

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

Interviewer: Desiree Harguess

Narrator: Gary Anderson, 1968 Olympic Games, Shooting

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DH:

Today is Tuesday, December 11, 2012. This is Desiree Hargis working on behalf of the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. As part of the 1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project, I am interviewing Gary Anderson over the phone about his experiences in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. Gary, can you begin with your full birth name and when and where you were born?

GA:

My name is Gary Anderson. I was born 8 October 1939 in Holdridge, Nebraska.

DH:

And where did you grow up and can you tell me a little bit about your family background and your childhood?

GA:

I grew up in a very small farm town, Axtell, Nebraska. My father was a farmer and school, I think my senior class in high school were 12 people, so it was a very small school, very rural community and of course the connection with my later involvement in sport is there were no sports clubs, no shooting clubs, no way for me to become directly involved in the sport.

DH:

So, what made you become interested in shooting? Well, I guess probably farm life piqued your interest, but what really made you become interested in seriously pursuing sport shooting?

GA:

I grew up in a family of hunters, so I was of course exposed to the guns and the use of guns and hunting, started doing a lot of reading and eventually that connection led me to discover that shooting, target shooting, was an Olympic sport and that kind of sparked the dream. I tried to learn as much as I could, there wasn't much information available, but started improvising some equipment, teaching myself what I thought was the right way to do things. During my last year of high school especially, I started doing a lot of training on my own, it was really getting quite intense.

DH:

Who were some of your major influences at the time, whether they were international athletes or neighbors, friends, family, who was really influencing you and inspiring you to continue with shooting at the time?

GA:

Really almost the sole influence were the shooters from the USSR. They had come into the Olympics, into the World Championships in 1952 and of course became dominant in the sport. There was a little bit of information getting out about them through the 1950s.

The leader in the world was a Russian-Soviet shooter by the name of Anatoly Bogdanov. He wrote a couple of pretty detailed technical articles that had been translated and he became my hero and he became my inspiration. I think later looking back at it, picking a hero who was the best in the world set the bar real high and I think that made a big difference for me.

DH:

Did any of your friends or family practice with you or keep company with you in the sport?

GA:

No, I think almost the opposite. Spending a whole lot of time practicing, trying to become involved in a sport or trying to be the best in the world was looked upon as a pretty nutty idea. I didn't have a hostile reaction from my family, but I certainly had no support, had no one to train with, no coach.

I was strictly on my own and from my little hometown there was nobody that thought this was a good thing to do and everybody thought it was kind of a nutty idea.

DH:

Tell me a little bit about those early training periods and what you did specifically to train.

GA:

I didn't really have a real target rifle. I had to improvise, take one of my dad's old .22 caliber rifles and make some adaptations. I didn't have a lot of money so I had to do what we call dry fire training, which is simulating the firing of a shot without actually using real ammunition.

By observing what happens you can judge a performance almost as well as with real ammunition. I dry fired all week and had enough money to buy a box of bullets which I would shoot on Saturday and then go back to dry firing the rest of the week. It was a pretty improbable beginning compared with everybody else in the world that was able to get involved in shooting clubs of some kind and have some level of support.

DH:

So, I guess let's go to your first series of competitions. If you could describe those and what the results were and how you got there and how they propelled you to the next stage.

GA:

There were a few competitions around and I tried to do anything I could to get to a competition. Basically, as soon as I started going to competitions my training had been good enough that I was either able to win or come close to winning just about everything I did. At least there was some positive reinforcement there, although the level of competition in that part of the country was not real high, but at least it got me a start.

After a year, year and a half of this I started to realize that staying in that part of the country and being on my own was just not going to let me reach my goals. At that time, the only

good training environment for our sport, certainly U.S. O.C. and the national governing body had no programs going at that time. Anyway, the one opportunity was the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit at Fort Benning. I got a hold of them and tried to talk my way into a trial with the team where I felt like the training environment would allow me to reach my goals.

DH:

So I read somewhere that you had, I guess, results and they didn't believe your results so you had to give them a trial?

GA:

Yeah. The little matches I was shooting in the Midwest nobody really paid much attention to those, so nobody at Fort Benning was really aware of me and my results. I reported scores I had been firing which, as it turned out, were as good as everybody except maybe one or two people on the team.

So, of course, it was pretty unbelievable. A kid from Nebraska we'd never heard of who says he's shooting these kind of scores. Everybody pretty much regarded it as a fabrication.

One of the great what-ifs, I guess, in the history of our sport, the commander of the unit, a fellow named Colonel Tom Sharp, looked at this and for whatever reason he said, let's give the kid a chance. So he wrote me back a letter and said, if you enlist in the Army I'll get you a ninety-day trial. He proved to be good to his word and I was able to get down to Fort Benning on a tryout.

DH:

How did things go there?

