story. Well ok, after the Olympics, what sort of reception did you receive upon coming home. Did you have any down time? Or did you go directly back to work, like training or employment? What was it like right after the Olympics for you?

[MM:] Right after the Olympics I did come home. Actually the city of Cleveland was going to do a ____ (??) parade for me and Elenore Montgomery who was the other—she was a high jumper who made it into the finals ____ (??) Tennessee State University. And they were gonna do this big thing and there was my gym coach. She was on that ____ (??) as one of the managers as well. So and then of course my coach, Alice Ferenzi (??), I'm starting to—I don't think he—maybe he was with us. Well something happened and we didn't get home until way early in the morning so they did have some people waiting at the airport for us but it was dark and brought my sister and my brother there. My mother had been in Mexico City to see me but she had flown back home. There was, it was kinda neat. Later on I was recognized by the city council at the top of the town that was restaurant (??), we call that the top of the town. They had a big thing and they had the

1:21:56

c ____ (??) and mayor and people from my past. This was one of those, this is your life type things (laughs). People always seem to, ever since I was (??) a little girl that it was just awesome. It was awesome. So they made me feel really welcome, they were very, very proud of me. I didn't have to go back to work but later on did have to go back to school. (laughs) So it was—it wasn't a

time that we made a lot of money, like I wish I could have. Man, oh man, what I did at that point, had I done that in these days, I would be a multimillionaire.

[BB:] (laughs)

[MM:] Which wouldn't be too bad. And at that time I was pioneering and opening the doors for women of ethnicity to compete in track and field. And so there was just the talk of doing it for the love of the sport. Of course you're doin' it for the love of the sport, but you also have to eat and pay bills. So but there was no money there for me. I'm kinda tryin' to think what I did after. Let's see. That was October that we had the Games in Mexico so I'm thinking I went right back into school.

[BB:] How much more time in school did you have?

[MM:] I was, let's see, I started in '66 so I was just going into my junior year, so I had just finished up as a sophomore. I was a sophomore in college.

[BB:] Okay.

[MM:] I hadn't started my junior year yet.

[BB:] Alright, well, looking at, I guess a new generation of Olympic hopefuls, what's one piece of advice you would give to today's Olympic hopefuls?

[MM:] One piece of advice to give an Olympic hopeful. Well one of those people that are looking that is an Olympic hopeful happens to be my daughter.

[BB:] Yeah?

[MM:] Yes. And one of the things that she and I have talked about, and that is how do you make a US Olympic team? How was all the necessities they have today: the training, the nutrition, the new type of running, facilities, the training facilities. Now you have your personal coach, you have your personal nutrition, you have your chiropractor, you have your personal trainer, you have your all medical, sports medicine doctor, you have a manager, you have agents. It is so complex now. It is so different from what I experienced or what I had available to me. That is a whole business. I mean it's a whole business. And that's because you can make more money now, it's now considered an occupation, not just a sport. Its in the area of entertainment, but its an occupation, you know, when you're out there training, you need to be training full time. How do you do this still be able to live? So when kids are out there competing now they're not always competing to beat somebody else, they are trying to make a living. So I understand that it has different dynamics to it then it did when I was coming up. The one thing she and I talk about is staying clean from drugs, not allowing the wrong people to be around you to snuff you and to something you don't even know that's going on. And certain situations where you have trainers or coaches saying here, take these supplements, this'll help you and you find out later on that

those were not supplements. Those were enhancing drugs for your performance, you know, performance enhancing drugs. It ___(??) ruins you, so having the right people around you to help you get the best for your system because you do need nutrition and you do need supplements because foods just don't have enough in 'em themselves. So you have to eat right, sleep right, train correctly according to your body's needs. And really stay focused and not give up, that's the main thing! You have to stay consistent(??), you can't like get disappointed, oh I competed horrible this time and I'm not competing now, I guess I don't have it. Cause it takes time to get to your best. It just takes time. And everybody who has been to their best has had low points in their life. That's the main thing, it's not to get--you might get tired and discouraged and that's ok, because that happens but just don't give up!

[BB:] Right. Well, just about done here, but what does the creation and preservation of the 1968 US Olympic Team legacy, what does that mean to you?

[MM:] I feel that the 1968 Olympic Team was the one of the best teams that ever existed. Of course 1936 was the Berlin situation with that whole political situation with Jesse Owens and Adolf Hitler was historically phenomenal but aside from that one of the most powerful team that represented the United States at the Olympic Games was the 1968 Team. ___(??). And I've been on 4 teams. And also kinda kept up with the history of teams before me and the history of teams after me. '68 with all of its complications and challenges performed at a level that was, that totally outquest(??) everybody in the world. And it was just phenomenal and I think that probably that happened because of the struggle and because of the challenges we had. It forced us to be closer. Because when you have Olympians together on one team like that, everybody is basically a pre-Madonna. And sometimes it's hard to get people to come together as a team after they've competed against each other so long. But we supported other sports. Our sports themselves were just really tight, very close. Extremely competitive and extraordinary talent. So much is so that we have records that have held 30 and 40 years. That's unheard of. You know, _____(??) an Olympic Team that has records that lasts that long. And I could be wrong but I mean—even with my record, although I beat my time from there cause I ran a 2.00.87, and my fastest has been 1.57.9. What I did, has not been, there has been no other woman to win a gold medal and bring it back to the United States in the Olympic Games. Which I did it. And it's not that people hadn't run faster, but they had not produced a gold medal and set a world record and set an Olympic record at that time. You know when we look at my training, not being the same training that is given today, and even at that time, I wasn't doing any weights, I was doing no weight training because it was, that that's not good for girls. (Laughs). So I wasn't doing any weight training. I can't imagine what I would've done had I had the type of training, the type of nutrition, the surfaces that they run on today, the shoes that they have for running on them. Oh man, all of that shaves off hundredths of seconds. What I could've done.

[BB:] (Laughs) Oh sure!

[MM:] I just know that that was one of the greatest teams of our time for the United States. And I'm very proud of it.

[BB:] Well great. Are there any other thoughts that you wanna share with us? Just that we haven't covered or any topics or anything like that?

[MM:] Hold on one minute, my other line is ringing, I need to get it.

[BB:] Okay.

[MM:] Be back with you. I tried to cover as much as I could when you asked the questions, to be detailed so I really—really don't have a whole lot to say, other than what I've said.

[BB:] Oh okay, well, Madeline Manny Mims, we really thank you so much for participating in this project.

[MM:] you're welcome. I would love to hear everything that's gonna be put together, what you have together, sounds like a great project you all are working on. How long do you take---(phone cut)

[end of interview, end recording]

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The Institute for Olympic Studies
The H.J. Lucher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports
University of Texas at Austin
403 East 23rd St., NEZ 5.700
Austin TX 78712
512-471-4890
www.starkcenter.org
info@starkcenter.org