GA:

And things actually went very well. They made us dry fire again without ammunition for thirty days and then the first day after we dry fired they had a test match and I think it was the second best score on the team that day. So they ended my trial and put me on permanent assignment to the unit.

So that became my home, my training home, my competition home for the next several years and they really did contribute significantly to my being able to advance.

DH:

So how long were you in the Army and how long did you compete for the Army prior to the trials for the 1964 Olympic team?

GA:

Yeah, I was first assigned to the marksmanship unit in January, well the trial started in January of 1959 and I stayed on active duty through basically into 1962 and then when I went back to college and while I was going to college I would go back on active duty every summer whenever there was a major international competition and shoot with the Army team again. So I was active duty for nearly four years and then as a reservist and National Guardsman went back and shot with the unit until I retired from international competition after 1969.

DH:

Oh, okay. Well, what were some of the major championships that you won as part of the U.S. Army team?

GA:

I made the 1960 Olympic team as an alternate back then. They took alternates, we didn't get to compete, but it was a good experience. I was able to learn a lot.

I had made the Pan Am team, which was a larger team in 59 and actually won my first medal in the international competition. I think it was a bronze medal. First national championship in 61 and then the major breakthrough for me was the world championship in 1962 where I won four world championships and set three world records.

So that was, and then again, Pan American Games in 63, all of which led up to the Olympics in 64 where I won my first Olympic gold medal.

DH:

So tell me a little bit about Tokyo and winning your gold medal there.

GA:

Tokyo, by then I had become a multiple world champion, so I have to say I went there as a favorite. The Olympics themselves were impressively organized by the Japanese. Everything was meticulously done.

The competitions were well run. My particular competition went well. I ended up winning by, I think, a six-point margin, which today would be unheard of.

You don't see things like that today, although the difference today is there were so many more great competitors.

DH:

Well, what were you doing and where were you living in the year just prior to the 1968 Olympic Games?

GA:

I was going to the school through the year. So I was back to training on my own, and then I guess before the Olympics I had a whole summer of training with the Army team again, which took me from maybe two hours a day, which I could do during school, to six, seven, eight hours a day through the summer leading up to the Olympic Games in October.

DH:

Were you married at the time? Did you have a family at the time?

GA:

I was married. We were married in 1965, so we had been married three years by that time. After I made the Olympic team for Mexico City, one of the interesting things was that a family of Mexican shooters whom we had come to know very well invited my wife and the wives of a couple of other shooters to stay in their home throughout the Olympics.

So the 1968 Olympics became a we affair rather than just me.

DH:

How did your wife take all the training, all the many hours that you had to devote to the sport?

GA:

You know, I think that's a difference maker. You have to be very tolerant of someone who takes major chunks of the day and dedicates it to training and pursuit of a dream. Understanding and accepting that is pretty special.

Certainly the last thing you need is a spouse who resents it and keeps finding ways to pull you away from that. So that support was very important.

DH:

And how did she react to learning that you made the 1968 Olympic team?

GA:

I don't really remember too much. Making the team in many ways, I think both of the games where I participated, it's almost harder to make the team than it is to win gold medal after you get there. Your goal, your training is focused on winning the Olympic gold medal, but you have this intermediate step that if you don't do that right, you ruin the whole dream.

There's an awful lot of pressure during the trials and I'd have to say probably more pressure than in the games themselves.

DH:

And where were the trials held?

GA:

Trials 1968 were in San Antonio, Texas. Lackland Air Force Base had reasonably good training facilities. Anyway, they hosted trials that year.

DH:

Mm-hmm. And were there any close calls there or did you kind of beat the competition?

GA:

I haven't gone back and looked at my scores. I don't remember there being close calls as far as making the team in the event where I competed. The trial was a good set of performances as I remember it.

DH:

Mm-hmm. Well, talking about 64 and 68, making those teams, what were the reactions of your family and your hometown when you made the 64 team and when you returned?

GA:

Then I think the story changes from, you know, why don't you spend your time doing something useful to, oh golly, I remember all the training and how hard you worked and you deserve all this and this is great. So mostly short memories.

DH:

Yeah, that's funny. So you made the team for 68. Were there any special training methods or special training regimen for preparing for Mexico City?

GA:

Yes. Mexico City, high altitude, 7,000 feet or thereabouts. In shooting, your performance of a shot is directly tied to holding your breath for a certain amount of time and high altitude, you don't get as much oxygen.

So we had to take it seriously and we did organize a high altitude training camp outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico and spent, oh, I think about three weeks there before going down to Mexico City. And in looking at it, I think high altitude training turned out to be very necessary for our sport and there were quite a few other countries that were doing the same thing, so it wasn't that we gained an advantage, but it was that this was necessary to prepare for peak performance in a high altitude environment.

DH:

And how long did you spend in high altitude training?

GA:

We were there about three weeks. I don't think we did anything at higher altitude leading up to that, and I'm not sure what the right amount of time was, but I think the time that we spent was sufficient to have us prepared for Mexico City.

DH:

And when you got down to Mexico City and you experienced the altitude, did you feel that you had been sufficiently prepared?

GA:

By the time we got there, everything felt normal. I, of course, had remembered that when we got into Santa Fe, for the first several days, things didn't feel right. And by the time we got to Mexico, things did feel right.

So I think obviously we had acclimated and were prepared.

DH:

Now, do you remember being a test subject in any medical or physiological studies on the effect of altitude on performance during the period leading up to the games?

GA:

There were some inquiries. I don't think there were any formal tests done on any of the shooters. I don't recall that.

I do recall some exchanges of information about this, but nothing beyond that.

DH:

And financially, how was your training and travel and all of that supported at the time?

GA:

I'd have to say most of my support came from the Army. I kept my connections with them, and they were very good about providing ammunition for training. During the time I was on

active duty, of course, I received the normal support that the members of the team received.

The rest of the year when I wasn't on active duty, I was pretty much on my own, and except for the ammunition the Army provided me, I didn't really have any support from anybody else.

DH:

Must have been hard.

GA:

Yeah, and that's, of course, that's a big change from then to today. I ultimately decided to retire after the 1968 Olympics and 1969 competition season because there was no source of support that really could encourage you to stay in competition. Today, maybe the opposite is true where many athletes stay in training too long and end up not being able to change their lives to meaningful careers.

DH:

Yeah, things definitely have changed over time, especially with all the rules of amateurism. Did you have experience with the rules of amateurism, and did they ever cause any problems for you, or did you ever think that they were unfair? How would you compare amateurism then to today?

GA:

Night and day difference. During all of the period of my international competition, the amateur rules were, you can't accept any monetary reward for your athletic performance, no money prizes, no payment for anything connected with this. Of course, today, just the opposite.

You can accept as much as you can win or be paid to support you. One particular instance I think pretty well illustrates the difference. I had started doing quite a bit of writing about technical aspects of training and performance.

I was invited by a publishing house to write a book, which was part of a sports series, a book on shooting. I wrote the manuscript, and after writing the manuscript, of course, I provided it, but I had to tell the publishing house, I can't take any money for this. The only thing we got, we decided it was okay to charge the publishing house \$200 for my wife to type the manuscript, but wrote an entire book, got \$200 out of it, and the publishing house made all the money.

DH:

Oh my gosh. I guess that kind of thing wouldn't happen today under the changed rules. No.

That's too bad. Describe your relationships or interactions with your Olympic teammates. Did you have any really close friends on the Olympic shooting team?

GA:

I think the team was a close-knit group. Lones Wigger, who is one of our great all-time champions, I remember being very close friends with him. Of course, his wife was one of the women that accompanied my wife when we were at the Games.

I think one of the good things was the entire team was a relatively collegial group, got along well. There weren't any significant personality conflicts or anything like that. No eagles that were so huge that they got in the way of other members of the team.

I'd have to say it was a good team and quite unified.

DH:

In the months leading up to the 1968 Games, do you remember hearing anything about possible protests or boycotts by members of the U.S. Olympic team?

GA:

There was quite a bit of this, both before and when we went into Mexico City. It became very obvious that some members of the team seemed to be there more for the opportunity to protest than they were for the opportunity to compete. I don't know that I had developed an ideology that was strongly saying that politics and protest doesn't belong in sport, but I do remember quite a few of us not liking the fact that other members of the Olympic team didn't seem to be focused on their competition as much as they were on the protest.

DH:

Do you remember if you or anyone on the shooting team ever received a letter from the Harvard crew team, who was an Olympic rowing team as well, about an Olympic project for human rights or supporting some members who might protest, anything like that?

GA:

I vaguely remember their making this appeal. It didn't go over well with me or any of my teammates, so we pretty much distanced ourselves from it, although the Harvard 8 rowers were certainly at the forefront of the protest movement.

DH:

Well, speaking of protest movements, do you remember hearing anything about student protests and violence in Mexico City 10 days before the start of the games?

GA:

Yes. I think the night before we arrived in Mexico, there had been a very large and significant protest. As we were getting ready to go, there was quite a bit of news about the student protests in Mexico.

When we arrived, of course, the reports were of a number of students who had been killed in these protests. So it cast a rather dark shadow over the whole beginning of the Olympics. I don't remember the death toll that was reported, but my memory is that it was in the 10s, 15, 20, some number like that.

But a couple of our Mexican friends who were involved in shooting were very close to highest ranking officials in the Mexican government. I know that later they reported that the

actual death tolls were probably on the order of 10 times greater than the reported death tolls.

DH:

How did that affect you at the time? Did you just try to stay focused on competition? Were you affected by all of this political stuff that was happening around you?

GA:

When people die, you can't help but be affected. That's something you can't just shrug off. On the other side, it was clear the Olympics were going to move ahead.

They were going to go. The Mexican government, Mexican authorities, and the Mexican Olympic Committee were committed to making the Olympics happen. We had to get focused.

I think it made it more difficult, for sure. But the reasons for the rioting were difficult for people in our position to fully understand, certainly things that we couldn't change. The best we could do was get refocused and be prepared for our competition.

DH:

What were your impressions of the city itself, of Mexico City and its people when you first arrived?

GA:

It was, in many ways, a different kind of city than what we had experienced for most of our international competitions. It was a city where there were a small number of rich people, but at that time everybody else was visibly, obviously poor. The housing was extremely substandard by any of our standards.

The first impression I remember coming into Mexico City from the airport, there had been a series of false fronts that had been put up to cover what was really very poor housing. But it looked like an effort to at least make the road out of the airport look like Mexico was more prosperous than it was. So the impressions of poverty were very deeply felt impressions.

On the other hand, we had good relations with particularly the Mexican shooters and the Mexican people who were involved in the organization. Hospitality couldn't have been better. They were very gracious people, did everything they could to give us a wonderful stay, very dedicated to doing a great Olympics.

So poverty on one side, but just absolutely tremendous hospitality, friendship, warmth on the other side.

DH:

So now did you stay in the Olympic Village and your wife stayed with the families of the Mexican shooters?

GA:

Yes, that's correct. We lived in the village and where our wives were staying was quite some distance away. It was probably an hour away from the village.

So we made some efforts to go back and forth. And of course, then the Olympic Village was essentially wide open. We were able to bring our wives into the village without any problems.

You don't do that today. We were able to move back and forth without anybody being too concerned about it. So we had a great deal more flexibility than what you have with Olympic life today.

DH:

Absolutely. So what were the accommodations in the Olympic Village like?

GA:

They were, you know, for the time typical. I think there were three of us in one room, rather crowded, but not uncomfortable. A bathroom down the hall.

We had the time to shower. The food service in the Olympic Village, I remember as being really excellent. That was for those of us who had spent our lives up to that point living or eating either in college cafeterias or in Army mess halls.

Food service in the Olympic Village was pretty good. So we enjoyed that.

DH:

Did anyone get ill while you were there?

GA:

Not that I'm sure. I'm sure there were some problems. I know at the time we took some rather extraordinary precautions.

I don't think I ever drank water. I was pretty careful about what food I ate. Whatever our medical people told us to do to stay away from trouble, we followed that advice pretty carefully.

DH:

And speaking of what the medical people told you to do, did they give you, I guess, antibacterial pills or pills to ward off any illness? Or did they give you lists of prohibited or banned substances?

GA:

I think the only advice we got are things like don't drink the water. Drink bottled water only. Be careful.

Like your toothbrush, well, rinse it in bottled water. Don't rinse it in tap water. Avoid the salads, the fresh foods that haven't been cooked.

But as far as any antibacterial medicine or anything like that, no, I don't recall anything like that.

DH:

What are your memories and experiences of the opening ceremony?

GA:

For me, and I think for most athletes, the biggest thrill of the Olympic Games is marching into the stadium with the team and just feeling and hearing the reaction of the spectators. Certainly every Olympic opening ceremony, I think, is special for the athletes in that way. That entrance into the stadium is just one of those highlight moments in your life.

Ceremony itself, I remember the last torch carrier, Enrica Basilia, I think was her name, the first woman to carry the torch on its last leg anyway. That was a special moment. But details about the ceremony itself, I don't think anything really stands out at this point.

DH:

Well, did you have any memorable interactions or experiences with people from other national teams during these Games? Anything that stands out in your mind?

GA:

Specific details, probably not. General memories, a lot of interaction. I think if you've been in international competition, you get to know people from all over the world and they become very special friends.

Some of them you have languages where you can communicate directly, some of them communication is pretty indirect. But the friends you develop are pretty unique because they're part of this intense effort to excel. They're unique people themselves.

DH:

Well, 1968 was the height of the Cold War and Vietnam. What effects, if any, did this political climate have on the Games and on relationships between athletes from various national teams?

GA:

Of course, the Cold War, I think, had a special role in shooting because the Soviet Union had become the dominant nation up until the U.S. started really developing highly competitive shooters. So, 1964, 1966, 1968, we were playing out the Cold War and while we didn't believe it personally, while we were close friends with the Russian shooters, we also felt pressure from those around us who treated us as Cold War warriors. And the messages we heard, particularly at home or from our own people, were, you know, you've got to beat the Russians.

You've got to go after them. I don't know that we felt that was what our mission was, but that certainly was what we were being told by a lot of people. So that was going on, the Cold War playing itself out.

Of course, Vietnam was another and I think a factor in the protest movements that were going on. So, a lot of pressure from a lot of different directions and all of this made it, I think, much more difficult to focus on competition performance.

DH:

Definitely. Well, these were the first Games, 1968, the first summer Games in which an official team from East Germany, the German Democratic Republic, competed. Did you have any experiences or memories surrounding this?

GA:

The DDR had a separate team in the 1966 World Championships, so I had actually come to know several of them and a couple of their leaders pretty well. And we're beginning to develop good relationships with them. So, yes, we knew about them.

We competed with them prior to the Games and they were just an accepted part of the shooting family by the time we got to Mexico.

DH:

And were they grouped kind of with the Soviet bloc as the Cold War enemy or were they viewed a little bit differently?

GA:

I think viewed somewhat differently. Part of what we had to deal with was the reaction. We were, of course, very close to the West German shooters and how the West German shooters interacted with their counterparts from East Germany.

So, we had some feelings to respect there that probably made some difference.

DH:

Well, and what do you remember doing in the day and hours just prior to your event?

GA:

I do remember the afternoon, late afternoon of the day before. We had our firing point assignments by then and I remember going out on the range probably five o'clock, maybe even a little bit later. All the training was gone.

Nobody was there. I just stood on the firing point. At that point, I pretty well decided that this would be my last Olympics.

So, the thoughts that go through your mind about, we've got to make this a good one, trying to focus on how to perform the next day. But, it was this kind of special moment. And, of course, the morning of, I didn't have access to the rest of the start list.

They didn't distribute things like that then. But, I showed up on my firing point and the firing point immediately to my left was the Russian shooter who was the main competition. So, I'm left-handed, he's right-handed.

We're going to be eyeball to eyeball all day. I don't know if I'd call it a shock, but it wasn't something I was mentally prepared for. But, also, I knew in that situation and shooting, the left-hander has an advantage because you're eyeball to eyeball with somebody every time you compete.

Where right-handers, what are the odds that a right-hander is going to have a left-hander next to them? Most of the time, they're looking at the back of somebody's head. So, I'm thinking, maybe this is a good thing.

But, it wasn't something I was mentally prepared for.

DH:

But, it sounds like it worked out to your advantage.

GA:

I think it did. I've always felt it did anyway. And, through the competition, we went back and forth.

I had the first stage prone position. I wasn't satisfied with my performance. I didn't feel like my rifle was shooting well.

I remember taking it back, giving it to the coach and saying, this isn't working well. He disappeared with the rifle ostensibly to go find the gunsmith. Came back, I don't know, ten minutes later.

Gave me the rifle back and said, it's okay now. To this day, I don't know if he did anything to it or just came back and told me it was okay. But, second position, I pretty much picked up what I had lost in the first position.

We got into the third position, which is standing. Four series of ten shots. We could pretty well, between myself and the Russian corner, we could pretty well see what our scores were because they were signaling them from the pits.

I knew we were within a point or two of each other. In the third series, the Russian coach started yelling at him, which is not really legal, but that made it stand out even more in my mind. When he started yelling at him and I saw a couple of eight show up, I knew I had him, which kind of took the pressure off.

DH:

What was your reaction in the feelings that you had when you first realized that you were going to win the gold?

GA:

One of the things you do in a sport like shooting is train yourself to have absolute emotional control. It's hard to let go. You're so conditioned to keep yourself under control that you don't necessarily explode with joy right away.

It's one of these things that has to gradually work itself on you.

DH:

What did you do immediately after your event? Did you celebrate, call family, relax?

GA:

I fired my last shot. My wife was behind me. I remember a long embrace with her before doing anything else.

After that, I had to wait until he finished. The two of us, the range is maybe a hundred meters long and all of the spectators, or as many as the crowd around us, were with us. It was a pretty raucous group by the time we finished.

DH:

What do you remember of the medal ceremony?

GA:

Medal ceremonies in shooting, they waited until the next day. I don't really have good memories of the medal ceremony. It was late in the afternoon.

In fact, this is probably the most poorly photographed medal ceremony I've ever seen in our sport. The light was so dark that there weren't any good photographs taken. I got my medal.

It's a day later. We've already had our celebrations. The news is already out.

Getting the medal was kind of anticlimactic. I guess there was supposed to be a gold pin, lapel pin type pin that was in the medal box. Anyway, somebody had stolen the pin out of my box before it was presented to me.

That was not a highlight.

DH:

No, definitely not. Did they get you another one?

GA:

Never did. I didn't try to beat anybody up about it, but I did ask several times, including asking later times when I returned to Mexico. It just never happened.

I kind of gave up on it.

DH:

These were the first games in which standardized drug testing was implemented. Do you remember having any experiences with testing or if anyone on the team did?

GA:

To my knowledge, there was no testing of shooters during those games. I don't think. We've since gone through some periods where there have been.

Yeah, with regard to testing, there really wasn't any testing of shooters at that point. I think the general consensus was shooters really weren't taking anything that was going to make a difference to the team. I certainly felt like the members of the U.S. team were clean. I wasn't really aware that anybody else was taking anything. The problems in our sport really didn't show up until by 1980. There were some serious problems, but it was another 8-10 years before this became a problem in shooting.

DH:

When the problems did start to show up in the 80s, what substances were being used for performance enhancing?

GA:

We are pretty certain that the Russian shooters who were winning in the 1980 Olympics, which was boycotted by the U.S., were on something. Later, this turned out, at least in other cases, to be beta blockers, one sort or another, something to slow your heart rate down even when you're exceedingly nervous. It took us another probably 5 years, it was in the

mid-80s, before we really convinced everybody that there needs to be testing and that this needs to be banned.

Of course, now it's strictly banned.

DH:

Were you aware of the disqualification for use of a banned performance enhancing substance that occurred with a Swedish pentathlete during the 1968 games? I think it might have been alcohol.

GA:

Very likely it was alcohol. I don't know that I'm aware of that one in particular. I do recall that I knew some of the pentathletes pretty well.

I remember in the 1964 games accompanying one of them while he competed in shooting and being absolutely appalled at the drunken state of some of the competitors. They really were abusing alcohol. They took whatever stimulants they could to speed themselves up for fencing and then tried to use alcohol to bring themselves down for the third day which was shooting.

To me, it was dangerous. I really was quite appalled by that. 1968, the particular instance you talk about, I don't know that I remember that, but I'm not surprised.

DH:

Were women shooting in 1968 or when did women start shooting in the Olympics?

GA:

The first women to compete in the Olympics, we came at this as a sport that was generally thought of as a man's sport, but according to our rules, basically was regarded as a mixed sport. Just that women had not been qualifying for the Olympic team. Of course, in most countries, there wasn't a whole lot done to encourage them.

In 1968, there were two women, one from Poland, Rolinska, and one from Mexico, a skeet shooter, who made their teams and competed. So, I believe they were the first two women to compete in the Olympics in our sport.

DH:

Now, did things change in shooting in the U.S. after Title IX?

GA:

Actually, they really started to change before that. Well, I don't remember the date on Title IX, but I remember women starting to become involved. We had a woman, Margaret Thompson Murdoch, who qualified for a world championship team in 1966.

So, that really was our first opportunity to deal with women competing in what before had been thought of as strictly a man's sport. So, we were already attuned to it and had fought the battles in the International Federation where, you know, she can't compete, she's not a man. I'm sorry, but the rules don't say that it's a man's sport.

They say anybody can compete. So, anyway, we'd gone through the battle and it wasn't as big a deal to us as it was to many other countries.

DH:

Gender verification testing was introduced in 1968 and implemented at the Summer Games. Do you remember hearing anything about this?

GA:

Yeah, I remember hearing about it. Again, I don't think, you know, we had started to come to the realization that in at least the rifle events and shooting, uh, women are capable of producing as good scores as men. So, the idea of gender verification didn't really make much difference to us.

DH:

Well, going on with more political things, 1968 was a pivotal time in the American Civil Rights movement and in race relations in the U.S. and really across the globe. And that was the same year that Martin Luther King was assassinated that spring and also Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. What effect do you think the political climate and the civil rights and human rights climate had on Olympians and on these particular games?

You already talked a little bit about it, but if you can remember anything else that comes to mind?

GA:

Um, you know, it's a very ambivalent feeling that you have towards things like this. You know, on one hand, you look at the causes that were being brought forward and you have to say, this is right, our country needs to move in this direction. And then you put yourself in the standpoint of an Olympic athlete where, you know, I don't know that I can change the course of American history by being an Olympic athlete.

So, you know, you're torn between, okay, that's right. And I really came here to compete and resenting this as a distraction from what the Olympics are about.

DH:

Did you happen to witness the Smith and Carlos protest on the medal stand?

GA:

Yeah, I was in the stadium at the time their victory ceremony took place. And, you know, as their demonstration unfolded, like most people there, it probably took a while to realize what was going on. I don't think we caught the import of the moment for some time before we realized, okay, they are making a statement and this is likely to become controversial.

DH:

And what are your memories of the media, TV cameras, photographers, reporters, journalists during the 68 games? And how would you compare that to the presence of the media in Tokyo?

GA:

The media that covered us, actually in both games, maybe more so in Tokyo, we were still very, very open. They had open access to us. In fact, I remember riding the bus out to the range in Tokyo and I was sitting in the back of the bus and I ended up being surrounded by several reporters who were on an athlete's bus.

And, you know, they were interviewing me as we were riding out to the range. It was just no big thing. Anyway, the relationship was much, the rules governing the relationship were really not established.

It was much less formal. I don't recall having any difficulties with any of this. My experience was generally better to be open and forthcoming with the media and they'll treat you pretty fairly.

I do recall the very informal nature of the relationship, but of course today it's very structured. The number of media who show up on our venues is much greater today. We had just an absolute mob in London, but the mixed zones, the formal press conferences, we didn't have all that then.

DH:

So you mentioned being in the stadium during the 400 and the, I guess it was the 400 or the 200. Did you attend any other memorable record-setting events while you were there?

GA:

We attended quite a few of the athletics events. Most of their events were afternoons, so we could train, you know, come back to the village, go watch something. I do remember Bob Beamon's long jump.

We were on the other side of the stadium and so you couldn't see it in detail, but it was an amazing feeling because you saw him going down the runway and you knew where the markers were for the leader and the world record and you saw this form go way past the world record thing. First reaction is he must have scratched by a long ways and then you see you hear the reaction of the crowd on the other side of the stadium and realize you've just watched something very remarkable.

DH:

Absolutely. That must have been incredible.

GA:

That was a unique feeling. I have very vivid memories of the, I think the 5,000 Billy Mills, was that 68 or was that 64?

DH:

Might have been 64.

GA:

But we were able to watch quite a few of those events.

DH:

That's great. A lot of people that I've talked to have not been able to go to a lot of other events for whatever reason, but that's great that you were able to go.

GA:

For us, we trained and competed in the morning and afternoons and evenings were free. Of course, you had lots of energy and wanted to get around and take in as much as you could.

DH:

Definitely. Did you do any sightseeing in the city itself?

GA:

Not a lot. I'm sure we did some, but I don't remember doing a lot of sightseeing. I think most of what we did was getting to other venues.

DH:

Was it hard to get around?

GA:

I don't remember it being hard. Bus system worked. We actually had one Mexican shooter that loaned us a car that we were able to use to get around.

We didn't have that much trouble getting around. I don't remember that being a difficulty.

DH:

For you personally, what was the most memorable part of competing in the 1968 Games?

GA:

Two things, probably. The entrance into the Olympic Stadium during the opening ceremony is really special. Certainly, the competition experience as a whole was much more difficult to win the second gold medal than it was.

The fight with yourself is much greater. Just the feeling of going through that and doing it well, that's a memory that never goes away.

DH:

Were you there for the closing ceremony?

GA:

Yes, I was. Our competitions were over mostly during the first week. I stayed on through the Games.

At the end of the Games, each nation was, I believe, asked to appoint six athletes to represent the nation in the closing ceremony. I ended up being one of the six that represented the USA, so I was able to participate in the closing ceremony.

DH:

Oh, wow. I think you might be the only person I've talked to who was one of the six.

GA:

I don't remember. Well, I remember one athlete who was a basketball player by the name of Mike Silliman, who was one of the six. Whatever we did through the ceremony, and then at the end, it just kind of broke out into chaos.

Everybody was jumping around and dancing. I remember Silliman and I both got kind of bored with this going on and on, so we went out, caught a bus, and went back to the village. I don't remember who the other four were.

DH:

So what did you and your wife do right after the Games closed?

GA:

Sixty-eight, we would have gone back to Nebraska. I remember a lot of what happened back there. I was about the only one from that state that did anything in the Olympics.

The small towns and celebrations and the speaking engagements and all that kind of thing certainly got going. Shortly after that, we had made arrangements to go to Munich and spend the year, so we were getting ready to go over to Munich and learn some German and experience Germany.

DH:

That sounds wonderful. I read somewhere that you were the first Nebraskan to win an Olympic gold medal?

GA:

I think that may be correct. There was a University of Nebraska sprinter by the name of Greene that I think was on a gold medal relay in 1964 perhaps, but he was not from Nebraska. But I think otherwise, if I wasn't the first one, I was one of the first two.

DH:

Okay. That's a pretty outstanding achievement.

GA:

Yeah, it was a big deal in the state. It got me all over the state. I have never counted how many speaking engagements it brought me, but it was a bunch.

DH:

You already talked a little bit about what happened with your athletic career after 1968 and your decision to retire from international competition in 1969 and why you made that decision. Could you talk a little bit more about that and then how you decided or how you chose to stay involved in the sport and some of the various activities and offices that you've held?

GA:

First of all, the decision to retire. I don't know if this is unique for athletes, but I got into the sport with pretty clear goals of what I wanted to do and by the end of the Olympics in 1968, the second gold medal would probably mean I had achieved the goals I'd set for myself. Plus, I remember even as early as 1967, the motivation I felt to continue just wasn't quite the same.

I was feeling like I'd done what I set out to do and as an athlete, you have a decision. Do you step out while you're on top or do you hang on until it gets embarrassing and you have to quit? I really wanted to quit while I was on top and not when it was too late.

Plus, at that point, you're really starting to think about what you're going to do with the rest of your life. If I keep on competing, you're not going to be someone who can build a career somewhere. A combination of all of those things, I decided that I'd stayed in in 1969 because we lived in Germany at the time and was able to do a lot of competing there and a lot of special experiences.

We decided after that time to walk away.

DH:

What has competing in elite sport shooting done for you? How does it change your life, positive or negative?

GA:

I am a very firm believer in sports done right changes people's lives for the better. Done right is a pretty important qualification. The things you go through in order to excel, and it's really the process.

It's not winning the medals. It's the process you go through to try to get to the podium that really do change you. You can look at different sports and the life lessons aren't all the same, but so many of them are.

Plus, you build a special kind of relationship with other people from all over the world. Your perspective changes completely. After you do this, you find out that all these people, they told you back home that they're different.

The religion is different. The language is different. The culture is different.

They don't act like we do, etc., etc., etc. You get on the sports playing field with these people and you find out they're not different. They're great people and the things that brought us together on the playing field are a lot more important than all these things that you heard about back home that really don't make that much difference in the end.

Your worldview changes. You learn a lot of special things about yourself that I suppose you could do the same thing in any quest for excellence, but sports does a good job of it. I'm grateful for having had the experience for sure.

DH:

What are some of the major differences that you could point out between Tokyo and Mexico City?

GA:

Tokyo, the city itself, very well developed, economically very advanced for the time. Mexico City, totally underdeveloped, struggling to emerge as an organization. The extreme poverty that you saw everywhere in Mexico City at the time compared with relative prosperity in Tokyo, so a big difference there.

The Japanese approach to competition organization was very meticulous, very precise. Everything was run exactly according to the rules. Mexico, the approach was a whole lot looser.

Time wasn't as important. Doing it right wasn't important. The Japanese, Tokyo, the organizing committee, they're very stern.

The face of the Japanese official was always very stern. Go to Mexico and the face of the Mexican official might not have known exactly what he was doing, but he was smiling and he was friendly and he was trying to be nice to you. There were differences.

On the other side, both cities and every Olympics that I've experienced since, it becomes a way to really express what's good about our culture and our people. Both of them did a good job in that regard.

DH:

So we talked a little bit about your retirement and why you retired from the sport, but then you got into mentoring and coaching and involved in the governance of the sport, both nationally and internationally. Can you give a summary of those activities and the held?

GA:

After I got out of competition, I really quite quickly got into government and first elected public office, which I suppose in part was influenced by the fact that I'd been running all over the state of Nebraska giving speeches. As that was developing, I had a job offer to go back and take a much better paying position in the National Rifle Association, which was the governing body at the time. Even while I was competing, I felt pretty strongly about wanting to pay back to the sport, wanting to teach younger shooters.

I had a couple of unpleasant memories from when I first broke in of other shooters who didn't want to answer my questions, didn't want to help, and swearing to them that if I'm ever in that position, I'm going to try to answer the questions and try to help. So I did a lot of writing, taught a lot of clinics, and so that really motivated me to get back into program building and trying to help build a sport, help build a program. I was elected to administrative counsel in the International Federation in 1978, and of course that's led to executive committee vice president to the position where I am today.

So didn't expect to get back in sport when I retired, but when I did, it's of course once again become alive.

DH:

Well, you've certainly had a wonderful career both as an athlete and as somebody who's involved in the governance of the sport and in state government as well. One last question. What one piece of advice would you give to today's Olympic hopeful?

GA:

Um, probably start off with something that goes like, you know, dare to dream. You know, my memory of people discouraging me from having any dreams when I started, I think it is important to dream, but you got to figure out how much work goes with that dream if you're going to realize it. And so the second thing beyond dreaming is the one who works the hardest and the smartest is the one that's going to realize their dreams.

So there is no substitute for a whole lot of hard work.

DH:

Right. So I guess that's kind of similar to what I think it was Edison said, you know, part inspiration and 99% perspiration, something like that.

GA:

And gold medals in sport are no different from that.

DH:

Yeah. Well, in closing the interview, is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?

GA:

No, I think other than I salute you for this effort to capture this oral history. I think it is an important effort and I think the memories, the collective memories of all of my colleagues, teammates on the 1968, I'm sure they have many important lessons to share. So thank you very much for putting all this together.

DH:

Well, thank you, Gary. And I really appreciate you taking the time and effort to share your memories with us today. I'm going to turn the recorder off.